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**Official Report
of Debates
(Hansard)**

**Journal
des débats
(Hansard)**

Tuesday 2 November 1999

Mardi 2 novembre 1999

Speaker
Honourable Gary Carr

Président
L'honorable Gary Carr

Clerk
Claude L. DesRosiers

Greffier
Claude L. DesRosiers

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Tuesday 2 November 1999

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Mardi 2 novembre 1999

*The House met at 1332.
Prayers.*

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

COLLÈGE D'ALFRED

M. Jean-Marc Lalonde (Glengarry-Prescott-Russell) : Ma déclaration aujourd'hui s'adresse au ministre de l'Agriculture, de l'Alimentation et des Affaires rurales. L'agriculture est la première industrie en importance dans l'est de l'Ontario et la deuxième en importance dans l'ensemble de l'Ontario ; 80 % des agriculteurs de l'est ontarien sont francophones, et nous avons besoin du Collège d'Alfred pour former notre jeunesse et pour nous assurer que nous conservons nos fermes familiales.

Hier soir, j'ai appris de TFO que 1,5 \$ million avait été retranché du financement du Collège d'Alfred. Ce collège ne reçoit que 2,2 \$ millions. Qu'advient-il du Collège d'Alfred avec ces coupures ?

De même, monsieur le ministre, étiez-vous au courant que le président du conseil d'administration et le directeur de ce collège n'avaient même pas été informés de ce pour parler de votre ministère ?

Va-t-il devoir fermer ses portes ? Il semble que votre gouvernement préparait la fermeture du Collège d'Alfred depuis plus d'un an, mais que vous avez attendu après l'élection pour en faire l'annonce. Ceci est déplorable. Nous ne pouvons accepter cette décision.

Ce collège de réputation internationale, le Collège d'Alfred, est connu et respecté par tous les pays francophones. Qu'allez-vous faire aujourd'hui pour garantir la survie de notre collège francophone ? Est-ce que les francophones de l'Ontario doivent se préparer à perdre encore un autre service ? Avons-nous une quelconque importance, monsieur le ministre ?

PETER KNIPFEL

Mr Bill Murdoch (Bruce-Grey): I rise today to congratulate Peter Knipfel from my riding, Chesley, Ontario. Mr Knipfel is the owner of the Knechtel grocery store and yesterday was elected the chairman of the Canadian Federation of Independent Grocers.

Mr Knipfel is here in the House today.

Mr Knipfel has served on the board for the past seven years and has been involved in the grocery industry for

25 years. He has a very good understanding of the smaller retailers serving rural Canada.

There are more than 4,000 members of the Canadian Federation of Independent Grocers. They represent 30%, or \$17 billion, of Canada's retail food sales. The mission statement of the CFGI is "To further the unique interests of independent and franchised grocers in Canada, through a progressive partnership with retailers, their suppliers and the consumer."

The responsibility Mr Knipfel is assuming is a testament to his commitment and dedication. I am proud that a retail grocer from my constituency has earned the respect and confidence of his peers from across the country.

SYNAGOGUE DESECRATIONS

Mr Gerry Phillips (Scarborough-Agincourt): I want to respond to a very disturbing report that appeared in the newspapers of the last few days that has to do with the desecration of a Jewish cemetery with anti-Semitic vandalism. Perhaps most disturbing was a Jewish Holocaust memorial.

All of us in the Legislature share the feelings of how reprehensible this act is. It's important that particularly our Jewish community understands that everything will be done to bring the perpetrators before the courts. I'm pleased to see some of our senior police officers here today.

What can we do as individuals? I think it's important to remember, when we hear a joke or we see an act that's inappropriate, that we respond to that instantly.

There are some very good organizations out there: The Harmony Movement will be having its annual banquet this Thursday night, the Urban Alliance on Race Relations, the council of Chinese Canadians. They all do good work. I particularly recognize in the Jewish community the human rights league of the B'Nai Brith as well as the Canadian Jewish Congress. They are relentless in any act of discrimination or racial bias and they respond quickly.

Finally, I would urge the government to reconsider one of the things it has cut from the Ministry of Education: its race relations division. I don't think that's appropriate and I would hope that the government, as well as all of us, will do whatever we possibly can to make certain these acts do not go unpunished.

SCHOOL CLOSURES

Mr Rosario Marchese (Trinity-Spadina): I want to inform the Premier and the members of this government that two schools from the separate school board are closing or are threatened with closure: St Peter and St Lucy. They have been organizing steadily and ferociously against those closures and they're devastated that their two schools would close.

St Lucy is a very healthy, viable building constructed in 1962, but with many renovations that have been done to it. It's inconceivable to me and to them that such a school would close.

St Peter is another healthy building, and if it were to close, there will be no school around it in the centre of the city for miles and miles.

That is a serious problem in my community when schools are closing, because they are the centres of our communities. They are vital to healthy communities. You, as a result of your funding formula, are forcing some of our schools like St Lucy and St Peter to close. I want to tell you that if those two schools close, they hold you, Premier, and your government responsible for that and they will not forget.

FIRST NATIONS VETERANS

Mr Toby Barrett (Haldimand-Norfolk-Brant): This past weekend, veterans and military service personnel of the Six Nations Veterans Association celebrated their 50th anniversary. Many dignitaries were involved in the ceremonies—including Phil Fontaine, national chief, Assembly of First Nations, and Jack Frost, Ontario president of the Royal Canadian Legion—ceremonies to honour the traditions kept alive by the veterans' association and to remember fallen comrades.

Native people from both Six Nations and the Mississaugas of the New Credit have a long history of military service for Canada and the United States. Over 300 courageous young men and one courageous young woman volunteered in the First World War and over 40 never returned.

During the First World War, at least 4,000 Indian men volunteered to join the Allied Forces on European battlefields, more than 3,000 Canadian Indians served during the Second World War, and it is estimated that several hundred native people volunteered in Korea. Battalion and regimental histories offer many examples of native courage and achievements. On November 11, and always, we should remember that more than 500 native people gave their lives during these wars and others defending values that were meaningful to all Canadians.

First Nations veterans are proud of their wartime contributions. Cairns and memorials have been erected in prominent locations across Ontario to recognize this.

1340

HAZARDOUS WASTE

Mr John C. Cleary (Stormont-Dundas-Charlottenburgh): I rise today to put on record my strong opposition to the proposed shipment of MOX nuclear fuel to Chalk River from the cities of Cornwall and Sault Ste Marie.

There is strong opposition in my riding to this ill-conceived plan of Atomic Energy of Canada. As you know, Atomic Energy of Canada Ltd proposed to transport nuclear fuel from Russia up the St Lawrence River to Cornwall, where it will be unloaded from a freighter and then transported through my riding and on to Highway 401.

We have witnessed a 500% increase in the importation of hazardous waste into Ontario in the last five years under Mike Harris and we are rapidly becoming a dumping ground for the United States because of our weak and ineffective regulations regarding the disposal of hazardous waste.

Now we are supposed to be taking in nuclear waste in Ontario, and I'm not just talking about one shipment. We may see trucks carting several tonnes of weapons-grade plutonium over Ontario highways annually in the future if this project goes ahead.

I just want to tell you that all sorts of organizations are also opposed, such as the council of the city of Cornwall, the Mohawk council of Akwesasne, the Police Association of Ontario, the all-party committee of the House of Commons on foreign affairs, the International Association of Fire Fighters, the Federation of Canadian Municipalities and the Ontario generation company.

BRAMPTON BATTALION

Mr Joseph Spina (Brampton Centre): Today I rise in the House to give the members a progress report on the growing success of the Brampton Battalion, an Ontario Hockey League franchise in my home riding.

This time last year, I informed the members of the beginning of a piece of Brampton sports history when the team hit the ice last October in Brampton's privately owned, newest, state-of-the-art sport and entertainment facility. The Battalion finished its inaugural season recording only eight wins, 57 losses and three ties, but even with this record, several key members showed early signs of talent.

Head coach Stan Butler was named assistant coach of the Canadian world junior team and Battalion defencemen Jay Harrison and Tyler Hanchuck played for Ontario's under-17 team and recently returned from the Four Nations Cup in the Czech Republic with gold medals.

This year, I'm pleased to tell the honourable members the Battalion has moved onward and upward to top spot in the Ontario Hockey League with 26 points in 15

games, two points ahead of the Ottawa 67's, the reigning Canadian Hockey League champions.

This team's impressive beginning in the second season has caught the attention of fans, the national media and NHL personnel.

I extend an invitation to everyone to come and see the Battalion in full military colours, the future stars of the NHL.

CANCER CARE

Mr Michael A. Brown (Algoma-Manitoulin): Last Friday in Sault Ste Marie, my leader, Dalton McGuinty, and I met with Dr David Walde, a medical oncologist in the city. Health care professionals are worried that delivery of the services for cancer care that had been promised just prior to the election could be delayed upwards of four years.

Cancer care is a very important issue, one of life and death. Dr. Walde has stated that unless Sault Ste Marie receives immediate help, options such as limiting patient care or turning people away are a possibility. This situation is clearly unacceptable. I call on the Minister of Health to take immediate action so that Sault Ste Marie receives a cancer radiation treatment facility now, not four years down the road.

Minister Witmer, the people of Algoma deserve nothing less than first-rate cancer facilities and care. For the record, in addition to the pleas of local doctors, a petition with in excess of 30,000 names has been forwarded to your attention demanding this cancer care facility.

The Harris government made a promise and a commitment to this needed cancer care centre in Sault Ste Marie. It is time to deliver. The lives of cancer patients and their families depend on this. It is my sincere hope that the government of the day is not playing politics with regard to these delays.

It is clear to all parties involved that the need for the cancer centre is immediate. It is not clear why the Harris government has not carried through with its promise.

SCUGOG CHAMBER OF COMMERCE AWARDS

Mr John O'Toole (Durham): Today I would like to recognize two Scugog business owners who were recently recognized by the Scugog Chamber of Commerce.

I extend my congratulations to Ken Koury of the Nutty Chocolatier, who won business of the year in the category of more than 10 employees.

I would also like to congratulate Dana Smith from Dana's Goldsmithing Inc. Dana won Scugog Chamber of Commerce's business of the year employing fewer than five employees. Dana's business, on Queen Street in Port Perry, specializes in beautiful jewellery design, restoration and repair, as well as carrying other special lines of merchandise. The building Dana's store is located in has

received an award from the Scugog Historical Society for heritage restoration.

As we all know, small businesses like Ken Koury's and Dana Smith's are an important part of the Durham and provincial economies. There are many small business owners in my riding who deserve thanks for their role in creating over 542,000 net new jobs in Ontario since 1995. Our government recognizes the important contribution and service of small business owners like Ken and Dana. We are the government that cut red tape, eliminated waste and duplication and cut taxes 99 times.

Again, I would like to offer my congratulations to Les Gower, president of the Scugog Chamber of Commerce, Ken Koury, Dana Smith, and members of the Scugog and local community for their support of small business in my riding of Durham.

Thank you, Mr Speaker, and I thank the businesses of Durham.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

SAFE STREETS ACT, 1999

LOI DE 1999 SUR LA SÉCURITÉ DANS LES RUES

Mr Flaherty moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 8, An Act to promote safety in Ontario by prohibiting aggressive solicitation, solicitation of persons in certain places and disposal of dangerous things in certain places, and to amend the Highway Traffic Act to regulate certain activities on roadways / Projet de loi 8, Loi visant à promouvoir la sécurité en Ontario en interdisant la sollicitation agressive, la sollicitation de personnes dans certains lieux et le rejet de choses dangereuses dans certains lieux, et modifiant le Code de la route afin de réglementer certaines activités sur la chaussée.

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

The Attorney General for a short explanation?

Hon Jim Flaherty (Attorney General, minister responsible for native affairs): Mr Speaker, I'll make a minister's statement.

1350

POLICE RECORDS CHECK BY NON-PROFIT AGENCIES ACT, 1999 LOI DE 1999 SUR LES VÉRIFICATIONS DES DOSSIERS DE POLICE PAR LES AGENCES SANS BUT LUCRATIF

Mr Kormos moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 9, An Act respecting the cost of checking the police records of individuals who may work for certain non-profit service agencies / Projet de loi 9, Loi concernant les frais de vérification des dossiers de police à

l'égard des particuliers qui pourraient travailler pour certaines agences de services sans but lucratif.

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

Mr Peter Kormos (Niagara Centre): The bill applies to non-profit agencies, agencies like Big Brothers, Girl Guides of Canada or Boy Scouts of Canada, who are being charged higher and higher user fees to check out and access police records of applicants who want to volunteer with those agencies. The bill would prohibit a police force from charging any amount to provide a police records check to one of these agencies in respect of an individual who is working or volunteering for the agency or who has applied to do so. This is going to make those agencies' access to the backgrounds of those volunteers much more reasonable, and it's going to facilitate volunteers who come forward in good faith but who could well be barred by prohibitive costs.

MOTIONS

STANDING ORDERS REFORM

Hon Frank Klees (Minister without Portfolio): I believe I have unanimous consent to move a motion without notice regarding some additional amendments to the standing orders.

The Speaker (Hon Gary Carr): Is there unanimous consent? Agreed.

Hon Mr Klees: I move that the standing orders of the Legislative Assembly of Ontario be amended as follows:

That the last paragraph in standing order 24(b) be struck out and reinserted as 24(d); and

That the phrase "limited by this clause" be struck out and replaced with the phrase "governed by this standing order";

That standing order 25(e) be struck out;

That standing order 48(b) and (c) be struck out and reinserted into standing order 2 at the end of the definition of "substantive motion";

That in standing order 59(d) the word "recognized" be inserted before the word "party" in the fourth line; and

That the word "sessional" in the first line of standing order 106 be replaced with the word "sitting."

The Speaker: Mr Klees has moved that the standing orders—dispense?

All in favour of the motion? Carried.

HOUSE SITTINGS

Hon Frank Klees (Minister without Portfolio): I believe I have unanimous consent to move a motion without notice regarding this evening's sitting.

The Speaker (Hon Gary Carr): Is there unanimous consent? Agreed.

Hon Mr Klees: I move that notwithstanding the order of the House dated November 1, 1999, the House shall not sit this evening.

The Speaker: Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

SAFE STREETS ACT

Hon Jim Flaherty (Attorney General, minister responsible for native affairs): Our government believes in keeping the promises it makes to the people of Ontario. In the Blueprint, we made a commitment to take action about behaviour that jeopardizes the safe use of the streets.

Last month in the speech from the throne, we reiterated our intention to introduce legislation empowering police to crack down on squeegeeing and aggressive forms of solicitation experienced by many people in Ontario through panhandlers. This is one element of our broad effort to make our towns and cities safer places to live and raise families.

Our government believes that all people in Ontario have the right to drive on the roads, walk down the street or go to public places without being or feeling intimidated. They must be able to carry out their daily activities without fear. When they are not able to do so, it is time for government to act. It is time for government to exercise its responsibility to maintain and protect the ability of Ontario residents to use their streets, sidewalks and parks in a safe and secure manner.

Earlier today, I introduced the Safe Streets Act. The bill, if passed, would regulate conduct that interferes with the safe use of public spaces. It is legislation that responds to the real-life concerns Ontarians have about problems they encounter, such as squeegeeing, aggressive solicitation, soliciting in captive audience situations, and the disposal of dangerous objects in parks, schoolyards and other public places.

Earlier today, I saw and heard first-hand how one neighbourhood is struggling to keep its laneways free of carelessly disposed syringes, needles and other items that endanger health and safety.

Police officers who patrol our streets daily have told me that the activities I have mentioned compromise the safe use of streets in the communities in which the police are charged with the responsibility of serving and protecting. We know that many motorists feel intimidated when people enter the road to offer unwanted services, resulting in a significant safety hazard. I personally have met with business people who say that their employees and customers routinely have difficulty entering stores and offices because the sidewalks are blocked by people who are aggressive in their solicitations. Mayors are hearing calls for action from community residents. As a

result, some municipalities have enacted bylaws to deal with some of the problems.

Some of these concerned people have journeyed to the House today. I would like to acknowledge their presence and thank them for taking the time to attend: Margaret Knowles of the Yonge-Bloor-Bay Association, Acting Chief Boyd, Inspector Randal Munroe and Staff Sergeant Ken Kinsman of the Toronto Police Service.

The Safe Streets Act would create new provincial offences and amend the Highway Traffic Act. It would give certain powers of arrest and the courts a range of sentencing options, including jail for repeat offenders.

Some people say this law is not needed. They expect communities to accept the status quo. They expect communities to accept a diminished quality of life. I say this is unacceptable. I say we are exercising responsible and responsive government. Ontario residents asked us to do something to ensure the safer use of their streets. We have listened and we have introduced the Safe Streets Act. In so doing, we are helping to ensure that Ontario remains the best place to live, work, invest and raise a family.

The Speaker (Hon Gary Carr): Responses?

Mr Michael Bryant (St Paul's): We got the name of the act wrong. It should be called the "Let's sweep it under the rug" act. This approach is going to fail. It's doomed to failure.

Last September the minister held a press conference in which he waded a squeegee around in one of the lowest moments in the history of this province's justice department and said, "Mark my words: There'll be no more squeegees in the city of Toronto a year from now." Well, mark my words: The kids will be back.

The reality is that this act attempts to sweep the problem under the rug. There is nothing in this act that is going to do anything more than put them in the revolving door of the criminal justice system. They're going to congratulate themselves when the kids go through the door and hope that none of us notices when everybody is coming right back out and going right back to the streets. You can take a street cleaner down Bloor Street and sweep away the rubbish, but you can't do the same thing with the poverty in the streets of Toronto. These kids are going to come back.

We're going to have to take a good look at the bill, but I can tell you right now from looking at all of its four pages that it fails to learn the lessons of New York City, Vancouver and Montreal, where the important second half of the work has to be done to deal with these people after they're taken off the streets. This is the "Sweep it under the rug" act and, mark my words, it's going to fail.

This government is bent on turning squeegee kids into crowbar and crack kids. Everybody understands that if you take the squeegee out of their hands and give no other alternative, provide no other diversion, all that's going to happen is you're going to be putting a crowbar in their hands and they're going to be coming to a neighbourhood near you soon.

Lastly, the priorities of this government are completely out of whack with the priorities of Ontarians. This government is prioritizing squeegees over stretchers, squeegees over schools. Within the criminal justice portfolio itself, within law and order itself, there are so many more issues we could be dealing with but this is the first one that we're looking at.

It's Holocaust Education Week and hate crimes are going up in Ontario. Is the government doing anything about hate crimes? No. They want to deal with 200-odd squeegee kids.

There's a rise of gangs and organized crime in the province of Ontario. Does this government want to do anything about organized crime? No. The 200-odd squeegee kids.

Proliferation of guns on the streets of our cities. You know what? This government wants to intervene, along with the government of Alberta, to strike down our federal gun control laws.

1400

Interjection: Shame.

Mr Bryant: Shame. This government doesn't want to do anything about guns.

Police and prosecutors tell me that domestic assault has been on the rise over the last few months, and this week in particular it would have been appropriate to bring forth a bill to deal with the mess whereby crowns get files for five minutes before they can assist a victim of domestic assault. Are they going to deal with that? No. They want to crack down on 200-odd squeegee kids.

Deadbeat dads can roam the streets of Ontario without concern. This government committed in 1995 and 1999 to crack down on deadbeat dads, and their great crack-down rate of 1% was reported last month.

Let's just hope the crackdown rate on squeegee kids is more successful. It's not going to be. It's not going to work.

Lastly, the minister was in the riding of Toronto Centre-Rosedale and, in an effort to throw smoke and mirrors at this issue, purported to address the issues of that community. I think the member for Toronto Centre-Rosedale has something to say about that.

Mr George Smitherman (Toronto Centre-Rosedale): I say today, shame on the Attorney General. You visited the neighbourhood of Dundas and Seaton Streets today, which has had problems. It's plagued by crack cocaine, not squeegee kids. At 51 division, police resources are pathetic: six drug officers for two downtown divisions.

Minister, you recklessly contribute to class warfare that threatens my riding, yet you offer no new resources to deal with the real problem in that neighbourhood, which is crack cocaine and addiction. You are so out of touch, apparently you need your windscreen cleaned.

Mr Howard Hampton (Kenora-Rainy River): We were expecting a major piece of legislation today and instead we're presented with some fluff that is about as transparent as a clean windshield.

The fact of the matter is this legislation is an embarrassment and it's an insult. It's an embarrassment because there are real crime problems out there in our communities. This legislation will do nothing about it.

This legislation will do nothing about wife assault. This legislation will do nothing about the increasing experience that seniors have of home invasion. This legislation will do nothing about hate crime. This legislation won't even put any more police on the street to deal with those real issues.

Let me tell you how transparent this is. Thank God we still have in Canada something called Statistics Canada. StatsCan has done a study of police officers in the street in Ontario and what they show is that this government has actually cut the number of police officers on the street. In 1994, there were 20,737 police officers in this province. In 1998, there were less: 20,454. When you factor in the growth in population, just to stay equal with 1994 the government would have to have 21,865 police officers on the street, and it's not happening.

Instead, it's this government's priority that the police officers who are out there are going to spend their time chasing after squeegee kids. No effort for wife assault, no effort for hate crime, no effort to deal with home invasion. This government's priority in terms of dealing with crime is to go after 300 or 400 squeegee kids. It is an insult. It is an embarrassment. But even worse, what we see is a government that wants to use the criminal law to go after a social problem. We see young people who want a real job out there trying to make do with squeegeeing to make a few bucks. The government is going to turn the criminal law loose on them. We see people who are homeless, who don't have a home, our evidence of the growing crisis of homelessness in our major cities, and does the government have a solution? No. They're going to turn the criminal law on them.

What a misuse of the criminal law. What a misuse of police resources. What a missed opportunity to do something about the real crime problems in our society and to put together a strategy to deal with some of these social problems. What an embarrassment. What an embarrassment that the Attorney General today had to take six police officers off the beat to go down the street with him so he could have a photo opportunity chasing some squeegee kids. Embarrassment, that's what it is.

Mr Peter Kormos (Niagara Centre): This government has one real twisted point of view about what constitutes crime prevention in our communities. I note that it's either a new or a used hypodermic syringe, but it's only used condoms that constitute a violation. I don't envy the cop who has to testify in court as to the condition of that condom that is going to be discovered.

Didn't you guys understand? A street junkie or a crack addict couldn't care less about a provincial offences ticket as a result of what they did with their used syringe. We've got a serious drug problem in this province and you guys should be standing up, committing yourselves to devoting specific funds to specific police forces in very specific communities to combat drug trafficking and

drug use. That's what's going to solve the problem of syringes being found by kids or other people in public places.

You want to take on squeegee kids? Well, the fact remains that at the end of the day, come winter and salt and snow and slush, I want a squeegee kid at the end of University Avenue before I hit the Gardiner Expressway, and I'm prepared to pay a toonie rather than just a loonie because that kid's out there trying to hustle, trying to keep body and soul together in the hard times that you've helped create.

You want to put squeegee kids in jail? Think about it, Speaker. If they put all the squeegee kids in jail, there won't be any cells left for the cabinet ministers.

This government is trying to divert attention from its incredible mismanagement of law and order and of policing in this province. It's trying to distract attention from its lack of support from crown attorneys and other personnel in the criminal justice system. It's trying to distract attention from its complete failure in the area of corrections, especially youth corrections, and its failure to implement meaningful programs to straighten out young kids who run afoul. This is just another example of trying to steer people away from the real issues. It ain't going to work. You're going to be mocked. It's going to be a subject of laughter.

DEFERRED VOTES

THRONE SPEECH DEBATE

The Speaker (Hon Gary Carr): We have a deferred vote on the amendment to the amendment to the motion for an address in reply to the speech of Her Honour the Lieutenant Governor at the opening of the session. This will be a five-minute bell. Call in the members.

The division bells rang from 1408 to 1414.

The Speaker: All those in favour of Mr Hampton's amendment to the amendment to the motion will please rise.

Ayes

Agostino, Dominic	Cordiano, Joseph	Levac, David
Bartolucci, Rick	Crozier, Bruce	Marchese, Rosario
Bisson, Gilles	Curling, Alvin	Martin, Tony
Bountrogianni, Marie	Di Cocco, Caroline	McGuinty, Dalton
Boyer, Claudette	Dombrowsky, Leona	McLeod, Lyn
Bradley, James J.	Duncan, Dwight	Parsons, Ernie
Brown, Michael A.	Gerretsen, John	Patten, Richard
Bryant, Michael	Hampton, Howard	Peters, Steve
Caplan, David	Hoy, Pat	Phillips, Gerry
Christopherson, David	Kormos, Peter	Ramsay, David
Churley, Marilyn	Kwinter, Monte	Ruprecht, Tony
Cleary, John C.	Lalonde, Jean-Marc	Sergio, Mario
Colle, Mike	Lankin, Frances	Smitherman, George
Conway, Sean G.		

The Speaker: All those opposed to the amendment to the amendment to the motion will please rise.

Nays

Arnott, Ted	Hodgson, Chris	Ouellette, Jerry J.
Baird, John R.	Hudak, Tim	Sampson, Rob
Barrett, Toby	Jackson, Cameron	Skarica, Toni
Beaubien, Marcel	Johns, Helen	Snobelen, John
Chudleigh, Ted	Johnson, Bert	Spina, Joseph
Clark, Brad	Kells, Morley	Sterling, Norman W.
Clement, Tony	Klees, Frank	Stewart, R. Gary
Coburn, Brian	Marland, Margaret	Stockwell, Chris
Cunningham, Dianne	Martiniuk, Gerry	Tascona, Joseph N.
DeFaria, Carl	Maves, Bart	Tilson, David
Dunlop, Garfield	Mazzilli, Frank	Tsubouchi, David H.
Ecker, Janet	Molinari, Tina R.	Turnbull, David
Eves, Ernie L.	Munro, Julia	Wettlaufer, Wayne
Flaherty, Jim	Murdoch, Bill	Wilson, Jim
Galt, Doug	Mushinski, Marilyn	Witmer, Elizabeth
Gill, Raminder	Newman, Dan	Wood, Bob
Hardeman, Ernie	O'Toole, John	Young, David
Harris, Michael D.		

Clerk of the House (Mr Claude L. DesRosiers): The ayes are 40; the nays are 52.

The Speaker: I declare the amendment to the motion lost.

The next question to be decided is Mr McGuinty's amendment to the motion.

All those in favour of Mr McGuinty's amendment to the motion will please say "aye."

All those opposed will please say "nay."

In my opinion, the nays have it.

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

The division bells rang from 1418 to 1423.

The Speaker: All those in favour of Mr McGuinty's amendment to the motion will please rise.

Ayes

Agostino, Dominic	Cordiano, Joseph	Lankin, Frances
Bartolucci, Rick	Crozier, Bruce	Levac, David
Bisson, Gilles	Curling, Alvin	Marchese, Rosario
Bountrogianni, Marie	Di Cocco, Caroline	McGuinty, Dalton
Boyer, Claudette	Dombrowsky, Leona	McLeod, Lyn
Bradley, James J.	Duncan, Dwight	Parsons, Ernie
Brown, Michael A.	Gerretsen, John	Patten, Richard
Bryant, Michael	Hampton, Howard	Peters, Steve
Caplan, David	Hoy, Pat	Phillips, Gerry
Christopherson, David	Kennedy, Gerard	Ramsay, David
Churley, Marilyn	Kormos, Peter	Ruprecht, Tony
Cleary, John C.	Kwinter, Monte	Sergio, Mario
Colle, Mike	Lalonde, Jean-Marc	Smitherman, George
Conway, Sean G.		

The Speaker: All those opposed to the amendment to the motion will please rise.

Nays

Arnott, Ted	Hodgson, Chris	Ouellette, Jerry J.
Baird, John R.	Hudak, Tim	Sampson, Rob
Barrett, Toby	Jackson, Cameron	Skarica, Toni
Beaubien, Marcel	Johns, Helen	Snobelen, John
Chudleigh, Ted	Johnson, Bert	Spina, Joseph
Clark, Brad	Kells, Morley	Sterling, Norman W.
Clement, Tony	Klees, Frank	Stewart, R. Gary
Coburn, Brian	Marland, Margaret	Stockwell, Chris
Cunningham, Dianne	Martiniuk, Gerry	Tascona, Joseph N.
DeFaria, Carl	Maves, Bart	Tilson, David
Dunlop, Garfield	Mazzilli, Frank	Tsubouchi, David H.
Ecker, Janet	Molinari, Tina R.	Turnbull, David
Eves, Ernie L.	Munro, Julia	Wettlaufer, Wayne
Flaherty, Jim	Murdoch, Bill	Wilson, Jim

Galt, Doug	Mushinski, Marilyn	Witmer, Elizabeth
Gill, Raminder	Newman, Dan	Wood, Bob
Hardeman, Ernie	O'Toole, John	Young, David
Harris, Michael D.		

Clerk of the House: The ayes are 40; the nays are 52.

The Speaker: I declare the motion lost.

We now come to the motion of Mrs Mushinski.

All those in favour of Mrs Mushinski's motion will please say "aye."

All those opposed will please say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

I declare the motion carried.

It is therefore resolved that an humble address be presented to Her Honour the Lieutenant Governor as follows:

To the Honourable Hilary M. Weston, Lieutenant Governor of Ontario:

We, Her Majesty's most dutiful and loyal subjects, the Legislative Assembly of the province of Ontario, now assembled, beg leave to thank Your Honour for the gracious speech Your Honour has addressed to us.

ORAL QUESTIONS**MINISTER'S RESIGNATION**

Mr Dalton McGuinty (Leader of the Opposition): My question is for the Premier. The subject I want to deal with today has to do with the most aggressive panhandling we've ever witnessed in the province of Ontario, and that's the Steve Gilchrist "Buddy, can you spare \$25,000" approach to public policy.

On September 30, the assistant Deputy Attorney General—that's the highest civil servant in the province responsible for criminal law—decided that accusations against Mr Gilchrist and his lawyer were so serious that they should be immediately turned over to the OPP for a full police investigation.

Premier, you knew this on September 30, yet you decided to say nothing about either the accusations or the fact that a member of your cabinet was under police investigation until after word leaked out on October 8. That was a full nine days later. Can you explain to us why you decided to cover up the fact that one of your ministers was under police investigation for a full nine days before you disclosed this to the public?

Hon Michael D. Harris (Premier): I think we have come forward with the information pretty directly and pretty forthrightly. What was determined by the assistant Deputy Attorney General was that the allegations, if substantiated, if true, were quite serious. The decision was made to call in the OPP to see if these allegations were true, could be substantiated. I think that was the correct course of action and we are awaiting that report.

Mr McGuinty: That wasn't the question. The question was, why did you hide this fact from the Ontario public for nine days?

I can tell you what the Ontario public thinks. They are entitled to assume that no member of your cabinet today is under police investigation, and with that assumption comes the legitimate expectation that should that change, you will immediately put them on notice. You will stand up and make sure that Ontarians understand that “yes, there’s somebody today in my cabinet who’s under police investigation, so I’ve asked them to resign, at least pending the outcome of that investigation.”

What you did was cover up the matter. In the context of the fact that you are a Premier and we’re dealing with the cabinet and you lead a government, this is a political cover-up, Premier. That’s what it’s all about. You knew the allegation involved a plot regarding \$25,000 to be extracted from developers. You knew that there was a minister who was under investigation by the police. Again I ask you, why did you deny this fact from the Ontario public for a full nine days?

Hon Michael D. Harris (Premier): I would first of all say to the members of this House, and I would caution members opposite, you are throwing about allegations that you think maybe are true or maybe somebody has said. I have no knowledge of that.

Secondly, I can tell you that, to the best of my knowledge, the minister is not under investigation. If a minister of my cabinet is under police investigation, I have asked him to step aside. What is under investigation is: Is there any truth to these allegations? If, in fact, there is truth to the allegations, I made it very clear I would ask the minister to step aside.

1430

Mr McGuinty: You knew for a full nine days that this matter, no matter how you dice it or slice it, was the subject of a police investigation, and you decided that you were not going to inform the Ontario public. You weren’t going to inform voters that somebody in your cabinet was facing some very, very serious allegations. You kept this matter secret. You hid this from the Ontario public. You covered it up.

If it was not for the fact that this matter was leaked to the media, we here still today would not have been apprised of the fact that your minister continues to face some very, very serious allegations.

That’s why, Premier, we are asking that you hold a full public inquiry so that we can get to the bottom of this growing scandal in our province. Will you do that, Premier?

Hon Mr Harris: It’s very clear that the difference between you and me is I wait to make sure something is substantiated first. I have no substantiation to date. What I have is a verbal allegation that I have been unable to verify and my office was unable to verify. We asked for assistance to verify that. You, on the other hand, are quite quick to condemn people on the basis of no evidence at all. I would suggest to you that this is most inappropriate.

The Speaker (Hon Gary Carr): New question.

Mr McGuinty: My question is for the Premier. We’re not talking about something here on your behalf that was inappropriate; we’re talking about something that was

nothing short of scandalous. You had information that a member of your cabinet was the subject of a very, very serious allegation. You knew that the Attorney General had referred this matter to the Ontario Provincial Police for them to conduct an investigation. For nine days, you kept that matter secret. You refused to disclose it to the Ontario public. That’s what you did.

Premier, tell us, why is it that you continually put the interests of your friends and your cabinet ministers ahead of the Ontario public interest?

Hon Mr Harris: Clearly, the actions that we have taken (a) have followed the protocol laid out by the government and (b) suggest that we put the truth ahead of all else, something that the party of the member opposite has had great difficulty doing over their political career.

Mr McGuinty: The Premier is still covering up for his friends. That’s exactly why we need a public inquiry.

Let’s review the latest. Every day we’ve got some new information and the sleaze factor jumps just a little bit higher. Today we discover that John Snobelen, another member of your cabinet, knew as well about these allegations. On the weekend, we found out that David Lindsay in your office also knew about these allegations. There are reports that at least two other senior government officials knew about these allegations. The switchboard in your office was lighting up like a Christmas tree with people phoning in and complaining about this matter and this cabinet minister.

Come clean, Premier. Who knew what, when, and why didn’t you disclose it?

Hon Mr Harris: I think we’ve laid out very precisely who knew what. I’m not sure you know anything yet. You seem to think you do. But all I know is there was a verbal allegation, over the phone. My office dealt with it immediately—in fact, before even notifying me. When they notified me they said, “Premier, we’ve referred it to the Deputy Attorney General,” as is the protocol. We need to determine if there’s anything factual to it. That doesn’t stop you from raising it. I understand that. It never has; it never will.

Mr McGuinty: You can hide behind your protocol, but let me tell you about your responsibility to the people of Ontario. When a cabinet minister is the subject of these kinds of very, very serious allegations, when this matter is referred by somebody in the Attorney General’s office to the Ontario Provincial Police, when the Ontario Provincial Police are conducting an investigation into this matter, you, sir, have the responsibility as leader of the government and Premier of Ontario to disclose this to the Ontario public and not conduct a cover-up. That’s your job. That’s what you’re supposed to do. Either come clean on exactly what went down in your office or agree here and now to conduct a public inquiry.

Hon Mr Harris: Everything that’s been done in my office is a matter I think of record, and we’ve told you all that. We do await the facts before we make judgments. That little difference between you and Liberals and Conservatives is probably why next year we’ll go into this booming economy with a balanced budget; it’s probably

why we have all these jobs created in the province; it's probably why we now have new higher standards in education; it's probably why we now have a revitalized and a reformed health care system, because we do check the facts before we act.

Mr Dwight Duncan (Windsor-St Clair): On a point of order, Mr Speaker, related to standing order 39(a): Reference to the protocol has again twice been made today. The minister opposite indicated that that's everyone's protocol. It's not everyone's protocol. We are not in possession of the protocol. Again I urge you to use your chair to protect the opposition's ability to question the government. Will you please intervene and ask the government to table its protocol.

The Speaker: This is the same point of order as yesterday. As I explained to him yesterday, the rules are that you are not allowed to quote at length. The Premier did not do that. He simply referred to it briefly, so it's not a point of order.

Mr Duncan: Speaker, I would suggest to you that that protocol has been referenced on so many occasions that by not asking the government to table it, you, sir, are not allowing the opposition its ability, it's rightful role to question the government on a very serious cover-up.

The Speaker: The member take his seat. I have ruled as I did yesterday: It is not a point of order.

Mr David Christopherson (Hamilton West): On a point of order, Speaker: I thought I saw you direct the table that the clock be stopped. You know the importance of that. It didn't stop, sir.

The Speaker: Yes, it did.

Mr Christopherson: No, it didn't.

The Speaker: I apologize. The table did not see me. I did say, "Stop the clock," and the table didn't see it. They're going to put a minute back on the clock.

Mr Christopherson: Thank you, Mr Speaker.

The Speaker: New question.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

Mr Howard Hampton (Kenora-Rainy River): My question is for the Minister of the Environment. I want to take the Minister of the Environment back to his responses earlier in the week. When we questioned him about his letter on behalf of a developer friend, he said he was simply pointing out that "he act within the class EA regulations and the law."

This is a report from the planning commissioner of Durham region. The report is about your developer friend Jay-M Holdings and its plan to put 2,500 units of housing on the Oak Ridges moraine, the plan that you wrote to Durham region about. The report is scathing. It finds your developer friend's application to be bad for the environment, bad for urban planning and bad for economics. But what is most striking is their response to your letter. Their view is that under the Environment Assessment Act it isn't legal for them to do what you suggest, that they can't do it.

Minister, would you table the legal advice that you relied upon when you wrote to them advising them of the law and the Environmental Assessment Act?

Hon Tony Clement (Minister of the Environment, Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing): I would say to the honourable member that in the first instance the issue is to be determined by the organization in the municipality that you refer to so that they have the opportunity to review their practices. They did so and they came up with that decision and that's their right to do so.

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Mr Hampton: That's not what you said last week. What you said last week is that your letter "requests that, in his due deliberations as regional chair, he act within the class EA regulations and the law," and then you point out what your developer friend wants and you point out that your developer friend can be accommodated.

If you read this planning report, they say, "The request by Jay-M Holdings Ltd to extend the York-Durham sewer system to Uxbridge cannot be considered by way of reopening the class EA and by the preparation of an addendum to the original EA, but rather, under the act, it must be considered a new undertaking"—in other words, a new EA.

Minister, not only do the planning staff oppose the suggestion that you make in your letter, but they can't legally do it. They just can't do it.

I ask you again, Minister: They've looked at the act; they've gotten legal advice. Show us the legal advice you relied on before you went out there and wrote that letter on behalf of your developer friend.

Hon Mr Clement: Two things: Just for the record, I disagree with the honourable member's characterization, but I would say to him that there is no discordance between what I wrote and the deliberations. I said merely "take into account in your deliberations." They took it into account. They deliberated. They came up with an answer. There's nothing wrong with that at all.

Mr Hampton: No, Minister. What you said in this House is that you were informing them about the law. That was your whole line of defence for getting cced on a letter from a developer and then taking that cc and writing a very explicit letter to the municipal officials in Durham region. You said you were informing them of the law. Well, they've sat down and they've looked at the Environmental Assessment Act and they are very clear that it would be illegal for them to take the line that you suggested. It would be contrary to the Environmental Assessment Act for them to act in that way and to favour your developer friend.

What I'm asking you is very simple: Table here, so people can see it, the legal advice that you relied upon before you wrote the letter supposedly instructing Durham region as to your version of the law. Will you do that? Will you show us what you relied upon before you went out there and interfered in this decision and instructed this municipality that they should in fact

breach the Environmental Assessment Act in order to favour your developer friend?

Hon Mr Clement: For the benefit of all honourable members, the law is quite clear. Any significant modification has to be reviewed by the proponent. The proponent reviewed the case and made their decision, and I'm satisfied with the decision.

SPORTS FACILITY TAXATION

Mr Howard Hampton (Kenora-Rainy River): My next question is for the Premier. It concerns your government's desire to use taxpayers' funds to subsidize professional hockey teams.

Your Minister of Finance presented on Thursday a strategy whereby your government is going to potentially subsidize two professional hockey teams in this province to the tune of \$16 million.

I know you have the support of the Liberal Party on this. They believe this should be a priority for Ontario.

Why is subsidizing professional hockey teams more important than, for example, dealing with the problems in our health care system or dealing with second-stage housing for assaulted women or dealing with the issues of homelessness? Premier, why is giving \$16 million to millionaire hockey players more important than looking after these very important issues for a majority of people in Ontario?

Hon Michael D. Harris (Premier): I think you would know we have been very clear that there would be no direct subsidy of NHL teams, the same as other businesses, from the province of Ontario.

What the Minister of Finance did offer, however, was to private sector owners of arena facilities, who may or may not be the same people who are involved with professional sports. Where instead of using taxpayer dollars to build the arena, a municipality had opted to have a private sector consortium or individual or company build those facilities, the Minister of Finance has offered to the municipalities an opportunity to allow those to be at the same tax basis as those facilities, for example, that were owned by the municipalities themselves. That is the proposal that is there, and we'll see if municipalities wish to avail themselves of it.

Mr Hampton: Premier, let's be very clear. Maple Leaf Gardens, what is now the Air Canada Centre, the Toronto Maple Leafs, you're going to offer them an \$8-million subsidy. You're going to offer the Ottawa Senators an \$8-million subsidy. Some of that money is going to come out of your education tax; some of it is going to come out of municipalities.

Meanwhile, you don't seem to have money to help, for example, the Gallaher paper mill in Thorold restructure itself and reposition itself so that 300 jobs can be preserved.

I want to quote for you Glen Murray, the mayor of Winnipeg, who says: "We started out subsidizing the Winnipeg Jets to \$2 million a year. Then they came back and they wanted \$20 million a year. The last year here,

they asked for \$50 million. Then they went to Phoenix. Now they want the city of Phoenix to build them a brand-new arena at taxpayers' expense."

Why, Premier, do you have money for millionaire hockey players, but none for the health care system, the school system, the situation with respect to the homeless or people—

The Speaker (Hon Gary Carr): Premier.

Hon Mr Harris: I'm still awaiting the briefing note from the Liberal Party on Windsor. When I get that and when you ask the question next time, I'll have it about how you gave property tax concessions to, I guess—

Interjection: A casino.

Hon Mr Harris: A casino, I suppose it was. I may not have it accurate; I'm still waiting for the full note. But let me be very clear: We are spending over \$20 billion in health care. We are spending a hundred times more dollars than the federal government on homelessness, although they do have a minister with no money; that's the Liberal way, I think you know.

In the case of arenas, public facilities that are owned by municipalities, if they ought to have the private sector builder own them, this now gives them the option of putting those owners of those facilities on a level playing field with municipally owned facilities. Quite frankly, the way I would expect it would be done would be by municipalities spreading that cost, if there is a cost, over all the commercial and industrial taxpayers. That would be a business decision that would be made on behalf of businesses—

The Speaker: Premier, order. New question.

MEMBER'S COMMENTS

Mr Dominic Agostino (Hamilton East): My question is to the Premier. I want to ask you about comments made by your member from Haldimand-Norfolk-Brant with regard to restructuring.

His father was quoted as saying that residents in Haldimand are "conservative in their spending" and "rooted in British tradition," while those in Norfolk are "European immigrants" and "peasant stock" who "borrow heavily" and "expect a substantial profit."

The member had the opportunity to clarify this, and what did he say? To quote the member, Toby Barrett: "There are very significant differences" between the two sides of the region, "and the regional census would show that.... There is census data and facts out there. There's so many differences between the two counties and part of that is that it all derives from the soil structure. Haldimand is clay and Norfolk is sandy. It really has had an influence on the makeup" of the citizens.

Premier, what we're now having is the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of the Environment, who is now also in charge of municipal affairs, suggesting that restructuring Haldimand-Norfolk be based on ethnic backgrounds. Do you agree with that? If you don't, what steps have you taken?

Hon Michael D. Harris (Premier): I think the member's comments do not by any interpretation and certainly do not in any way reflect a view that I or this government share. I'm happy to clarify that and make it very clear.

Mr Agostino: I appreciate that. As Premier, you now have to take steps, I believe, to rectify the situation.

He didn't stop there. Further comment in today's Toronto Star: "There is no question that there has been an invisible [ethnic] boundary within the two counties 25 years ago there was a forced marriage and it just didn't work out." The Mayor of Delhi says, regarding these comments that this "is scraping the bottom of the barrel." The Mayor of Nanticoke says, "People's [ethnic] makeup should not be used. I wouldn't want Mr Farrow to say we can't have Germans, Poles and Hungarians together with United Empire Loyalists."

Premier, I agree with you that these comments are inappropriate. These offensive, discriminatory insults involve residents across the province. Will you today take the responsible act and fire the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of the Environment?

Hon Mr Harris: I want members of this Legislature and the public to be very clear about what we are doing in reforming local administration. We're doing so to cut down the size of government. We're doing so to reduce the number of politicians. We're doing so to find savings which will then be passed on to the taxpayers through property tax cuts or through improved services.

I want to say this to you: Any suggestions to the contrary would be inaccurate, and any suggestion of any other motivation is false.

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INFLUENZA VACCINE

Mr Doug Galt (Northumberland): My question is directed to the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. There are many seniors in Northumberland who are concerned, with this winter season coming on, that they will not receive their flu shots.

It is my understanding that in Northumberland the influenza vaccine has been distributed to family physicians. As you are aware, there are several residents, particularly in the Campbellford-Seymour area, who do not have access to a family physician. Minister, could you please tell the House what your ministry is doing to help people across the province, especially seniors, have access to flu shots in this upcoming winter season?

Hon Elizabeth Witmer (Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): I'd like the member to know that we're certainly aware of the concern that's been expressed. In order to fully maximize the allocation of the flu vaccine in the three counties he has talked about, it is the plan of the health unit to collect the surplus vaccines from physicians and then to establish a vaccination clinic where vaccinations will be provided free of charge to those who are eligible. There will be an advertising campaign to ensure that all of those seniors who require

and want the vaccination will have access to that. Those clinics will all occur at the end of November.

Mr Galt: Thank you for your answer and the encouragement. As you are aware, influenza is indeed a very significant problem, particularly with our seniors—a condition which can lead to all kinds of complications and the development of more serious diseases. It can also be spread from workers with seniors to our senior population. In Northumberland there is certainly an aging population and this vaccine is most important to our seniors.

Minister, could you explain to us how this immunization program fits with other immunization programs for our seniors?

Hon Mrs Witmer: Our government is very committed to ensuring that everyone who is eligible has access to the vaccine, so this year we have purchased an additional 200,000 doses of the vaccine. We have an opportunity to purchase an additional 10%.

We are making sure that we expand the eligibility criteria this year. All staff who have the potential for acquiring or transmitting influenza during the course of their work this year are eligible for vaccination. This includes those working in homes for the aged, nursing homes, chronic care facilities and units. We've also made all staff eligible in retirement homes where care is provided as well. It certainly is the intention of the ministry to ensure that all those who work with patients have access to the vaccine.

LITHOTRIPSY

Mr Dalton McGuinty (Leader of the Opposition): I have a question for the Minister of Health. I want to return to the issue of the lithotripter which is presently found in crates in a hospital in Ottawa, bought and paid for by the fundraising efforts of the people of that community and which you refuse to fund for its operating costs.

Yesterday, you effectively said that it was no concern to you that these people who need lithotripsy treatment are forced to travel at their own expense and to pay for their accommodation.

Let's just take a look at the economic side of this argument. Some 340 people at present are travelling to Toronto or London; 225 are going to Montreal. When they go to Montreal, because of an agreement your government entered into with the province of Quebec, we pay \$1,060 for a lithotripsy treatment, whereas we pay \$457 for lithotripsy treatment here in Ontario. Some 300 patients are treated by surgery at the Ottawa Hospital because they cannot travel.

In short, my question is the following: Why is it that taxpayers of Ontario are today paying \$805,880 as a result of not having a lithotripsy treatment centre in Ottawa, whereas otherwise, if we had the damned machine in Ottawa, we would be paying less than \$400,000?

Hon Elizabeth Witmer (Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): The member might be well advised to review some of the situations that occurred when your government was in power, regarding this particular issue.

In response to the question that has been asked, I will indicate one more time that we continue to be in discussion with the hospital in Ottawa. We have indicated that we do support the principle. I made that abundantly clear yesterday. We do support the development. It's also important to point out that the waiting list has not increased in this province since 1996; all urgent cases are responded to within 48 hours.

Mr McGuinty: I ask that the Premier pay some attention to this very important issue for the people of Ottawa-Carleton. The people of Ottawa-Carleton bought and paid for a lithotripter. They did that because they were given a written promise by this minister that she would fund its operating costs. At the present time, there are hundreds and hundreds of people who must travel to Montreal, London or Toronto for their treatments. Premier, this is not politically sustainable.

Minister, please stand up and tell us that the bureaucrats are in error; they don't understand that when it comes to health care there is more here than simply considerations related to efficiency. We're talking about the basic emotional and health care needs of people living in a particular community. Can you please do what is right in the circumstances and tell us that you are going to fund the operating costs of this machine for the people of Ottawa-Carleton?

Hon Mrs Witmer: I think the member opposite would be wise to consider the tremendous commitment that our government has made to increasing health care funding in the province of Ontario. In fact, we are funding health care to the tune of \$20.6 billion. It is the highest level of funding at any time in the history of this province.

If we take a look at Ottawa, we have increased funding to the Ottawa-Carleton area by over \$259 million since 1995. We have introduced two new MRIs; we have a new dialysis centre. We have taken steps that were totally different to what any other government has done at any time, and we will continue to ensure that the services that are needed are provided for the people in the community.

HIGHWAY SIGNS

Mr Bart Maves (Niagara Falls): My question is for the Minister of Tourism. Inadequate highway signage has long been a problem for Ontario tourism destinations. They need highway visibility in order to ensure tourists can be directed from our now excellent Ontario highways to their businesses.

Some tourist businesses in Niagara Falls have been experiencing delays in obtaining these signs under the program operated by the Ministry of Tourism. One of my constituents wrote to you some time ago and said that there is not one satisfied hotel owner in Niagara Falls

because of the way TODS has handled the area signage. Can you tell me what you are doing to help these businesses successfully market their product to the travelling public?

Hon Cameron Jackson (Minister of Tourism): I want to thank the member for his question and remind members in the House that tourism is the fastest-growing industry in the world and it accounts for about \$13 billion worth of economic activity in our province. We're very proud of the fact that the tourism-oriented destination sign program was brought in by our government in late 1996. It replaces an outdated program that really hadn't had any work done on it since the early 1980s. Part of this program stipulates very clearly, though, that the highway signs will not be installed unless there is a municipal agreement to put in place trailblazer signs or directional signs within the community. Unfortunately, there are just a few communities left in Ontario, Niagara Falls being one of them, Halton region being another, and a couple of others, that have not implemented the program.

The other reason that some of these signs aren't going up is because of highway construction; we won't put a sign up in order to take it down. The fact of the matter is that this government is spending more than \$700 million on highway construction, the most in Ontario's history, which is more than double the amount the Liberals ever spent on highway construction in the province.

1500

Mr Maves: Minister, it is my understanding, in speaking with my colleagues, that individual tourist operators across the province have been experiencing a variety of difficulties with this program. Can you tell me what your ministry is doing to resolve these problems on behalf of my constituents and those around the province?

Hon Mr Jackson: I've had a couple of meetings with the Canadian TODS corporation. We've been reviewing the files and we're very pleased with the progress this program has made. There are 2,700 Ontario tourist operators who have signs on Ontario highways. They in turn have got about 7,500 panels promoting their operations. These monthly meetings I have with TODS is an opportunity to review each and every case. I know I have a couple from the opposition members. I have undertaken a full review of this program and I meet with TODS on a monthly basis in order to resolve those issues. I encourage any members to write me with any of their concerns.

Clearly, this is a leading-edge program promoting tourism, the fastest-growing industry in our province, and this government is to be commended for putting in place this program.

NOTICE OF DISSATISFACTION

Mr Dominic Agostino (Hamilton East): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: I wish to advise you of my dissatisfaction with the response of the Premier in regard to comments made by Toby Barrett, the member from Haldimand-Norfolk-Brant. The reason for my dissatisfac-

tion is the Premier did not satisfactorily answer the question. I would like to ask for a late show.

The Speaker (Hon Gary Carr): Would you file that with the table.

TENANT PROTECTION

Mr Rosario Marchese (Trinity-Spadina): My question is to the Premier. Premier, I need your help. I'm not going to be asking for much. You've got to listen to the question before you try to help me out.

The Centre for Equality Rights in Accommodation has documented some serious problems with the Tenant Protection Act. What we're seeing is that tenants are being evicted helter-skelter. In fact, in many cases evictions are downright fraudulent. The evictions forms are unclear, some are never delivered and tenants only have five days to file a written dispute. This, Premier, is where I'm asking for your help because you can do this without introducing any new bill. Can you ensure that the tribunal, not the landlord, gives the tenant notice of eviction? It's a simple request. Can you do it?

Hon Michael D. Harris (Premier): I think the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing can answer this.

Hon Tony Clement (Minister of the Environment, Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing): I thank the honourable member for the question. Indeed, the issue has been raised by the early intervention project. We have an interim report which I think the honourable member referred to. I would say to this House that it is only an interim study to date. We're awaiting the final study. We take the recommendation seriously. The only other thing I would say is that the report that the honourable member refers to only refers to one area in Toronto. It's not province-wide. Once we have some more fulsome recommendations and a more fulsome study—it is something we take very seriously.

Mr Marchese: I'm glad you're taking it very seriously. Obviously this is an interim report. It can only get worse, not better. All I asked was for the Premier, now you, Minister, to make a change that is within your control. I know you're the non-government government, but you can do this; you're in charge. This is only one simple request that I ask of you and that the Centre for Equality is asking of you. We'll see whether or not you can deal with another request that I'm about to propose to you. Otherwise you're leaving tenants powerless and in the hands of some landlord sharks. In fact, many of these people are being evicted and are on the streets, adding to the numbers of homeless.

The other matter is that the tenants are finding that Rent Check, which is the private sector credit check company, records them as having been evicted even when evictions are not carried out. That has a devastating and totally unfair impact on tenants. No landlord will rent to you if that remains the case.

Minister, will you make sure that the Ontario Rental Housing Tribunal removes all tenants who are not actually evicted from its records so tenants aren't unfairly put

on a blacklist? It's within your control. I hope you can at least deliver on that.

Hon Mr Clement: I thank the honourable member for his input and would advise him in the House that we are taking this review very seriously. The tribunal is going through a review. We want to see what the outcome of that review is. We thank him for his input.

I would say to the honourable member that the grounds for eviction have not changed. They were the same under previous legislation as they are under present legislation. The number of applications for writs of possession are essentially the same, but we are trying to do things better. We're trying to deliver better services for less to the taxpayer and we would take, certainly, the recommendations once they are finalized under advisement.

HYDRO RATES

Mr Sean G. Conway (Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke): My question is to the Minister of Finance. It's almost a year ago that this Legislature passed the so-called Energy Competition Act, Bill 35, which is supposed to deregulate the electricity marketplace in this province. That legislation gives to the Minister of Finance very considerable responsibilities in this very important electricity marketplace.

My question to the Minister of Finance today is a very straightforward one. Bill 35 made it plain that electricity rates in Ontario were going to come down, so my question today for the Minister of Finance is simply this: Will the Minister of Finance, as a key player in this policy, tell the average residential and farm consumer of electricity when and by how much their electricity bill will come down?

Hon Ernie L. Eves (Deputy Premier, Minister of Finance): I don't believe Bill 35 said that at all. What is happening in Ontario is that hydro rates have been frozen since 1995; they continue to be frozen. That is a policy of the government. It's a commitment that the government has made. I believe what the honourable member is alluding to is that we indicated competition surely would be the best way of keeping prices down.

Mr Conway: My question remains the same. The bill was so cleverly named. Let me read the bill: "Bill 35, An Act to create jobs and protect consumers by promoting low-cost energy through competition...." I sat through I think all of the hearings, and the advertisement from the Harris government with respect to this policy was plain: "We're going to give you competition in the electricity marketplace and through that mechanism we're going to bring your electricity bills down."

The Minister of Finance has very significant responsibilities and decision-making authority under Bill 35. Will he tell the House today, and will he tell the average residential and farm consumer of electricity how, when and by how much their electricity bills will be coming down?

Hon Mr Eves: I listened very intently to what the member just read from Bill 35, and he said "low-cost

energy through competition.” It doesn’t say that your rate will go down. However, we happen—

Interjections.

Hon Mr Eves: Just a minute.

Interjections.

Hon Mr Eves: Mr Speaker, perhaps they missed their feeding time over there this afternoon.

The bill says exactly what it means: This is the best way to keep energy prices down, through competition. I might have a question—would the honourable member be permitted to answer it in question period—as to why he and his party voted for Bill 35 if they think it’s such a bad idea.

Mr Conway: On a point of order, Mr Speaker: I think it is important. What the member has asked—on a point of privilege. If he checks the journals and the records, it will be made plain that after all of the evidence was in, we voted against Bill 35.

1510

RED HILL CREEK EXPRESSWAY

Mr Brad Clark (Stoney Creek): My question is for the Minister of Transportation. As you are aware, the construction of the Red Hill Creek Expressway will represent the completion of a vital transportation link in Stoney Creek and a harbinger of increased economic development throughout Hamilton-Wentworth.

It is unfortunate that the federal Liberal MPs in the area disagree with this and have used their power to block the expressway with yet another study. It is even more unfortunate that their provincial cousins don’t dare criticize this delay with the same kind of outrage they can summon against us on the government side.

As for the NDP, they used their term in office to cut the funding for the expressway.

Minister, what has this government done to ensure that this vital transportation link gets built after four decades of demand?

Hon David Turnbull (Minister of Transportation): I’d like to thank my colleague the member for Stoney Creek and congratulate him on his leadership on this issue.

Some months ago, my colleague the Minister of the Environment and I wrote a joint letter to the federal Minister of the Environment expressing our concerns and asked for reconsideration of their position. We believe that it is inconceivable that the federal panel review is going to provide any new information or insight on this matter.

The government of Ontario is seeking intervenor status in the Hamilton-Wentworth court challenge on this matter. The federal environmental review is too broad in its scope, in our view. We should not be covering the need for the Red Hill Creek or alternatives to the Red Hill Creek.

To date, there have been 61 studies—

The Speaker (Hon Gary Carr): Minister, time.

Mr Clark: A lot of people in Hamilton-Wentworth will be pleased with your answer. That would include the region of Hamilton-Wentworth itself, which has taken action against the Liberal roadblocks. They should be applauded for their efforts.

Minister, how is this government assisting the region of Hamilton-Wentworth in this important project?

Hon Mr Turnbull: There have been 61 studies to date on this matter. We believe it’s time that Hamilton be allowed to get moving forward on this. We continue to support the project, with \$106.76 million for the expressway and \$25 million for the intersection at the QEW. We have demonstrated our commitment to the transportation infrastructure, as we continue to in this province, with the highest budget in provincial history. This is more than any other government has done. We will continue to support the people of Hamilton-Wentworth.

STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

Mr Gerard Kennedy (Parkdale-High Park): I have a question to the Minister of Education. Minister, I use that term advisedly because your fumbling has taken away education. Some of your members opposite are making noise. It is the same members who refuse to stand up for the people in their areas. Last week, it was Hamilton. You turned your back on the special needs kids in Hamilton. We forced you to hold a meeting and you still haven’t done anything for 550 kids there.

Today I want to ask you specifically about the Grand Erie board. They have had to cannibalize their other programs or other operations to fund 150 kids and they have 60 kids on a waiting list. I want to know, when the supervisors of education in this province say that you’ve made a mess of special education funding, that you’re not acting quickly enough, that it is your responsibility, will you stop whining about school boards? Will you, today, give these kids the education they deserve? Will you promise that here and now?

Hon Janet Ecker (Minister of Education): I really hope that the Hamilton board doesn’t take their political advice from the member opposite, because it’s not going to be of assistance to them as they meet with ministry officials to sort out what they are doing with the increased special education funding they’ve received from the ministry.

We recognize that the way special education was previously supported in the province was not correct. That’s why we gave boards more money when they asked for it. That’s why we changed the funding formula so it did have flexibility and it was tied to students who had special needs. We are continuing to meet with boards to discuss how we can change and improve this funding so that they can meet their responsibility to give these children the supports they need.

The Speaker (Hon Gary Carr): Supplementary.

Mr Bruce Crozier (Essex): This is a problem across the province. You have a letter from the Greater Essex

County District School Board on the issue of special education and intensive support. In that letter the board states that Windsor-Essex has a high incidence of children with special needs.

One of my constituents, Denise Dupis, is very concerned about this problem. Her 11-year-old son, Bobby, is severely visually impaired. In this past year, Bobby's sight deteriorated from 20/200 to 20/800. He also suffers from severe sensitivity to light. Unfortunately, despite Mrs Dupis's best efforts, the medical report was not completed in time to qualify for funding to assist Bobby at school. The Dupis family is trying desperately to keep him in school and now may have to remove him from school.

Boards can't make up these funding shortfalls. You've frozen the intensive support funding. What choice are you giving families like the Dupis family? Is it your message that there's no room in the school system for children with intensive support needs? Don't you treat this with any urgency at all?

Hon Mrs Ecker: The reason that our government has given boards like the Windsor-Essex Catholic board, for example, 48% more for special education funding, and perhaps the Hamilton-Wentworth Catholic board 44% more in special education funding, the reason they have increased money, is because we recognize that there is an increased need.

Yes, ISA support grants were frozen because boards said to us that they needed experience in dealing with the new process to meet the special education needs of the high-needs students. We did that at the boards' request. But we also gave them additional monies this year yet again, inflexible monies to help meet these needs.

We understand that there need to be more refinements to this process. That's why we are continuing to meet with the boards. If they need assistance in terms of allocating their funding, again, my ministry staff are prepared to assist them to do that.

Mr Crozier: On a point of order, Mr Speaker: Pursuant to section 37 of the standing orders, I will be filing the form that I'm not happy with that answer because the minister did not speak to the urgency of it.

The Speaker: The member will file with the table.

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

Mr Dan Newman (Scarborough Southwest): My question is to the Chair of Management Board of Cabinet. Minister, as you are aware, I have a keen interest in information technology and I'm very interested in the government's use of information technology to provide better and more convenient services to the taxpayers of this province.

As the Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet, can you tell me if you have a strategy in place to take advantage of the benefits of information technology to improve service to my constituents in Scarborough Southwest and to the taxpayers of Ontario?

Hon Chris Hodgson (Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet): I appreciate the question from my colleague the member for Scarborough Southwest. I would just like to say that I'm pleased to get the question because one of the most important things the government is doing is laying the foundation to use information and information technology to the benefit of the people of Ontario so that the people of Ontario can get access to government services when, where and how they want. The implementation of this strategy will be critical to improving customer service in this province.

Mr Newman: The answer was quite informative, and I know my constituents in Scarborough Southwest appreciate that.

In your answer you also wanted to have some further information to give to the House, and to my constituents in Scarborough Southwest, with some examples of how this information technology will help them.

Hon Mr Hodgson: I know the member for Scarborough Southwest's constituents and the people of Ontario will be interested to see some early results from the implementation of our IT strategy, that is, Service Ontario kiosks that allow taxpayers to buy licence plate stickers or change their address or their health card when they are available; not during government office hours but through the Service Ontario kiosks.

Ontario Business Connects is using technology to allow people to register a small business on line within 20 minutes. In the old days that would take anywhere from four to six weeks, and then it would have to be sent back if there were any errors.

Publications Ontario allows people of Ontario through the Internet to have access to the publications produced by the Ontario government. These are huge improvements but small steps in terms of our commitment to improving government services and making government work for the people of Ontario, not the other way around.

1520

COLLÈGE D'ALFRED

ALFRED COLLEGE

M. Gilles Bisson (Timmins-Baie James) : Ma question s'adresse au ministre de l'Agriculture. Votre ministre a recommandé d'éliminer la subvention de 1,5 \$ million du ministère au Collège d'Alfred, le seul collège agricole francophone dans la province.

Ma question est celle-ci : pour quelle raison accepterez-vous d'éliminer cette subvention, sachant que c'est le seul collège agricole de langue française en Ontario ?

Hon Ernie Hardeman (Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs): I appreciate the fact that the member opposite recognizes the importance of agriculture in Ontario. In fact, it is the second-highest employer providing employment to some 640,000 Ontarians. In fact, it provides \$25 billion in our economy, and I want to assure the member that we are very committed to education to the agriculture sector in our community. That's

why in 1997 we entered a partnership with the University of Guelph to provide, among other things, quality agriculture education for the people of the province in the agriculture community. In fact, the province presently spends \$11 billion a year to provide that type of education.

Enrolment in our agricultural colleges has increased each and every year in the last number of years. The graduates coming out of those colleges are indeed picked off by our agri-food sector and are provided jobs in our growing economy, the economy that's provided through tax cuts in the province. We're very happy for that to be happening.

M. Bisson : Monsieur le ministre, on sait asteur que la communauté francophone a des gros problèmes avec ce gouvernement quand ça vient à comprendre le dossier francophone. On vous a demandé pour quelle raison vous avez éliminé une subvention au Collège d'Alfred. Vous avez l'air de vous planter ici puis nous dire comment le collège de Guelph est important. Oui, c'est important pour les anglophones, mais nous les francophones avons besoin de notre collège.

Je vous demande encore : pour quelle raison avez-vous éliminé, en tant que ministre responsable de l'agriculture, la subvention au Collège d'Alfred ? Répondez une fois à la question.

Hon Mr Hardeman: I want to assure the member opposite that the \$1.5 million of which he speaks has not been eliminated from Alfred College at this point. As a ministry, we are looking at all our expenditures to make sure we are providing the best possible service in the best possible way for the people we serve and for our stakeholders in our ministry.

I can assure the member that we will be providing francophone education for francophones in our agricultural community as we have in the past and as we will continue to do in the future. But I want to point out that we want to look at all our expenditures to make sure we are as cost-effective and efficient with the taxpayers' money as we possibly can be.

HOMES FOR THE AGED

Mrs Leona Dombrowsky (Hastings-Frontenac-Lennox and Addington): My question is for the minister responsible for seniors. We continue to read daily about the confusion and disagreement around who is and should be responsible for ensuring the safety of seniors in retirement homes. The minister responsible for seniors told us about process, about discussions, about reports that have been sitting on shelves for years. The people of Ontario are tired of proposals. They want action on this issue.

Minister, recently you were quoted as saying, "All I care about is that seniors are protected." Why weren't you there for 81-year-old Teofil Skupien? In February a health care aide from his retirement home went to the provincial government and to city hall and nothing was done. It was not until this gentleman walked into a police

station with a bruised face and three broken ribs that charges were laid. How can your government so arrogantly ignore seniors at risk? What action will you take today to ensure the safety of seniors in retirement homes in Ontario?

Hon Helen Johns (Minister of Citizenship, Culture and Recreation, minister responsible for seniors and women): I would just like to first off say that as a result of the actions that the city of Toronto has taken recently, obviously if this gentleman walked into city hall today, he would get a very different response than he got three, four or five months ago. Now, of course, they have a hotline, they have people who go out and check different retirement homes to ensure that services are being provided.

But I want to say that there are some responsibilities that the province has; there is no question. Elder abuse is against the law and we have a responsibility to ensure that people are safe in their homes. If a senior is the subject of elder abuse, all they have to do is call the police and the police will go in, because elder abuse is against the law.

Mrs Dombrowsky: With regard to the minister's suggestion that the issue is being managed adequately by municipal representatives, I would suggest that, reading recent media reports, the mayor of the city of Toronto is having some difficulty having that responsibility laid at his feet. He has indicated very clearly that the province must give cities the power to license homes and would suggest that the minister is trying to download yet another provincial responsibility to the municipality.

The government needs to take some responsibility; the minister needs to take some action. We are aware of what's happening in the city of Toronto, but what about the other 585 municipalities in the province where the needs of seniors and their safety in retirement homes are not being addressed?

Hon Mrs Johns: I know the member is new, so let me just explain a few things that have happened in the past.

Let me be very clear when I say that Toronto and Etobicoke both had bylaws present before the amalgamation last year. A number of different communities have bylaws presently, which include Ottawa and Hamilton. Let me suggest to the member opposite that the other day I wrote to the mayor and asked if he wanted me to upload some services, if he didn't want to handle some of the responsibilities that he has. We're prepared to look at this.

What's important to ensure is that our seniors are safe within our communities. The municipality has responsibility, the province has responsibility and every person and every family in Ontario has a responsibility to ensure that seniors are safe in their community.

Mrs Lyn McLeod (Thunder Bay-Atikokan): On a point of order, Speaker: I would appreciate you indicating whether or not this is a point of order. The minister has just made reference to bylaws that exist at the municipal level. It's my understanding that in the absence of provincial legislation, any municipal bylaws other than

in the city of Windsor may be ultra vires, and I'm asking for clarification of that.

The Speaker (Hon Gary Carr): Actually, I had a little bit of trouble hearing that. Could you explain the point of order again, please.

Mrs McLeod: I'm asking for clarification by the government, by the minister or any other minister of the government; a clear indication of whether, beyond the city of Windsor, which has a law that has been passed giving them the ability to make bylaws respecting care in retirement homes, other bylaws in respect of care in retirement homes at a municipal level are in fact ultra vires and need to be dealt with by government.

The Speaker: That's not a point of order; it's obviously a question.

Hon Ernie L. Eves (Deputy Premier, Minister of Finance): On a point of personal privilege, Speaker: I'd like to correct the record. During question period I indicated that the member for Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke and his party had voted for Bill 35. I would like to correct the record, Mr Speaker. They did vote for Bill 35, a vote in principle on June 25, 1998, including the honourable member. Only 10 opposition members, all of whom were NDP members, voted against the bill in principle. Of course, something happened between voting in principle and the politics of third reading debate, in which case 18 members decided to join the party of principle and vote against Bill 35. I would just like to clarify the record.

1530

NOTICE OF DISSATISFACTION

Mrs Leona Dombrowsky (Hastings-Frontenac-Lennox and Addington): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: I wish to file my dissatisfaction with the response that I received from the minister and I would like to indicate at this time that I will be filing the appropriate papers for a late show.

The Speaker (Hon Gary Carr): The member will file with the table.

PETITIONS

HIGHWAY SAFETY

Mr Tony Ruprecht (Davenport): I have a petition signed by a number of persons not only in Davenport but across the province. It's addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario and it reads as follows:

"Whereas 13 people died during the first seven months of 1999 on Highway 401 between London and Windsor; and

"Whereas traffic levels on all sections of Highway 401 continue to increase; and

"Whereas Canada's number one trade and travel route was designed in the 1950s for fewer vehicles and lighter trucks; and

"Whereas road funding is almost completely paid through vehicle permit and driving licence fees; and

"Whereas Ontario road users pay 28 cents per litre of tax on gasoline, adding up to over \$2.7 billion in provincial gas taxes and over \$2.3 billion in federal gas taxes;

"We, the undersigned members of the Canadian Automobile Association and other residents of Ontario, respectfully request the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to immediately upgrade Highway 401 to at least a six-lane highway with fully paved shoulders and rumble strips; and

"We respectfully request that the Legislative Assembly of Ontario place firm pressure on the federal government to invest its gasoline tax revenue in road safety improvements in Ontario."

I have signed my name to this petition.

ABORTION

Mr Bert Johnson (Perth-Middlesex): I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the Ontario health system is overburdened and unnecessary spending must be cut; and

"Whereas pregnancy is not a disease, injury or illness and abortions are not therapeutic procedures; and

"Whereas the vast majority of abortions are done for reasons of convenience or finance; and

"Whereas the province has exclusive authority to determine what services will be insured; and

"Whereas the Canada Health Act does not require funding for elective procedures; and

"Whereas there is mounting evidence that abortion is in fact hazardous to women's health; and

"Whereas Ontario taxpayers funded over 45,000 abortions in 1993 at an estimated cost of \$25 million;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to cease from providing any taxpayers' dollars for the performance of abortions."

I will sign this on behalf of the 206 people who presented this petition.

HIGHWAY SAFETY

Mr Steve Peters (Elgin-Middlesex-London): To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas 13 people have died during the first seven months of 1999 on Highway 401 and the carnage on this highway continues; and

"Whereas traffic levels on all sections of Highway 401 continue to increase; and

"Whereas Canada's number one trade and travel route was designed in the 1950s for fewer vehicles and lighter trucks; and

"Whereas road funding is almost completely paid through vehicle permit and driving licence fees; and

"Whereas Ontario road users pay 28 cents per litre of tax on gasoline, adding up to \$2.7 billion in provincial gas taxes;

"We, the undersigned members of the Canadian Automobile Association and other residents of Ontario," including constituents of my riding, from St Thomas, Aylmer, London and Sparta, "do hereby present this petition to the Legislature."

I affix my signature to it.

Mr Bob Wood (London West): I have a petition submitted to me by the Canadian Automobile Association and signed by 288 people.

"Whereas 13 people died during the first seven months of 1999 on Highway 401 between London and Windsor; and

"Whereas traffic levels on all sections of Highway 401 continue to increase; and

"Whereas Canada's number one trade and travel route was designed in the 1950s for fewer vehicles and lighter trucks; and

"Whereas road funding is almost completely paid through vehicle permit and driving licence fees; and

"Whereas Ontario road users pay 28 cents per litre of tax on gasoline, adding up to over \$2.7 billion in provincial gas taxes and over \$2.3 billion in federal gas taxes;

"We, the undersigned members of the Canadian Automobile Association and other residents of Ontario, respectfully request the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to immediately upgrade Highway 401 to at least a six-lane highway with full paved shoulders and rumble strips; and

"We respectfully request that the Legislative Assembly of Ontario place firm pressure on the federal government to invest its gasoline tax revenue in road safety improvements in Ontario."

Mr Ernie Parsons (Prince Edward-Hastings): As a former highway engineer who has watched over the last eight years as volumes on highways have increased and upgrades have not kept pace with them, I also would like to present a petition signed by people from Wellington, Belleville, Foxboro and Carrying Place regarding highway 401 and the carnage on it. I am pleased to add my signature to it.

PARAMEDICS

Mr David Christopherson (Hamilton West): A petition to the Honourable Lieutenant Governor and the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the Ontario Ministry of Health this past spring amended O. Reg. 501/97 under the Ambulance Act so that paramedics are considered no longer qualified to do their job if they accumulate a minimum of six demerit points on their driving record; and

"Whereas this amended regulation has resulted in at least one paramedic being fired from employment"—that's now six and, as I pointed out, two of those are from my hometown of Hamilton; "and

"Whereas the Ministry of Health's regulation is far more punitive and harsh than the Ministry of Transportation's, which monitors and enforces traffic safety through the Highway Traffic Act; and

"Whereas the Ministry of Transportation mails out a notice to drivers at six to nine demerit points and suspends a person's driver's licence at 15 points for a 30-day period; and

"Whereas none of the other emergency services in Ontario, eg, fire and police services, are held to the same standard or punished so harshly; and

"Whereas this amended regulation is not needed since other sections of the Ambulance Act protect the public against unsafe driving and/or criminal behaviour by paramedics (specifically O. Reg. 501/97, part III, section 6, subsections 8, 9 and 10); and

"Whereas the Ministry of Health's actions are blatantly unjust and punitive, and they discriminate against paramedics;

"Therefore we, the undersigned citizens of Ontario, beg leave to petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To immediately eliminate any references to the accumulation of demerit points during employment from O. Reg. 501/97 under the Ambulance Act (specifically, part III, section 6, subsection 7), thereby allowing the Highway Traffic Act to apply to paramedics; and

"To order the immediate reinstatement of paramedics who have been fired under this unjust regulation."

My caucus colleagues and I continue to support the paramedics in Ontario.

HIGHWAY SAFETY

Mr Ted Arnott (Waterloo-Wellington): My petition is addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario and it concerns safety on Highway 401. It says that the undersigned respectfully request that the Legislative Assembly of Ontario place firm pressure on the federal government to invest its gasoline tax revenue in road safety improvements in Ontario, and that the undersigned members of the Canadian Automobile Association and other residents of Ontario respectfully request that the Legislative Assembly of Ontario immediately upgrade Highway 401 to at least a six-lane highway with full paved shoulders and rumble strips.

I have affixed my signature to it as well.

HEALTH CARE

Mr Mario Sergio (York West): I have a further petition received from residents which I'd like to read to the House.

"Say no to the privatization of health care.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas we are concerned about the quality of health care in Ontario; and

"Whereas we do not believe health care should be for sale; and

"Whereas the Mike Harris government is taking steps to allow profit-driven companies to provide health care services in Ontario; and

"Whereas we won't stand for profits over people;

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

"Do not privatize our health care services."

I concur with the intent of the petition and I will affix my signature to it.

TAXATION

Mr John O'Toole (Durham): I have a petition from my riding of Durham. It reads as follows:

"Whereas the taxpayers in Canada and indeed in Ontario are the highest-taxed jurisdiction in the G7, let it be known that 25% of the federal and provincial taxes to government is up from 17% as recently as 1980. Therefore, for a family with two children earning \$21,000 in 1980 whose income doubled to \$43,000 in 1995, their income not just doubled; it went to \$10,000.

"Therefore we urge the government of Ontario to implement as soon as possible the taxpayers protection act."

1540

NORTHERN HEALTH TRAVEL GRANT

Mrs Lyn McLeod (Thunder Bay-Atikokan): I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas the northern health travel grant was introduced in 1987 in recognition of the fact that northern Ontario residents are often forced to receive treatment outside their own communities because of the lack of available services; and

"Whereas the Ontario government acknowledged that the costs associated with that travel should not be fully borne by those residents and therefore that financial support should be provided by the Ontario government through the travel grant program; and

"Whereas travel, accommodation and other costs have escalated sharply since the program was first put in place, particularly in the area of air travel; and

"Whereas the Ontario government has provided funds so that southern Ontario patients needing care at the Northwestern Ontario Cancer Centre have all their expenses paid while receiving treatment in the north, which creates a double standard for health care delivery in the province; and

"Whereas northern Ontario residents should not receive a different level of health care nor be discriminated against because of their geographic locations;

"Therefore we, the undersigned citizens of Ontario, petition the Ontario Legislature to acknowledge the unfairness and inadequacy of the northern health travel grant program and commit to a review of the program with a goal of providing 100% funding of the travel costs for residents needing care outside their communities until such time as that care is available in our communities."

I affix my own signature in full agreement with the concern of my constituents.

PROTECTION FOR HEALTH CARE WORKERS

Mr Bert Johnson (Perth-Middlesex): I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas nurses in Ontario often experience coercion to participate in practices which directly contravene their deeply held ethical standards; and

"Whereas pharmacists in Ontario are often pressured to dispense and sell chemicals or devices contrary to their moral or religious beliefs; and

"Whereas public health workers in Ontario are expected to assist in providing controversial services and promoting controversial materials against their consciences; and

"Whereas physicians in Ontario often experience pressure to give referrals for medications, treatments and/or procedures which they believe to be gravely immoral; and

"Whereas competent health care workers and students in various health care disciplines in Ontario have been denied training, employment, continued employment and advancement in their intended fields and suffer further forms of unjust discrimination because of the dictates of their consciences; and

"Whereas health care workers experiencing such unjust discrimination have at present no practical or accessible legal means to protect themselves;

"We, the undersigned, urge the government of Ontario to enact legislation explicitly recognizing the freedom of conscience for health care workers, prohibiting coercion and unjust discrimination against health care workers because of their refusal to participate in matters contrary to the dictates of their consciences, and establishing penalties for such coercion and unjust discrimination."

I'll sign this on behalf of the 40-odd people who have signed it in my riding.

HIGHWAY SAFETY

Mr Pat Hoy (Chatham-Kent Essex): To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas 13 people died during the first seven months of 1999 on Highway 401 between London and Windsor; and

"Whereas traffic levels on all sections of Highway 401 continue to increase; and

"Whereas Canada's number one trade and travel route was designed in the 1950s for fewer vehicles and lighter trucks; and

"Whereas road funding is almost completely paid through vehicle permit and driver licensing fees; and

"Whereas Ontario road users pay 28 cents per litre of tax on gasoline, adding up to over \$2.7 billion in provincial gas taxes and over \$2.3 billion in federal gas taxes;

"We, the undersigned members of the Canadian Automobile Association and other residents of Ontario, respectfully request the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to immediately upgrade Highway 401 to at least a six-

lane highway with full paved shoulders and rumble strips; and

“We respectfully request that the Legislative Assembly of Ontario place firm pressure on the federal government to invest its gasoline tax revenue in road safety improvements in Ontario.”

It's signed by a number of residents from Blenheim, Tilbury and Chatham and I affix my signature to this petition.

SCHOOL CLOSURES

Mr Tony Ruprecht (Davenport): I have a petition here which is signed by a number of residents of Davenport and it concerns the issue of school closings.

“Whereas the Ontario government's decision to slash education funding could lead to, and has lead to, the closure of many neighbourhood schools, including one of the most community-oriented schools like F.H. Miller Junior School; and

“Whereas the present funding formula does not take into account the historic and cultural links schools have with their communities nor the special education programs that have developed as a direct need of our communities; and

“Whereas the prospect of closing neighbourhood community schools will displace many children and put others on longer bus routes; and

“Whereas Mike Harris promised in 1995 not to cut classroom spending, but has already cut at least \$1 billion dollars from our schools; and

“Whereas F.H. Miller Junior School is a community school with many links to the immediate neighbourhood, such as the family centre, after-school programs, special programs from Parks and Recreation, and a heritage language program;

“Therefore, we, the undersigned citizens, demand that the Harris government changes the funding formula to take into account historic, cultural and community links that F.H. Miller Junior School has established.”

Since I agree with this petition, I affix my name to it.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

TAXPAYER PROTECTION AND BALANCED BUDGET ACT, 1999

LOI DE 1999 SUR LA PROTECTION DES CONTRIBUABLES ET L'ÉQUILIBRE BUDGÉTAIRE

Mr Harris moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 7, An Act to protect taxpayers against tax increases, to establish a process requiring voter approval for proposed tax increases and to ensure that the Provincial Budget is a balanced budget / Projet de loi 24, Loi protégeant les contribuables des augmentations d'impôt,

établissant un processus d'approbation des projets d'augmentation d'impôt par les électeurs et garantissant l'équilibre du budget provincial.

The Acting Speaker (Mr Tony Martin): Mr Harris.

Hon Michael D. Harris (Premier): I want to advise the House that I will be sharing my time with the member for Wentworth-Burlington.

It gives me great pleasure to speak on second reading of Bill 7, the Taxpayer Protection and Balanced Budget Act.

For far too long, the taxpayers of Ontario were forced to bear the burden of governments addicted to taxing and spending, governments that believed every problem we faced as a province could somehow be fixed by more spending, more bureaucracy, more programs, more taxes.

Previous governments, I would suggest to you, tried to be all things to all people, and in the process they nearly bankrupted this great province of Ontario. They didn't realize that high taxes kill jobs. I believe they didn't realize that, because I don't think they would have proceeded down that spiralling, escalating increase in taxes had they known the devastation it would wreak on Ontario. They didn't realize that for government to do a good job of providing the services that matter to people, services like accessible health care, quality education, government had to live within its means to be able to provide these services, not just today but next week, next month, next year, and on a sustainable basis.

Bill 7 would provide protection and insurance for the taxpayers of Ontario from unwanted tax hikes, provide protection and insurance against reckless deficit spending.

The taxpayer protection sections of Bill 7 stem from a very simple, and yet an important, idea: That politicians should not be able to raise the people of Ontario's tax rates without getting their permission first. I think we all know what happened in the past. Politicians would promise a program, and all the attention and focus would be on this new program or new spending, without an accountability to the taxpayers or to the public of how it would be paid for. The sections of Bill 7 now say: “You can't do that. You can no longer promise the goodies without also telling how they are going to be paid for, and identify that.”

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Our government listened when the people of Ontario told us that taxes were too high. We understood that high taxes were driving jobs and investment out of this province that lead Canada for much of Canada's history and much of Ontario's history. Then there was a period of time when Ontario became so high-taxed, with deficits to boot, because you would argue that you either run up deficits or you increase taxes to deal with this voracious appetite for spending that was there, but the fact of the matter is we had exhausted both. We were running record deficits and record high taxation.

We listened to the people for a number of reasons on this.

Number one, we listened because it was destroying jobs, it was destroying development, it was destroying investment, it was destroying growth in this province of Ontario.

Number two, though, is another interesting sidelight of this, if you like, and it seems counterintuitive, but the facts were these: The higher the former government increased taxes, the less revenue they got. It was like a business. Let's say your primary business was selling refrigerators and you priced your refrigerators at \$1,000 a fridge, and business wasn't going very well because your competitors were selling the same fridge for \$800. If a businessman said, "Well, I need more profits so I'll take my \$1,000 price to \$1,100 or \$1,200," thinking, "I'll make more money," that would seem to be the Liberal and NDP way of doing things. Of course, what happened was that the public said, "We're really not buying your fridges now," and this businessman would be out of business and he would have no profits.

That is what happened in Ontario. It wasn't that the 30-odd NDP tax hikes were any worse than the 30-odd Liberal tax hikes before them. That wasn't the problem. The problem was that the cumulative effect of all these tax increases was that Ontario had reached the point where it was into a law of diminishing returns. You increase the rate, you drive more jobs and investment out of the province and you actually get fewer dollars. So there were two very good reasons why we had to address this very serious problem, created exclusively, I might add, by Liberal and NDP politicians in Ontario.

What have we done? Thus far, we have announced a total of 99 tax cuts, 99 different ways and areas that we have reduced taxation. Each one of these tax cuts was designed in a very careful and thoughtful way to increase jobs and investment in the province—each and every one of them. Those tax cuts let those who earn the money in the first place keep more of their own money; more money for them to spend—after all, it's their money in the first place—more money that they could save, more money that they could invest as they see fit, which means, of course, more jobs and more prosperity for Ontario.

That's a very different approach from those in the opposition benches, which is why those few who are here today are so riled up when we point out the facts to them of what happened. It is a very different approach, and we make no apology for being different than the Liberals in particular, who like tax increases. It's something within their nature. It may be in their party's political constitution, I don't know, but for some reason or other they like high taxes and high government spending. It is their mantra. It is interchangeable with the word "Liberal," at least when it comes to Liberals in Ontario.

What happened from those on the opposition benches when they had the opportunity in the 10-year period—and really and truly you could say Liberal, NDP or socialist; it was interchangeable. There's no discernible difference in the 10-year record, nor is there any difference, I would argue, in opposition to our policies today.

They seem to be one and the same. They hiked taxes 65 times over 10 years. We don't ever again in the province of Ontario want that kind of job-killing tax-hiking to happen.

That is why our taxpayer protection law would require that future governments seek voter approval if they want to impose new taxes or to increase tax rates on any of the major tax instruments that we have, and we have a variety of them, as I think you know.

Through this legislation, we're asking that governments of all stripes treat taxpayer dollars as carefully as taxpayers treat their own personal finances. The taxpayers of Ontario surely deserve nothing less than that. Ontario families work hard to make ends meet and keep their own budgets balanced. This law would require our government and future governments to manage taxpayer dollars in the same way. We know, first, this: This money belongs to the taxpayers, not to the government, and we are requiring future governments to recognize this reality.

This bill also contains a balanced budget law that would prevent governments from running budget deficits. It is my hope and it is the hope of my colleagues on the government side of the House that the era of deficit spending in Ontario is over once and for all.

Let's look at the facts. In the last 35 years, Ontario has had balanced budgets or surpluses four times: four times in 35 years. Three of those balanced budgets came in the 1960s. That means that a great many people in our province have never seen two consecutive balanced budgets. I'll tell you this: People since the 1960s have never had a government bring in a balanced budget and then keep a balanced budget throughout that budget year. That has never happened since the 1960s, when there were three Progressive Conservative budgets that were balanced.

Today, every child born in Ontario is born in debt, bearing a combined federal-provincial debt load of \$28,711: \$9,572 for Ontario and \$19,139 for the federal government. We all know it has been Liberals in government in Ottawa for most of this century.

In 1998, average households—think of this—handed over 25.1% of their income in federal and provincial taxes to governments, up from less than 17% in 1980. When you look at that, from 1980 through to 1998, 17% of the average household's income went in federal and provincial taxes, and gradually over that period of time it's gone up to 25%. These facts show that for far too long governments just didn't get it. They took out the people of Ontario's credit card and they maxed it out. They took these credit cards and maximized each and every credit card that they could possibly get their mitts on, and they left our children with a pile of debt to pay.

Our balanced budget law cuts up that credit card, all of those credit cards. Under this new law, the Ontario budget must balance. It will be illegal for the budget of Ontario not to be in balance.

Bill 7 is tougher than any of the balanced budget bills of any other province in Canada. Cabinet ministers, for example, will be docked 25% of their cabinet salary for the first prohibited deficit, 50% for the second and 50%

for each consecutive deficit thereafter. Not only would it be against the law, but there would be the strictest financial penalties for members of the executive council in Canada.

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Beginning in fiscal year 2001-02, a budget deficit may only occur under extraordinary circumstances such as natural disaster or war. The legislation also provides the means to prudently manage any future economic downturn and respond to emergency situations, as we acknowledge government must do.

Our bill also recognizes there may be some situations, such as economic downturns, that require governments to plan ahead and establish a rainy day fund. Three years' worth of surpluses could offset a deficit in the following year. This is the way it's supposed to work: You don't start borrowing first, you put ahead first. That way, if governments plan, they can build a rainy day fund to help during times of economic hardship. This would allow a government to respond to an economic downturn without forcing drastic spending cuts. It is not our intention, as some have said, to balance at any cost, particularly if it would mean cutting priority programs. In fact, it is our intention, and this legislation facilitates, responsible budgeting and planning so that never has to happen.

In conclusion, taxpayers and voters told us they wanted to be confident that our province's finances will be managed responsibly not only for today but also into the future.

The Taxpayer Protection and Balanced Budget Act is designed to make our great province strong and competitive well into the next millennium.

This legislation will help us to build a better tomorrow for everyone in the province of Ontario; a better tomorrow in which our children are not born into this crushing burden of debt; a better tomorrow in which fewer taxpayer dollars are spent in interest and in debt payments, and more taxpayer dollars are directed to services that matter to people; a better tomorrow in which taxpayers remain as respected as they are by our government, and when politicians cannot hike tax rates without first asking the people who pay those taxes.

It is my hope that we will achieve this better tomorrow and that Ontario will become even stronger and more prosperous as a result of this in the future.

The Acting Speaker: Questions and comments?

Mr Toni Skarica (Wentworth-Burlington): For me it's both an honour and a privilege to be speaking to this bill. I'd like to go back to 1994. At that time I was not involved in politics in any way. I was working in the crown attorney's office. If I could say this humbly, I was a member of the public and I was very concerned about what was going on. At that time, as you recall, debts and deficit spending of both the federal and provincial government was completely out of control. I decided at that time to get involved in politics because, like many people in the public, I was totally disgusted with what was happening around me. I'm an immigrant to this province and I felt, just as the Premier has indicated, that this great

province is being brought low and that instead of it being a province of opportunity, it was a province facing bankruptcy and ruin.

There was a very deliberate reason why I chose to run for the Progressive Conservative Party. I could have run for any party; I had no political background at that time. The reason I ran for the Progressive Conservative Party was quite simply that they had a plan to deal with what everyone considered was an absolute crisis. The Common Sense Revolution had been published a year ahead of time. I knew what I was running on. The Premier had signed the taxpayers' pledge for this very type of legislation. The Liberals at that time, as you recall, weren't interested in this type of legislation. So really there was only one party to run for, if you cared about these issues of government overspending, and that was the Conservative Party of Ontario.

If you want to run in politics—I don't think most people are aware of what you have to do—you basically have to sign up members of the party and you have a nomination contest. As I say, I didn't have any political background. What I did was prepare an urgent message indicating what kind of state we were in. I have it here—

Interjection.

Mr Skarica: In 1994. It was entitled, "Urgent Message Number One: Combined Federal, Provincial and Municipal Public Debt." I have it here. I don't know if people can see, but it's a straight line upwards, from 1983 to 1995. It was not the American stock market, although it would have looked pretty similar; it was in fact the debt load of all levels of government.

At that time, federal interest payments were almost \$30 billion a year. One out of every three tax dollars was going to service our debt. A good night's sleep cost you \$40 million. When I pointed this out to one person, he said, "I know what the government is doing to me, but I didn't know it was going to be this expensive to sleep with it."

Unfortunately, the Ontario government situation was basically the same. I have a chart here of what was happening to our annual interest payment and it had a similar dramatic upward rise. At that time, we were paying \$15,000 per minute in interest payments. Accordingly, each and every day Ontario taxpayers were receiving an approximate \$135-million bill in government interest payments, and even though that's in Canadian dollars, that's a very dramatic impact.

At that time, in 1994, we had one of the world's heaviest tax rates. Taxes on families since 1961 had risen 1,200%. At that time as well, our interest rates were going up and basically we were facing a fiscal crisis. Any student of history knows that at that time we were facing virtual bankruptcy. Once you hit that wall of bankruptcy, what happens is you lose the rule of law, and once you do that, you've lost everything. I think that was a situation that we were facing for the first time in our history.

That's why it's of the greatest honour to speak to this bill, because what we are doing as a government is preventing a similar situation from developing. We are

preventing prolific government spending, the raising of taxes, the raising of deficits—and ultimately not only do you ruin the economy, but you could lose everything you have.

As the Premier has indicated, this legacy of taxing and spending certainly in 1995 had left us in very bad shape. We're basically in a situation where we have an accumulation of debt that will take generations to pay back.

In the last 35 years, Ontario has had balanced budgets or surpluses only four times: 1965-66, 1966-67, 1969-70 and 1989-90. The legacy that has left us is as follows: As the Premier has indicated, every child born in Ontario is in substantial debt, with a combined federal-provincial debt load of almost \$30,000, and that doesn't include municipal debt. By the end of March 1999, our debt had reached \$109 billion, more than 50 times greater than our debt in 1964. Accordingly, Ontario is now spending \$18,000 per minute just to service its debt. Public debt interest, at \$9.8 billion this year, is almost half of what we pay for health care.

Past deficits are tomorrow's taxes. As the Premier has indicated, in 1998 average Ontario households handed over 25% of their income in federal and provincial taxes to governments, up from less than 17% in 1980. This tax burden includes personal income taxes plus employment insurance premiums and CPP.

As has also been indicated by the Premier and by the member from Durham, in 1980 a one-career Ontario family with two children, earning \$21,000, paid \$3,000 in net personal income and statutory payroll deductions. In 1995, adjusting for inflation, this family would have had to earn \$43,000 and pay \$6,000 in taxes just to be as well off. However, that family is now paying \$10,660, so clearly our living standard has been damaged. As a result of rising tax rates, the elimination of deductions and benefits and the end of full indexation of the tax system, this family's income, as is indicated—while it has more than doubled, these taxes have more than tripled.

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According to a recent report by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, Canada has the highest personal income in the G7. Tax revenues in Canada, at about 30% of GDP, are much higher than in the United States, the country's most important economic partner. This difference puts Canada at an economic disadvantage in trying to prevent the emigration of its tax base, particularly south of the border.

In order to restrain future government spending and bring our taxes down to a reasonable level, Ontario is bringing in a combined balanced budget and taxpayer protection bill. This legislation is one of the toughest and most comprehensive of its kind.

Highlights of the legislation include:

Ontario would have to balance its budget each fiscal year, as do most other provinces with balanced budget legislation.

We have the highest penalties. Cabinet members would be penalized 25% of their cabinet salary for the

first deficit, 50% for the second consecutive and 50% for each year thereafter.

There is flexibility in the legislation. A deficit would be allowed in exceptional circumstances, such as war, national disaster and a more than 5% drop in revenues.

The government would be held to the accounting policies in place at the start of the fiscal year in determining whether the budget is balanced.

The legislation applies to all major taxes, including personal income taxes, corporate tax, retail sales tax, fuel taxes and education property taxes.

Except in very limited circumstances, the Ontario government, before raising any of the taxes listed previously, would be required to seek voter approval through a referendum which would require a clear, concise, impartially worded question capable of a Yes or No answer in an estimate of the revenue impact of the proposed increase or new tax.

In a nutshell, the legislation prohibits governments from spending more money than they have except in very limited circumstances. Future governments must seek permission from the voters before raising taxes. Ontario families work hard to make ends meet and keep their own budgets balanced. This legislation forces future governments to manage taxpayers' dollars in the same way.

What does that mean for the average Ontario taxpayer? Some things that can no longer happen are as follows:

From 1985 to 1995, Ontario taxpayers faced 65 provincial tax increases over which they had no say. For example, and I'll give a number of them, in 1985 the Ontario personal income tax rate increased to 50% of basic federal tax; the Ontario personal income tax surtax was levied at 3% of Ontario tax in excess of \$5,000.

In 1988, a gasoline tax was imposed which increased gas taxes by one cent per litre; the retail sales tax was increased by one percentage point, to 8%.

In 1989, and this was during the Liberal regime, gasoline tax increased by two cents per litre; a fuel tax was imposed which increased fuel and gas taxes by a further two cents per litre; the Ontario provincial income tax rate was increased to 53% of the basic federal tax; an employer health tax was levied on all Ontario employers; a tire tax was imposed; a commercial concentration levy was imposed.

In 1991—now we're talking about an NDP government—a gasoline and diesel tax was imposed, which increased those taxes by 3.4 cents per litre; an Ontario surtax was imposed, which increased the Ontario surtax rate from 10% to 14% of Ontario tax in excess of \$10,000.

In 1992, the Ontario personal income tax rate was increased to 54.5% of basic federal tax, and to 55% in 1993. The Ontario provincial income tax surtax was restructured and the top surtax rate was again increased to 20% of Ontario tax in excess of \$8,000.

In 1993, the taxes in Ontario continued to increase at the same time as the economy was deteriorating. The

Ontario provincial income tax rate was increased to 58% of basic federal tax. The Ontario top provincial income tax surtax rate increased to 25% of Ontario tax in excess of \$8,000 in 1993 and to 30% in 1994. Basically, it's exhausting to read it, but it was even more exhausting to pay it. That's what Ontario taxpayers were asked to do.

One of the criticisms of the legislation is that it has no flexibility, that once you lock in governments and they can't tax, they're going to have to slash government programs and that type of thing. If you really wanted to look at what does inhibit flexibility in government spending, it's debt. As I've indicated, Ontario is spending more than \$18,000 per minute just to service its debt. Public debt interest, at \$9.8 billion in 1999, is almost half of what the province will pay in important services such as health care.

The following are other examples of what could be purchased with that money, keeping in mind that we pay \$9.8 billion in public debt interest this year:

To hire 10,000 more nurses over the next two years requires \$375 million, just a fraction of the interest payment.

To expand home care beyond the original long-term-care plan, an additional \$40 million; again, just a fraction of \$9.8 billion.

The Ontario Innovation Trust, which will provide funding to Ontario universities, hospitals and colleges for labs, high-tech equipment and other research infrastructure, \$250 million; again, a fraction of \$9.8 billion.

The expansion of the access to opportunities program by almost 40% from 17,000 new tuition scholarships to 23,000 this year, an investment by the government of \$78 million; again, a fraction of what's being paid for public debt interest.

The strategic skills investment program in which 19 of Ontario's 25 community colleges have entered into new skills partnerships with industry in self-sustaining programs: That's a government investment of \$115 million; again, just a minor percentage of \$9.8 billion.

Approving post-natal care for mothers and their newborns: We're investing \$45 million this year; again, a fraction of \$9.8 billion.

We're investing to build and modernize universities and colleges, \$740 million this year; again, a fraction, less than 10%, of the \$9.8 billion being paid for debt interest.

To give you an idea of the magnitude of the interest payment, this year the Ontario government is spending on university operating grants \$1.6 billion, on colleges \$700 million and on student loans \$522 million, for a total of \$4 billion, less than half of what we're paying for public debt interest.

Tuition fees being paid by students this year for universities was \$3.8 billion and colleges was \$1.7 billion, for a total of \$5.5 billion. In essence, what is being paid in tuition fees is about half of what we're paying in debt interest. If we didn't have a debt, if we didn't have to pay public debt interest, we could pay 100% of all the tuition fees in this province and still have \$4 billion left over.

How does our taxpayer protection and balanced budget legislation compare to other provinces? Right now Manitoba and Alberta are the only other provinces that have taxpayer protection legislation. Of the three provinces that have this type of legislation, ours is the toughest and most comprehensive.

Ontario's balanced budget provisions demonstrate a strong commitment to fiscal responsibility in these ways. Ontario would have to balance its budget each fiscal year, as do most of the provinces with balanced budget legislation. Ontario's legislation would have the highest penalties. Cabinet members would be penalized 25% of their cabinet salary for the first deficit, 50% for the second consecutive deficit and 50% for each consecutive deficit thereafter.

A deficit would be allowed only in exceptional circumstances such as, war, natural disasters and, as I've indicated, a dramatic revenue decrease. Overall, these circumstances are similar to Manitoba's legislation, which is up to now a benchmark for balanced budget legislation in Canada. The government would be held to the accounting policies in place at the start of the fiscal year in determining whether the budget is balanced. It wouldn't be able to circumvent the legislation by changing the rules halfway through the game.

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Ontario's taxpayer protection provisions would be the most comprehensive in Canada. Ontario's protection would greatly exceed Alberta's legislation, which only applies to introducing a general sales tax. By applying to new taxes and more tax rates, Ontario's protection would also exceed Manitoba's legislation. However, unlike Manitoba, the accumulated net surplus from which the government could draw upon in times of need would only include the results of the past two years, not an ongoing fund like Manitoba's fiscal stabilization fund. Combined with the extensive taxpayer protection provisions, this legislation is the toughest of its kind in Canada.

As I've indicated previously, and as the Premier has indicated, taxes are too high in this country. We were elected, both in 1995 and 1999, because the public agreed with us that taxes were too high and have voted for the 99 tax cuts that we have implemented, 69 of them in the first four years of our mandate and 30 that will come this year.

Our record proves our commitment to lower taxes. With this legislation we will ensure that future governments will have to seek voter approval if they want to raise tax rates.

I would like to go into the past to see how this legislation would have affected past government's behaviour. I would like to specifically go through to the NDP era to see how this would have affected their economic performance. As is indicated, the legislation requires dramatic penalties on cabinet ministers' salaries if there isn't a balanced budget. There are only three exceptions to that spelled out in the legislation: expenditures relating to natural disasters, expenditures relating to war or, if there

is a year-over-year revenue decline of 5% or more, that would be an exception as well.

Going to the budget, how would that have impacted the NDP government? When they took over in 1990-91, there was a deficit of \$3 billion, so that would have required a 25% pay cut. The recession started to really take hold in Ontario at that time, and as I have indicated, the NDP reaction to that was to raise taxes, and that in fact had a very dampening effect on the economy. I'm not saying it's all their fault, but they certainly didn't do anything to help; in fact, in my opinion, by raising taxes, contributed to the economic decline at that time.

In any event, in 1991-92, the deficit ballooned from \$3 billion to almost \$11 billion. However, the revenue in Ontario at that time for the Ontario government dropped from \$42.8 billion to a little over \$40 billion, which was more than a 5% decline. So the legislation at that time would not have required a pay cut for the NDP cabinet ministers as they would be given the flexibility in this legislation to have not a balanced budget but to have a deficit.

The following year, 1992-93, the revenue in the province of Ontario went up by almost \$1 billion, but so did the deficit. It went from \$11 billion to over \$12 billion, so not only did the NDP spend the extra \$1 billion that they got, they spent \$1 billion on top of that. Under this legislation, they would have had to take a penalty for doing that, and from my reading of it, it would have been a 25% pay cut. As well, they would have been prohibited from raising many of the taxes that they were doing at that time, including a very gradual but still dramatic increase in the provincial income tax rate. So in 1992, the NDP cabinet ministers would have been taking a 25% pay cut.

The following year, the deficit dropped by \$1 billion to \$11 billion, even though provincial revenue went up by almost \$2 billion, so again spending was increasing by about \$600 million. The NDP ministers at that time would have had to take a 50% pay cut. Similarly, the following year, they had a \$10-billion deficit, and they would again have had to take a 50% pay cut. Perhaps they would even have called the election a year earlier, because if you were a minister in that government, with this legislation, by calling the election a year earlier, if you were re-elected, even though you came back as a regular member, you would have got a pay increase if you were in the cabinet.

Had we had this legislation back in the 1990-95 era, two things would have happened: Cabinet ministers would have taken a dramatic pay cut of up to 50%, at least in the last couple of years of their mandate, and they would have had to go to the public to raise taxes, as they were doing each and every year. If I was typical of the average person out there, and I think I was, it is my suspicion that they would not have been permitted to raise those taxes. If they hadn't been permitted to do that, then they would have had to review their programs and deal with reducing their expenses, as we did when we took over in 1995.

That brings me to the Liberals. How would they have reacted? We saw in 1990-95 that the NDP approach was to spend more, to increase deficits, to increase the debt—basically to double the debt during that period of time. This legislation would have seriously hampered their ability to do that.

The Liberals agree with this legislation although, interestingly enough, in 1994 they weren't participating in advancing it and they weren't supporting it, but they do now. Their approach now is that they agree with this. Does that mean they're on our page now? Unfortunately, the answer is no. The Liberals agree now that maybe we shouldn't increase any taxes but they disagree with the notion of cutting taxes.

For example, I'll read some quotes from their leader, Dalton McGuinty, and I'll give a brief history of Mr McGuinty's commitment to tax cuts.

In the Kitchener-Waterloo leadership debate on September 22, 1996, Mr McGuinty was quoted as saying this: "No, I am not in favour of a tax break."

In a news conference on May 6, 1997, Mr McGuinty was quoted: We "wouldn't have a tax cut. Couldn't afford a tax cut."

Mr McGuinty was quoted in the North Bay Nugget on July 29, 1997: "I wouldn't give you a tax cut."

On Focus Ontario on August 15, 1998, Mr McGuinty indicated: "I'm not the tax cut guy."

What is the Liberal approach to tax cuts? It is this: They say yes to tax cuts, but only after more spending. For example, here are some further quotes. This is from their 20/20 platform document, the first edition:

"Immediate investments in the education and health of our people. A balanced budget. And then tax cuts as the economy grows...."

"Once the budget is balanced, the fiscal dividend would be split three ways: 25% in tax relief aimed at lower and middle-income Ontarians...."

You're going to hear this theme repeated by the federal Liberals, the same thing. They have it as a 50-50 split as opposed to the 20/20 platform commitment.

Mr McGuinty was quoted on April 14, 1999, as follows: "Now, time will tell if we supply a tax cut in the second year of our mandate."

On the Roy Green show on CHML in our area, in Hamilton, on April 20, 1999, Mr McGuinty was heard to say this: "We'll be able to provide significant tax relief in the second year of our mandate."

On April 20, the same day, at a news conference in Richmond Hill he basically repeats that: "We'll be able to balance the budget in the first year of our mandate and will be able to cut taxes in the second year."

It changes a little bit at a news conference on May 10, 1999, where Mr McGuinty said this: "Well, we're talking about, according to the government's economic projections, we're talking about a tax cut available in the third year. So in our third year we'll have to put forward the money, and talk about what we're going to do at that point in time."

Interestingly enough, although the Liberals support this legislation now, I wonder how they would have reconciled that with their campaign commitments. You will recall from a news conference and from your campaign documents, the Liberals over there, that they were talking about giving school boards the right to raise money at the local level, talking about a 5% to 10% additional tax authority.

Similarly, there was going to be a 3% increase in commercial and industrial energy. As John Ibbitson said in the *National Post* on April 19, 1999, "Mr McGuinty hasn't mentioned it, but after repeated inquiries his staff revealed that the Liberal plan also envisions a 3% increase in commercial and industrial energy rates." How that would have been reconciled with this legislation, I don't know.

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Anyway, the basic Liberal theory provincially, and I'll talk about federally because it's almost the same, is: "We can't afford tax cuts now. We have to balance the budget first. Once that's happened, once we have our revenues to pay for our programs, then we'll think about tax cuts." That has in fact been the experience and the approach of the federal government.

A little-known fact—and it was mentioned during the heckling by the Liberal backbench when the Premier was speaking. It was mentioned that the Liberals have balanced the budget, but how have you balanced the budget? I've got the government of Canada statement of revenues and expenditures here, and it is very interesting to look at exactly how the Liberals have balanced the budget.

I'll start in 1995, because that's when we took over in Ontario. Their gross revenues in 1995 were \$135 billion, and their expenditures were \$172 billion. So they had almost a \$40-billion deficit. When you move forward to 1998, you see that their revenues are \$164 billion, almost a \$30-billion increase, and that their expenses are \$161 billion, about a \$10-billion decrease. Where has most of that come from? Most of that has come from cuts to transfer payments to the provinces, including almost \$3 billion to the Ontario government.

What the federal government has done is they haven't cut taxes; they have allowed revenues to increase, and if you examine what has happened in the economies of the provinces, you'll know that most of that revenue has come from the province of Ontario, because we've had more economic growth here in the last four years than the rest of the country combined. So most of that \$30 billion, certainly at least 50% of it, has come from the province of Ontario. The way the Liberals balanced the budget is they have kept the taxes high and they've just allowed revenues to catch up. They've made virtually no cuts to government expenditures except for transfer payments to the provinces. That's how they've balanced the budget.

As you know, we have taken a totally different approach. We have taken the approach that in order to stimulate the economy, you can't just sit back and do nothing. You have to realize that high taxes discourage business investment, discourage the creation of jobs.

Lower tax rates increase business investment, increase confidence in the economy, and the economy grows. That's what's happened here in Ontario. As we've cut taxes, as we've cut the income tax rate by 30%, as we've cut a variety of other taxes, we've increased business investment. We've had more growth here in Ontario than in any other province, and it has not been because of the boom in the United States. That has helped, there's no doubt about it, but we've had more growth in Ontario than all the other provinces because we have been aggressive in cutting taxes. Now we have the lowest tax rates in the country. We have been aggressive in getting rid of red tape and creating a favourable business climate.

One of the best examples of how to create jobs and stimulate the economy is in the film industry. What has happened in the film industry? The film industry, when we took over in 1994-95, was languishing due to high taxes. The Ontario government in every budget since 1996 expanded and enhanced Ontario film and television tax credits, and in fact introduced a number of computer animation and special-effects tax credits.

The *Globe and Mail* acknowledged in a recent article as follows: "Tax incentives were dropped by previous provincial governments, which resulted in a decline in the film and movie production in the province. The current government realized steps had to be taken to create jobs in the entertainment industry for people of Ontario," so a new set of initiatives was brought in the beginning of 1996. Those initiatives were a series of tax cuts targeted to help out that industry.

What has been the impact of that? It has been as follows: Statistics show that the film industry is responsible for 35,000 jobs and now generates \$1.5 billion in economic spinoffs. Movies and TV projects filmed in Ontario in 1998 totalled 185, compared with 161 in 1997 and 125 in 1996; 1998 figures show that TV film production pumped \$740 million into the Ontario economy, \$347 million from foreign projects. That's an increase of 57% in foreign productions.

It's clear that what happened in the film industry was that it was languishing. It was not doing very well; it wasn't creating jobs. The Ontario government was elected in 1995. We introduced a series of tax credits and we kept doing it. We did it in 1996, 1997 and 1998, and what's happened is that this industry, which was not doing very well, is now showing remarkable health, to the point where Toronto is known as Hollywood North. That's a clear example of how, if you take an industry, if you take an aspect of the economy that's being killed by high taxes and you lower taxes, what you do is you get stimulation in investment, stimulation in job creation and ultimately you get more revenues. That's exactly what's happened to us.

What the Liberals say—"You borrowed \$10 billion to pay for your tax cut"—is nonsense. That's just out and out garbage. If you look at the Ontario budget, that shows up nowhere. In fact, if you look at page 53 of the last Ontario budget, the 1999 Ontario budget papers, you see that each and every year as we've implemented the tax

cuts, and not only personal income tax but in all other areas, 99 in total now, our revenues have gone up, from \$36 billion in 1995-96 to \$38 billion in 1996-97, to \$41 billion in 1997-98, to \$42 billion in 1998-99. That's as a result of the economy expanding, of investment coming into the province, of 540,000 new jobs being created and those people paying taxes. I don't know how many of them came off welfare but I'm sure many of them did. It's not surprising that as the economy has expanded, over 400,000 people have come off welfare.

Our approach has been to look at taxes and to reduce them. That has stimulated job creation and proven a boon to our economy, to the point where we've created more jobs in the last four years than any four-year period in history. In 1998, we created over 200,000 jobs, the most ever in history.

What we've done, and it's not well known, is we've balanced two budgets. We're about to balance our budget this year, but we've also balanced the government of Canada budget because we've stimulated the economy. We've stimulated our economy, the most thriving economy of all the provinces, and all the federal government did was sit back, leave the tax rates the same and just got a flood of new revenue. That's how they balanced the budget.

If anyone wants to know how the Liberals would deal with taxes in the future, all you have to do is look in today's papers, where the federal government now has balanced the budget but, as I've indicated, not through their initiatives. It's been basically that they've cut transfer payments to all the provinces and they've just sat back and waited for revenues to increase, which they have, in large part because provinces such as Ontario and Alberta have cut tax rates and have stimulated their economies.

If you want to look at the other way to go, just look at the disaster in BC, another NDP disaster, where taxes have gone up, where you've got an economy that's completely failing.

A good indication of what the Liberals would do, and are about to do, is to take a look federally. Right now the federal tax burden is at a historic high. Today's *Globe and Mail* editorial indicates as follows:

"The federal tax burden is at a historic high in relation to the gross domestic product. Federal taxes will claim 17.8% of GDP this year, the highest proportion in 40 years. Ten years ago, the proportion was only 16.2% ...; 20 years ago, it was only 13.8%."

This is the *Globe and Mail*. It's not me talking, although you're going to hear it.

"Our historically high tax burden means that tax reductions have a strong claim on Ottawa's budget surpluses. Rising federal taxes have been the biggest drag on personal disposable income in the 1990s.

"High tax burdens and high marginal rates also undermine productivity and economic growth. That was Nobel Prize winner Robert Mundell's argument as Ronald Reagan assumed the presidency in 1981, and it has served the US economy very well. By comparison,

Canadians have been getting poorer in a lagging economy"

"If our tax burden was at historic lows and our economy were more productive, we could raise real per capita spending on desirable programs without raising tax burdens"

"As taxes fall and the economy grows, more aggressive direct debt repayment will be feasible."

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What's the Liberal response to this criticism? If you look at the US experience, they have been cutting taxes and have the most booming economy in the world. Ontario has been cutting taxes for the last four years. We have the most booming economy in Canada. In fact, our economic growth has been the best of all the G7 nations, and that's with being saddled with high federal tax rates.

What's the Liberal response to this demand or desire among the Canadian public for lower tax rates? It's again in today's *Globe and Mail*: "Taxes Too High? Leave the Country, Chrétien Advises." Talk about arrogance. That's the response of the Liberals if taxes are too high: "Yes, our tax burden is the highest in our history. It's the highest in the G7 nations. We have property taxes that are the highest in the free world. We have tax rates that are higher than all our competitors. If you don't like it, leave the country."

Again, if you look at the papers today, they indicate "Liberals' Surpluses Just Aren't Theirs." They just don't get it. That's right. The surpluses that the government of Canada is now experiencing have not been because of anything they have done. There's been nothing dramatic that they have done. It's been simply because Canadians have worked hard and are paying taxes at crushingly high levels. Some provinces, such as Ontario and Alberta, have been aggressive in reducing their tax rates in target industries which were suffering from high tax rates.

Another one that I might mention is the horse racing industry. Just before the election and after I met with Charlie Juravinski, the owner of the Flamboro Downs racetrack. He basically indicated to me that he's going to go out of business. The crushing tax burden he has every year takes him from a profit situation to a loss situation. Again, if you go to the Ontario budget, what did we do with that situation? He wasn't the only one. Basically every track owner was in a similar situation where they were profitable before taxes but after taxes they were not and they were all about to go out of business.

What we did was reduce and slash the racetracks tax. In 1995 it was \$92 million, in 1996 it was \$46 million and in 1997-98 it was \$4 million. What that has done for that industry is allow it to survive and to continue to operate. In fact, it's healthy now and providing jobs, many of them in rural Ontario. It's another example of an industry that was in trouble because of crushingly high taxes. We didn't wait for that industry to get better and then increase our revenues. We looked at that industry, we saw it was in trouble because of high taxes and so we cut tax rates.

What this legislation is going to do is ensure that in the future governments can't—governments historically have looked at their problems and indicated, "We have budget problems so what we're going to do it raise taxes." All that did was create a vicious circle where when you raised taxes, it meant that the economy didn't do as well as it could have done, which meant less revenues for government, which meant they thought they should raise taxes even more, which continued the vicious cycle.

The Liberals and the NDP, the members on the other side, opposed each and every tax cut. Every one of the 69 tax cuts we introduced from 1995 to 1999 was opposed by the members on the other side.

The end result of our tax cuts has been, as I've indicated, that we have the most flourishing economy not only in Canada but in the G7, in the free world. In fact, this year, with again 30 more tax cuts coming on line, our economy is doing better than every forecast. It was forecast in our budget papers that the economy would grow by 3.7%, but in fact it has grown to the tune of 4.3% to 5%. The TD Bank states: "Ontario's economy will grow by almost 5% this year—its best showing in a decade. With job markets sizzling, confidence brimming and personal income-tax burdens on the decline, Ontario consumers are in a spending mood." Accordingly, we have the most flourishing economy, as I indicated, not only in Canada but in the western world.

It comes down to this: Tax cuts create jobs. What you're seeing here is legislation that will enshrine—hopefully forever, because the government can always repeal this legislation, although I think it would be highly embarrassing to do so—several principles.

Governments no longer will be able to raise taxes without going to the public and getting their consent. I anticipate that in most cases, if there's a really good reason to do it, the public will say, "All right, we'll go ahead and do it." If there isn't a good reason to do it, the public will say no. The bottom line is that the public will have a say.

The balanced budget provisions will ensure that politicians look at every type of means to balance their budgets. As I've indicated, over the last 40 years, or certainly the last 30 years, governments haven't been prepared to do that. They've spent first and asked questions later.

The Acting Speaker (Mr Michael A. Brown): Before questions and comments, I have a few announcements of interest to the members.

Pursuant to standing order 37(a), the member for Hamilton East has given notice of his dissatisfaction with the answer to his question given by the Premier concerning comments made by the member for Haldimand-Norfolk-Brant.

Pursuant to standing order 37(a), the member for Parkdale-High Park has given notice of his dissatisfaction with the answer to his question given by the Minister of Education concerning special education funding.

Pursuant to standing order 37(a), the member for Hastings-Frontenac-Lennox and Addington has given notice

of her dissatisfaction with the answer to her question given by the Minister of Citizenship, Culture and Recreation concerning the safety of seniors in retirement homes in Ontario.

These matters will be debated at 6 pm this evening.

Questions or comments?

Mr Richard Patten (Ottawa Centre): I'm pleased to respond to the leadoff by the Premier and by the member from Wentworth-Burlington in his new fashionable look and his low-key style of presenting.

I find it of interest that the bill itself, though, would still not take effect until the year 2001, which I guess fits in with the plans of the government and the time in which they would look at balancing the budget.

As most people know, the budget is still not balanced, which in effect means that, again, the government will be borrowing in order to balance that budget. We're still talking about the accumulated debt, which this government has added to significantly. Of course, I haven't heard this mentioned on the other side, but the accumulated debt is essentially like adding to your mortgage at home. If you own a home or part of a home and you have a mortgage, can you imagine adding to that every year? That's what this government has done over the last period of time.

The government talks incessantly about taxes and about balanced budgets, even though it hasn't done it yet. This is another piece that will give the impression of the fiscal responsibility of this government, but of course the other side of the coin is the quality of programs. I would like to ask members on the other side to identify the last time somebody phoned up and said: "You know, I think our educational system is doing far better now than it was before and that our hospitals and our health care system are really more effective than they were before." Those are really the questions that concern a lot of people.

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Mr David Christopherson (Hamilton West): I appreciate the opportunity to respond to the comments of the Premier and the member for Wentworth-Burlington.

First of all, with regard to the comments of my colleague from the neighbouring riding of Wentworth-Burlington, let me just say—and I'm going to build on this later when I get an opportunity to speak more fully—that I have a real problem with the idea. I think it shows the mentality of the government in power now when the thing he focuses on as guaranteeing to make this work is that they're going to cut pay. I would take that to mean that somehow cabinet ministers seek to be in cabinet in the Harris government just for the money. Therefore, if you threaten to take away the money—

Interjection.

Mr Christopherson: The member laughs, but that's what you focused on. You said that's the incentive. What I want from ministers of the crown, whatever political party is in power, is to focus on the needs of kids in terms of education; the needs of our citizens in terms of health care; the needs in terms of the disabled community.

I want to hear that those are paramount, not your take-home pay.

With regard to the comments the Premier made, I'd like to correct the record. I'm disappointed that he would leave the record the way he did. He said that revenue dropped while we were in power. If you look at the government's own budget papers, on page 57, it shows that in 1993, government revenue increased by 4.47%; in 1994, revenue increased by 5.42%; in 1995, it increased by 7.46%. In 1996, the year after the Harris government was elected, it dropped by 0.05%. That's the record, that's the accuracy, and I'm disappointed the Premier would leave something different in the minds of the people watching.

Mrs Julia Munro (York North): I'm pleased to comment on the comments made by the member from Wentworth-Burlington and the Premier.

Like the member from Wentworth-Burlington, I too ran in 1995; I too signed the taxpayer pledge; I too was convinced that the problems we faced as a province were as a result of the taxing and spending of the previous 10 years, recognizing the fact that, like a family, one has to be able to pay the bills. I recognized the fact that we were saddling our children and grandchildren with this kind of debt. I think it became clear when we realized and put it in terms of \$1 million per hour, per day; when we recognized that that was the kind of spending we had inherited.

I support the introduction of this bill because I see that we are able to provide for our children and grandchildren by being able to introduce balanced budget legislation.

So much of the discussion in this House centres around issues with regard to government programs. We recognize on this side of the House that there is only one way to provide the kind of support and necessary resources, and that is through a balanced budget.

Mr Ernie Parsons (Prince Edward-Hastings): I'm also pleased to respond to the comments from the Premier and the member for Wentworth-Burlington.

I was told early in my political career that if something good happens that I wasn't part of, take credit for it anyway because when things go wrong I'll take the blame for it. I see that the government is following that advice.

I'm not an economist. I don't think I have to be to understand what's going on in my community. The growth in the economy that is being touted, if it has happened, has happened in the greater Toronto area. I would suggest to you there are reasons for it happening and I think the low Canadian dollar had a profound effect on it.

But I also talk to my neighbours, and one of the engines that's driving our economy is the sale of cars, predominantly to the US, but the sale of cars within Canada and in that industry. The people I talk to say their decision to purchase a new car wasn't driven by the fact that they got an extra \$10 a week in their paycheque; it was driven by the 1.9% interest rate, or the 0% interest rate, which is federal-government-driven. That's what is causing people to buy cars, rather than the 15% interest.

I would also challenge someone to prove to me that the average family is indeed better off. All of us campaigned in an election not that long ago and talked to people who said they are now paying fees for garbage that they never paid, they're paying money for their children at school that they never paid before, and they're paying money for delisted drugs. Seniors are concerned that they're paying money for drugs that they never had to pay in the past.

I thought when I first came to Toronto that the way you greet someone in this city is, "Can you give me some spare change?" I didn't experience that 10 years ago on Yonge Street. I experience it every day out here now.

Travel around my riding, see the closed factories, see the 7.8% unemployment rate, and try to convince the unemployed people that Ontario is prospering right now. It can't be done.

Ms Marilyn Mushinski (Scarborough Centre): It gives me pleasure to respond to the great speech both by the member for Wentworth-Burlington and of course the Premier.

It seems to me that when I was a councillor and an alderman many years ago, when the Liberals and the NDP were governing this place, there was a great deal of concern expressed by councils all over Ontario with respect to not just the downloading that was taking place from senior levels of government but to the tax increases that were being imposed.

The most infamous one of those was the commercial concentration tax which was imposed, especially on cities. Some of you may recall the hole-in-the-doughnut syndrome, where investment and jobs were fleeing Metropolitan Toronto because of the commercial concentration tax. That really was the legacy that was left to the new government of Ontario in 1995. We made a commitment that we would never again screw the Ontario taxpayer. We did that in 1995.

I'm very pleased to be speaking in support of this bill today and certainly to support the words and comments of my colleague from Wentworth-Burlington.

Mr John Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: Actually, I have two points of order, but the first point—

The Acting Speaker: One at a time.

Mr Gerretsen: OK. The first point of order: Was the language that the member used parliamentary, in your opinion?

The Acting Speaker: Yes.

Mr Gerretsen: My second point: Is it part of the new standing orders that there are five responses to each major speech, and if not, was a mistake made?

The Acting Speaker: I shouldn't wear socks, apparently. Yes, I did make an error.

The member for Wentworth-Burlington.

Mr Skarica: I would like to thank the members for Ottawa Centre, Hamilton West, Prince Edward-Hastings, York North and Scarborough Centre for their contribution to the debate.

I believe it was the member for Prince Edward-Hastings who indicated, "It's not your tax cuts, it's the low Canadian dollar that has made this economic boom in Ontario possible." The low Canadian dollar exists in Quebec and it exists in British Columbia, which is now having an economic disaster, with a government that can be described similarly. The economic boom is not happening in the Maritimes.

The Conference Board of Canada has indicated that clearly the Ontario economy is presently the strongest among the provinces, and it's clearly because we have had a number of economic initiatives that have stimulated investment and economic growth.

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I used the film industry because it's a prime example. That was an industry that was failing, that was under severe hardship. Then in 1996 the provincial government used a series of tax credits. What's happened is that that industry has completely turned around and is now flourishing to the point where—most of it's focused in Ontario, as most of it's focused in Toronto, and Toronto is now called Hollywood North and has the third-largest film industry behind New York and Los Angeles. That's partly because of the Canadian dollar; I concede that. But why is it not happening anywhere else in Canada? It's happening here because of a variety of initiatives that the Ontario government has implemented that have allowed that industry to be competitive with our American neighbours. In fact, a lot of the investment in the film industry is coming from the United States.

The Acting Speaker: Further debate.

Mr Gerry Phillips (Scarborough-Agincourt): Mr Speaker, we're supposed to indicate who we'll be sharing our time with. I'd like to share my time with the member for Essex and the member for Windsor-St Clair.

I'm pleased to join the debate on Bill 7, the balanced budget legislation. I think it's important to remind ourselves that there are three provinces right now without balanced budget legislation, if I'm not mistaken: PEI, Newfoundland and BC. So this is not exactly a revolutionary thought.

Our party happened to have run on balanced budget legislation in the last two elections. Now, we didn't win, but we ran on implementing balanced budget legislation. We have been supportive of the concept of balanced budget legislation for four years, so this is not something that comes new to us.

Indeed, the province of Quebec recently enacted it. It's of interest to the public to recognize that virtually every other province has balanced its budget. The province of Quebec balanced its budget six months ago. They all balanced their budgets at least a year, if not two years, ahead of Ontario, and virtually every other province has balanced its budget. Ontario is in the unusual position of historically leading the country on financial matters and right now we're essentially going to be one of the last provinces to balance our budget.

I appreciate the comments from the member from Wentworth-Burlington because he acknowledged that the

last balanced budget in Ontario, he said in his remarks, was for the year 1989-90, and that is the case. We always get into a debate here that I think the public's somewhat interested in, but certainly around here we all seem to be interested in it, of what has been the history of balanced budgets in Ontario. I asked the legislative library to research this for us, to try and give us an independent view on it. I asked the question, "When was the last balanced budget in Ontario?" I point this out because my business friends think the Conservatives are the money managers. I give them a trivia question: When was the last time a Conservative government in Ontario balanced a budget? "Well, I don't know." The answer is—and this is from the legislative research library—the last time a Conservative government balanced a budget was in 1969. John Robarts was the Premier and Mr MacNaughton was the Treasurer.

Interjection.

Mr Phillips: You inquire about the date of the last balanced budget. Mr Runciman's barracking here. In fiscal 1989-90—and this was the point that the Conservative member just made—the province of Ontario recorded a surplus. The Liberal Party was in power at that time. Previous to that, the budget was balanced during fiscal 1969-70, when the Conservatives were in power.

I just point this out—the Conservative member from Wentworth-Burlington pointed it out as well—because it's a myth that the Conservatives have balanced the budget. In fact, I look back at when Premier Harris was in the previous Conservative administration, when he was in the cabinet in here, and the deficits were going up. The last year they were in power, the deficit in Ontario in 1985 was over \$3 billion.

The reason for going through this is to say that Premier Harris went through four years as the Premier of this province and never balanced a budget. The debt of the province of Ontario over his time—and for the people of Ontario this is, I think, of substantial interest. He took the debt of the province of Ontario up \$21 billion in his first four years. The people may be able to see this; they can certainly get it when they look at the budget. It went from \$88 billion to \$109 billion, and this year, apparently, it's going to go up another \$4 billion.

A measurement of the debt is what's called the debt to gross domestic product, which is a measurement of how much debt you're at in the province. When Premier Harris became Premier, the debt to GDP was 28.8%. Today, according to the government's own documents, it's 31.9%. Let's accept the evidence that the Conservative member presented to us, and that is that the last time a Conservative government balanced a budget in the province of Ontario, the Premier of the day was Premier Robarts. In the last four years, Premier Harris has added to the debt of the province \$21 billion, and you add another \$4 billion this year.

I think another independent evaluation of this is the credit rating agencies. I remember Premier Harris, then the leader of the Conservative Party, sat right in here

somewhere, and Premier Rae sat there. When the credit rating of the province of Ontario was dropping and it went from AAA to AA+ to AA to AA-, Premier Harris railed when he was in opposition at the then Premier, Mr Rae.

Guess what, everybody? Four years later—Premier Harris has been in power for four years—the four major credit rating agencies didn't touch Ontario's credit rating, the same credit rating. The reason I raise this is that, yes, there is balanced budget legislation coming in now. It will require the government, after six years in office, to balance the budget. We will be behind the federal government by five years, we'll be behind Quebec by four years, and virtually every other province will have balanced the books.

The other thing to remind ourselves of, before I get into discussing some of the details of the bill, is what is driving the Ontario economy. I think without question it is exports. For me, the most startling number in the 1999 budget was the number that pointed out the importance of exports to the Ontario economy. What it said here is that in 1989, 27.5% of Ontario's gross domestic product was represented by exports—around 28%. That was in 1989. Eight years later, 1998, it was 49%. Without a question of a doubt, the engine driving Ontario's economy is exports. Other things have been helpful, but the centrepiece of what's driving Ontario's economy is exports. If we don't all know that and know why that happened and know how we keep that, we run the risk of undermining the very thing that drives Ontario's economy. I don't think there's another area in the world that relies as heavily on exports as Ontario does. By the way, 90% is to the US, and that's good, and the majority of that, over 50%, is auto.

The reason I raise that is that as we move forward on both our spending priorities and tax policies, I think we should realize why the auto companies like to locate here in Ontario. It's because we have a high-quality work force; it is because we are located clearly in an advantageous position. There's an old saying that Toronto is closer to more major US cities than any major US city is, and when you think about that, it's true. That's why the rail lines from New York to Chicago go through Ontario.

1710

But a key reason they locate here is because of health care. We fund our health care in a different way than the US does. Health costs for employees here in Canada are dramatically lower for our auto business than they are in the US. That is one of the key reasons they locate plants here. But we're heading down a road of Americanizing our health care system and I think that runs the risk of undermining our exports.

I want to talk about some of the details of the bill. There are two parts to this bill, as Ontario will come to recognize. There's the balanced budget portion of it and there's the taxpayer portion. The balanced budget portion essentially says that a government must balance its books on a four-year cycle, that future governments can use

surpluses from the three previous years to balance its books if they run into an economic downturn.

I think that makes sense, frankly. Being able to accumulate surpluses over a three-year period and use that in the event of a slight economic downturn makes sense. It gives future governments some flexibility in managing their affairs over a four-year period. That running four-year total—it just keeps running forward—makes sense.

One thing I would say on this section, though, is that I have some concerns about the accounting policies and the impact they have on the finances of the province. I'll just signal now my concern about some of the accounting practices of the government that I think will come back to haunt us.

We are essentially, in Ontario, putting all the school capital debt on to the books of our school boards. They have no money-raising authority, but the debt is hidden off the province's books on to school boards. The province of Ontario has historically spent \$400 million a year on capital. They now are saying to the school boards, "You keep spending that money, but that debt's going to go on your books and we will simply give you a cheque every year to cover the interest and principal on that." I call that a perpetual debt-creating machine, which is what it is. That's going to come back to haunt us, as is the way we are funding hospital construction now, where that is moving increasingly to essentially the province funding the principal and interest payments but no longer funding the capital.

Of interest to people if they want to get into it, in the provincial books in the last fiscal year, the one that just ended, the year ending March 31, 1999, Ontario spent, laid out in cash, \$1.3 billion for pension payments. That's the amount of cash that was paid out to the teachers' pension and to the OPSEU pension. We actually recorded on our financial statement, the one in the budget, minus \$100 million; we said we took \$100 million out of the pension. That is a \$1.4-billion swing in the cash. That too will eventually come back to haunt us.

I think the 407 sale was a huge mistake, and I said it at the time. I said two things on that. One is that the government actually gave us assurance here in the Legislature that they would not sell it off at 99 years, because that was the rumour. We heard the rumour that they were going to sell it off for 99 years, and they said, "No, no, we're going to sell this for 29, 30 years." The huge mistake, particularly, I might add, for anybody who's ever going to have to use the 407—if I'm in a big rush I'll lay out the cash, but otherwise I'll make my way slowly along the 401. But here's what's happened on the 407. Premier Harris pocketed an extra \$1.6 billion, because he sold it off at twice what it cost to build. How did they do that? Because they said, "We're going to sell it for 99 years." They said that whoever buys this will be able to take the tolls up at inflation plus 2% every year for 15 years, and they said, "If somebody doesn't pay you for those tolls, we won't renew their licence."

The reason I raise this is that some of these things are going to come back to haunt us. There's the pension

issue, the putting the school capital on to school boards' books. Credit rating agencies, believe me, will say: "Listen, they have essentially no money-raising capabilities. That's your debt; that's not their debt."

That's, on the one portion of the bill, the questions.

On the second portion of the bill, the tax portion, we had a briefing yesterday from the staff of the Ministry of Finance, and there are some still unanswered questions about the bill. The bill apparently excludes several taxes. We were told yesterday that if it isn't specifically mentioned it's excluded. We asked, "What's excluded?" They said they would give us a list, but certainly I gather tobacco tax is excluded, racetrack tax is excluded, land transfer tax is excluded, mining tax is excluded, and there may be some other things that are excluded. It will be interesting to find out the things that are excluded.

We asked the question yesterday on a portion of the bill that says—this is on page 6 of the bill, paragraph 1 of subsection 5(1); this is where you do not need a referendum on a tax—"The increase or the new tax is not designed to generate a net increase in the total amount of provincial revenues and revenue raised for school purposes under the Education Act." We asked if, for example, the federal government were to cut its transfer payments by \$1 billion to the province of Ontario, or if a casino were to close, or if there was a substantial change in revenue, does that mean you don't need a referendum to replace that revenue? We were told that was the case, and I'll make that assumption, that that is the case.

We are also told—and this part of the bill makes sense to me—that there is the flexibility. If a government says, "We want to change our tax policy; we want to eliminate one tax and recover that revenue from another tax," that is quite permissible within the bill, and I think that is helpful and correct.

There is a part of the bill that does provide for governments to respond in the case of a significant economic downturn. Again the member for Wentworth-Burlington mentioned this, the 5% decline in revenue that did occur in 1990-91. This bill would permit a government to try and find a way to recoup that in the case of a significant economic downturn, and I think that's important.

There is an unanswered part of the bill that the staff were unable to clarify for us. That is, in the event of a referendum, who is responsible for the referendum? Is it the political party, or is it the government? The bill is not at all clear on that, and it will be something we are still awaiting clarification on to better understand what the intent of the government is in this bill. As one would read the bill right now, it appears almost as if it's the intent of the government that it is the political party in power, not the government in power that has the responsibility for carriage of a referendum. We asked that question and we are still awaiting an answer on it.

1720

Just to begin to summarize my remarks, I'd like to highlight my opening comment, and that is that balanced budget legislation is not completely new ground in this country. It is, in varying forms, in virtually every other

province except PEI, Newfoundland and BC. The facts would point out that this is a government that, while it purports to have managed the finances well—I would simply say that when this government came into power the federal government had a deficit of \$42 billion and the rest of the provinces cumulatively had a deficit of about \$10 billion. Last year, the federal government ran a surplus of \$3 billion, the other provinces ran a surplus of around \$3 billion and Ontario continued to run a deficit.

That's why we say that we did borrow the money for the tax cut—there's no question. Somebody says revenue continued to grow. Yes, and you see it federally. We would have had a balanced budget last year or the year before, without a question of a doubt. Premier Harris would say, "We need the tax cut to stimulate the economy." I say that if you look at what drove the Ontario economy, it's exports. There's no trick. You can borrow money to give a tax cut, but we're paying debt, we're paying a lot of money to fund that.

It happened that it worked for Premier Harris, in the sense that he got re-elected. But the numbers speak for themselves. The last time there was a balanced budget by a Conservative government was in 1969-70, when Robarts was Premier. Premier Harris has already added, without a question of a doubt, \$21 billion—and at the end of this fiscal year it'll be \$24 billion—to the debt of the province. The credit rating agencies continue to give him the same rating they gave Bob Rae. We have paid a substantial price on the interest on that. So I don't think it's time for him to pat himself on the back. I think it's time to recognize that we have added an enormous amount to the debt of this province.

The specifics on the bill: There are some unanswered questions. How will the referendum be run? There are some questions on the accounting. Particularly, I might add—I go back to what I said earlier—I think there are some very significant accounting problems in the way the government's reporting the finances now. It will be only a matter of one or two years before they come back to haunt us—the school capital, the hospital capital and the pensions.

If we ever use the 407 as a model for our future private-public sector partnerships, we will have done the Ontario people a huge disservice. Poor people who are going to have to use the 407 for the next 99 years have been frankly sold down the road. They're going to be paying a premium. Figure this out: Ontario got an extra \$1.6 billion just by doing all those things. If someone wants a rate of return on \$1.6 billion of 7%, they're going to be paying about \$120 million a year more just to service that in tolls. So I feel badly for the future users of the 407 and I hope we don't use that as a model for the SuperBuild fund.

I look forward to the debate on Bill 7 and look forward to receiving some explanations from the government on the issues we've raised.

Mr Bruce Crozier (Essex): I want to compliment my colleague from Scarborough-Agincourt because he always seems to be able to put things into some per-

spective. It's interesting the way he raises those red flags, for example, the things that are going to come back to haunt us. If any of us think that we're totally immune from that kind of thing, they should listen to Gerry Phillips from Scarborough-Agincourt, because there are lots of things in legislation.

In fact, we have some examples over the last government, from 1995 to 1999, where there were pieces of legislation that were poorly drafted and consequently led to some trouble with the government.

Mr Gerretsen: Seven tax bills.

Mr Crozier: I'm reminded by the member from Kingston and The Islands that we had to have seven tax bills to straighten things out, and I'm not so sure they're straightened out yet. In fact, at our briefing yesterday, my colleague from Scarborough-Agincourt had to point out to the officials who gave us the briefing that there was in fact an error in this piece of legislation right here, so that's going to have to be corrected.

Mrs Lyn McLeod (Thunder Bay-Atikokan): Isn't that the second time they've done it?

Mr Crozier: Yes, second time they've done it. They have all kinds of time to look at it and, lo and behold—I can't find it right now, because it's rather incidental, but it's just proof that not only can you—

Interjection.

Mr Crozier: The minister says, "We make mistakes." That's kind of what we're saying, to be careful, that there are some mistakes in this. Do you know what they often say?

Interjection.

Mr Crozier: The government whip knows that I'm not an arrogant person. He'll come and tell me that later, I'm sure, because he and I were both born and raised in Essex county, and I can't think of an arrogant person in Essex county. Of course some of the arrogant people have moved out, and now the government whip lives somewhere near Toronto.

I just want to say that I certainly have confidence in what the member from Scarborough-Agincourt has said. He has certainly put us on warning for what we might expect as we go down the road on this piece of legislation.

I want to point out as well that our party has supported balanced budget legislation since the 1995 campaign. In the 1999 campaign, just recently past, we also pledged support for balanced budget legislation because we, along with both the senior government and other provincial governments in Canada, believe of course, as the people do, that they're sending enough tax money to government, and to municipal governments for that matter, and that it's the job of the government to manage the money that's sent to them.

In the case of the provincial government, all the people are asking is that when you manage the money of the province you do it so that we get the best bang for our dollar and that we do that primarily—and I think most importantly to the people of Ontario—in the areas of health care and education.

We could go on at some length about the problems we have in health care. This government says, "Well, those are problems that have resulted from the last 10 years." You've forgotten that of the last 10 years you own four of those. So of the last 10 years that you keep speaking of, four of them were—

Interjection.

Mr Crozier: I sat here in the House last night and I heard it again today. You repeat "the last 10 years." Well, four of them are yours, so I just want you to take that responsibility. I said last night that I don't mind that they brag about the things that are good. I have absolutely no problem with that, but what does bother me a bit is when you won't take responsibility for the things that aren't right yet and there again we can refer to health care and education.

Mike Harris has kind of given the indication that maybe the future of the province really isn't important to him, that although he speaks differently, he doesn't mind borrowing money in order to balance the budget. As part of their rhetoric on revenues, they'll also point to the federal government as having reduced transfer payments. Without going into a long explanation, because it's a matter of public record, look at the tax points that have been transferred to Ontario. You'll find that some \$2 billion in transfer payments that were reduced were made up in tax points. I would go on record as saying today, if you'll look up that information, you'll find that you really didn't lose any net revenue because you gained it in tax points. We've had a buoyant economy and those tax points, then, pay for themselves.

1730

We've talked about balanced budgets in the past, we've talked about debt in the past and we've talked about the boasting of this government as being great money managers. Well, I'd like the people who may be watching to think about this: The total debt is somewhere between \$115 billion and \$120 billion. Let's say it's \$115 billion, to give you the benefit of the doubt. Of that \$115 billion of total debt that's been accumulated over time, the Liberal government, when it was in power, was responsible for \$5 billion of it. So we're down to \$110 billion of total debt. Then we go to the NDP who, it has again been mentioned today, went through some tough economic times, and maybe some decisions weren't correct. As the Minister of Labour pointed out, we all make mistakes. We'll say that the NDP were responsible for about \$12 billion. So of the total debt in the province of Ontario, what does that leave the Conservative governments over time, including this one, responsible for? It's \$98 billion of the accumulated debt.

Mr Bert Johnson (Perth-Middlesex): No, no. It's \$12 billion a year for five years. Do the math.

Mr Crozier: They increased the debt, we're told, maybe \$20 billion. That will pick up the other \$5 billion that I gave you credit for.

My point here is that these great money managers are responsible for, by far, the greatest amount of the public

debt. And what do they do? They continue to borrow, and accumulate that debt.

My friend says: "No, we didn't borrow any money to increase the debt. In fact, our revenue has increased." As I pointed out, part of the reason revenue increased is because of tax points that you got. But the fact of the matter is that our total debt is significantly higher now than it was when this government was first brought into office in 1995.

We are debating a bill that was promised by this government in 1995. I recall, and I'm sure many of the people of Ontario will recall, that in the 1995 election campaign, the Common Sense Revolution document made a commitment to balance the budget in its first mandate. The Common Sense Revolution, as a matter of interest, didn't mention balanced budget legislation or tax referenda. It just said, "We promise you, the taxpayers of Ontario, that we'll balance the budget in our first mandate."

We all know they didn't do it. We're now debating a promise that was made back in 1995. In fact, the Premier, during that 1995 election campaign, staged a media event which promised taxpayer protection legislation and balanced budget legislation. It didn't say it in the Common Sense Revolution, but during the campaign, when the pressure was on, the Premier made that promise. In fact, at the Metro Toronto Convention Centre, on May 30, 1995, Premier Harris, then the leader of the third party, signed a pledge that read like this:

"1. Make any increase in existing tax rates subject to approval by the voters of Ontario in a binding referendum.

"2. Require the elimination of Ontario's operating and capital deficits within at least five years, along with interim deficit targets for each of those years.

"3. Contain 'pay for performance' ministerial salary penalties for the Premier and cabinet ministers if interim deficit targets are not met."

That pledge was signed by Mike Harris on May 30, 1995.

It didn't happen. We hear a lot about promises made, promises kept. Well, there was a huge promise that was made in 1995 that wasn't kept, but we're debating it today.

Did you know that the Canadian Taxpayers Federation, I believe it was, admonished the Premier during the 1999 election, saying, "Who can trust someone like that?" I don't blame them. Perhaps the pressure has come on again to finally bring in, in the year 1999, after the last election, a promise that was made in 1995.

At the outset, I said that we too, the Liberal Party, promised something in the 1995 election campaign that I would like to read to you. We made a strong commitment at that time on both balanced budget legislation and taxpayer protection. What Dalton McGuinty, the leader of the Ontario Liberal Party, at that time pledged was to pass balanced budget legislation ensuring the government lives within its means; to guarantee funding of no less than \$20.9 billion in health care and \$14.3 billion in

education; and to pass taxpayer protection legislation within the first 100 days, making any increase in existing tax rates, or a new rate, subject to approval by voters in a binding referendum. That was in our platform, both taxpayer protection legislation as well as balanced budget legislation.

Where are we today? Because of the Harris government's mismanagement, I would suggest, Ontario's provincial debt is now 26% higher than it was when the Tories took office four years ago. The government has added somewhere around \$20 billion in debt, which, when spoken in terms of what it means to the individual, is \$8,000 in new debt for every Ontario family, and that was after he promised to balance the budget back in 1995. In fact, according to this legislation that we have before us, this government doesn't really have to balance the budget until the year 2001. It's more than a year and a half from now before the Premier and his cabinet will have to make this great sacrifice of reduced salaries.

I want to talk for the next few minutes about the referenda part of this legislation. Like my colleague from Scarborough-Agincourt, I'm willing to raise a flag. I'd be willing to bet—and those who know me know I'm not a gambling person—that this referenda part of the legislation will never be acted on. I don't think there is going to be a referendum, but if there is, I want the people of Ontario to understand what that really means. What it means is that you're going to have a referendum that will cost in the neighbourhood of—we weren't able to get an exact figure from the bureaucrats yesterday, but we suspect it would be a cost of around \$50 million just to ask the question. But as important as the total cost of the referendum is who is going to pay for it; another question that couldn't be answered yesterday.

You'll recall not too long ago—in fact I think it started last year about this time—this government spent upwards of \$100 million in advertising leading up to the last election. They spent \$100 million telling us how great our health care system is supposed to be. They spent upwards of \$100 million, which included advertising, to tell us how great our education system is. And that was taxpayers' money. What they can't tell us at this time is that if the government does want to pose a referendum question, who is going to pay to promote it? Is the Progressive Conservative Party of Ontario going to pay their share of promoting the question that's on the referendum? I doubt it. I suspect what's going to happen is that the government of Ontario, who represents the taxpayers of Ontario, is going to take that money out of the pockets of Ontarians and put it towards promoting their referendum.

1740

Not only do I suggest that there's not going to be a referendum, that this is not going to be used, but that if it is, the taxpayers of the province are going to pay heavily for it. That's even adding insult to injury, because if the taxpayer has to pay to have it promoted, what are they paying for? They're paying for a question that's going to increase their taxes, so they get a double whammy. If anybody over there can answer that question, as to

whether the government will put any money into promoting a referendum question, I'd appreciate it, and perhaps as we get further on in the debate that question may be answered.

What this legislation also says, and I think we have to be careful, is that the Lieutenant Governor in Council will determine what the question will be. Folks at home may not completely understand what the Lieutenant Governor in Council is. What it is, is the government. The government will decide what the question is. Yes, the legislation provides for the question to be sent to the Chief Election Officer. The Chief Election Officer can comment on the question, but the final decision as to what the question is going to be lies with the government—of course, Speaker, I use the term “lies” in the appropriate way. It may lead to something else that sounds a lot like that, but far be it for me to suggest that this really would be the result of it.

There's a fair amount of wriggle room in this legislation too. On the surface it reads just great: An Act to protect taxpayers against tax increases, to establish a process requiring voter approval for proposed tax increases and to ensure that the Provincial Budget is a balanced budget. There's an awful lot of wriggle room in this. We know, for example, as was pointed out by my colleague from Scarborough-Agincourt, that if in any other area of revenue there is a decrease, the government can raise taxes without the question of referenda.

One thing that's good about this piece of legislation is that the government can't transfer taxation power to another jurisdiction. In other words, they can't turn around and say to the municipalities, “We can't increase taxes to pay for transportation or health care or education, but you can.” At least there is some protection that way. But what happens is if there are decreases in revenue in other areas, the government then can increase taxes. In fact, it's done under the absolute authority of the minister.

I'd like to read from the bill, subsection 5(2):

“If no referendum is required by virtue of subsection (1)—that's the one where there are decreases from other areas of government—“the minister shall prepare a statement indicating that, in his or her opinion, a specified circumstance listed in ...”—and this is where the drafting was wrong; it named the wrong subsection—“exists and shall lay the statement before the assembly or give it to the Clerk of the assembly before the applicable bill is introduced in the assembly or the applicable regulation or requisition is made.”

Here comes the gripper—and we've seen this kind of authority given to ministers; we've seen this kind of arrogance in bills that have been passed up until now, over the past four years, where ministers are given sweeping authority. This is the crux of this. The minister lays the statement before the assembly or gives it to the Clerk of the assembly.

“(3) The minister's statement is, for all purposes, conclusive evidence of the matters addressed in it.

“(4) The minister's statement is not reviewable by any court or tribunal.”

How arrogant can you get?

The Minister of Finance can stand before this Legislature and say, “I'm going to raise your taxes because,” and no court, no tribunal or the Legislature can do a thing about it. That's just not taxpayer protection, in my view; that's arrogance. That's saying: “I'm right. It doesn't matter whether you have an opinion. It doesn't matter whether you can make a case. There's nobody to present your opinion or your case to.” If that's taxpayer protection, you can have it.

I like that, along with other governments across the country, we're all striving to have balanced budgets, to all live within our means. But when somebody uses the words “taxpayer protection” and then says, “The minister's statement is not reviewable by any court or tribunal,” that's about as arrogant as you can get. “I'm untouchable.” That's what the Minister of Finance is under this piece of legislation; he's untouchable.

I want the taxpayers of Ontario to ask themselves about the idea of referenda. It doesn't matter how much it costs; it doesn't matter who's going to have to pay for it. Just ask this question of yourselves: You elected a government that you sent to Queen's Park to be responsible for the next four or five years of their mandate. What you're saying, then, is if they get into a tough spot and they want to lay the blame on someone else, we'll have a referendum. That referendum is going to cost you \$50 million and that referendum is going to be paid for by you.

Just think about those things that the member for Scarborough-Agincourt said; think about a few of these.

It's my pleasure to pass this on to the member for Windsor-St Clair.

Mr Dwight Duncan (Windsor-St Clair): As always, it's a pleasure to follow my colleague from Essex and my other colleagues, including our Finance critic, Gerry Phillips.

It's important to note that the Ontario Liberal Party has for a number of years supported balanced budget legislation. Indeed, in the last two elections we have campaigned on that. We share the view that many people in this province do, that it's appropriate, provided there are opportunities over periods of time, to accumulate a surplus when times are good so that governments do have some flexibility. To that extent we are pleased with that aspect of this particular bill. Let me say to my colleagues opposite that I will, as are my colleagues on this side in the Liberal Party, be voting in favour of this particular bill.

We agree that this aspect of the bill is important. We find the part of the bill that deals with referenda more troublesome but again, on balance, we think it's the appropriate legislation.

I wanted to take a few minutes to talk about what problems we see in the bill and say very clearly that when we become a government in three years' time—or

sooner—there will be changes to make the legislation better.

I listened attentively as the Premier earlier this afternoon put his position with respect to the government's record in terms of debt reduction, deficits and job creation. If one listened only to the Premier, we would think the prosperity that Ontario is enjoying today—a prosperity, by the way, that's not equally shared by all people in this province, but it's a prosperity that's there—was all the result of the Harris government's actions and initiatives.

I think most thoughtful people out there understand that in fact it's due to the hard work and efforts of working people, of other governments, of people who invest in our economy. Indeed, for somebody to try to claim credit for this singly or individually really is the height of arrogance. It's almost laughable. The growth that we've seen in the US economies, the Canadian economies, is the result of a variety of factors.

1750

That being said, there was still a need in 1995 to bring a sense of responsibility and a sense of change to Queen's Park. The mismanagement of the previous government, second in my view to none in the history of this country, is a mismanagement that the government of the day has paid for in two successive elections.

Let's talk about deficits and debt. Under the Harris regime, Ontario's debt has risen 26% in four years. They've borrowed a lot of money, about \$20 billion, I think. I may be a little high on that figure. But I'd like to say that they are the second-last government in Canada to balance the books, despite their protestations about being good fiscal and financial managers. Only Ontario and British Columbia have not balanced their books. I don't think I would be bragging about that at the top of my lungs.

Let's look at Ottawa, for instance, where the budget has now been balanced for I think two years in a prudent and careful policy that first eliminated the deficit and will now turn its attention to program investments and to tax cuts. There will be a balance. We haven't had that kind of balance here. What we've had is severe and deep cuts in programs. We think of hospitals, in the first instance. The Premier said in the leaders' debate in 1995, "Robert, it's not my intention to close any hospitals."

Mrs McLeod: I remember that.

Mr Duncan: My colleague from Fort William, I'm sure, well remembers that. We certainly remember that comment and we certainly appreciated the tenor of the comment.

What about cuts to education, classroom spending? Today in the House we're going to be having a late show on special-needs funding for kids, not to mention the education funding formula. Let me say that had the government proceeded more cautiously on the tax cut side, a tax cut, frankly, where there isn't a lot of evidence to suggest that it has contributed to the growth—we see many jurisdictions, and I think perhaps the United States is a good example, where there haven't been those kinds

of tax cuts at the federal and/or the state level in many instances, yet we've seen growth of similar patterns. On a national level, due to the foresight and good management of that government, we have seen growth in this economy that has not been accompanied by those kind of tax cuts.

Does that mean we're against tax cuts? Absolutely not. The Premier would have you believe, based on experiences in the 1980s and way back then, that perhaps all we want to do is raise taxes. The Premier even—I guess he was in a bit of a humourous mood—wanted to suggest, of course falsely suggested, that it's in our party's constitution that we believe in raising taxes. We appreciate the give and take of debate, as does anybody, but let me say this: We will be voting for this bill because we, having been the last government to balance a budget in Ontario, in 1989—

Interjections.

Mr Duncan: They want to deny it and the other party over there wants to deny it and try to lay blame for everything that went wrong in those years, but the fact is, according to the government's own books, that's the last time the budget was.

What we saw in that period, not unlike what we've seen in the last four years, was a steady decline, anyway you measure it, of the deficit relative to GDP, relative to any number of factors. What we didn't see was the growth in the debt that we've seen in the last four years. I would suggest to my colleagues that the Harris government's record of increasing the debt is second only to the NDP's record, not one that I would be particularly proud of.

I say to the Minister of Transportation, who laughs about highway situations in Ontario and doesn't want to deal with his own government's books, that your debt has gone up. You've raised the debt almost as quickly as our colleagues in the other party over there did. That's not the kind of record you ought to be proud of, and it doesn't stack up well.

My colleague from Scarborough, Mr Phillips, reminds continually that between 1969 and 1985 successive Conservative governments were unable to balance the budget. That's most unfortunate. Of course, when they talk about the 10 lost years, they don't want to talk about those lost years. So I think it's—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker: Member for Timmins-James Bay, you're not in your seat. You also used some unparliamentary language and I wish you to withdraw that.

Mr Gilles Bisson (Timmins-James Bay): I withdraw.

Mr Duncan: We believe and continue to believe that tax cuts are appropriate at the right time, in the context of a balanced budget and in the context of a recognition that our hospitals require more funding, that our schools require more funding. Our highways have been so badly neglected by this government. I would suggest that the people in Ontario who are listening to this, the people in my community who witnessed the tragedy—days after the Minister of Transportation suggested the ride along

the 401 between Windsor and London was a pleasant drive, my community witnessed a massive traffic accident that shouldn't have happened.

The government plays fast and loose with figures. They try to compare 1988 dollars with 1998 dollars, and it doesn't wash. I would suggest that while we're prepared and will support this bill—and I'll be voting for this bill—that the more prudent approach would have been to: first, balance the budget; second, look at what your community needs are; and, third, select a mix of tax cuts that will benefit people right across the province and in a variety of ways.

I would suggest to the government members and to the Premier that you have mismanaged the file. Growth in the economy could have been much stronger. The crisis in our hospitals, the crisis in our schools and the crisis on our roads—the crisis in our hospitals and schools was precipitated, I understand, by the mismanagement of the NDP government, five years of absolutely inept management. They went from 72 seats to 17 seats, to 9 seats. One can understand their frustration tonight here in this chamber.

I would suggest to the government members that the appropriate policy on the economy, the appropriate way to deal with this—we could have balanced our budget two or three years ago, and we could have done it without the massive cuts to health care and education that we've witnessed. We could have done that. Instead, we did a questionable tax cut, one that the government's proud of, I understand, but one that we fundamentally oppose. The appropriate response would be to balance the budget, to make sure our schools and our hospitals are properly and appropriately funded, and to choose a range of tax cuts once you're not adding to the debt.

1800

In conclusion, I would suggest that while we're prepared to support this particular legislation, the problem we see is in the mismanagement of this and in the mismanagement of the government's financial policies. The government laughs, but these policies will come back to haunt you. They are in our hospitals today. The cuts that were started by the NDP, you've continued on. The cuts to our schools that were started by the NDP, you've carried on. You haven't done as good a job, frankly, at cutting them as they did, and certainly you've enjoyed more labour peace than they did in the last two years of their regime.

In voting for this bill we are reaffirming the position we took in 1995 and the position we took in 1999. We are more troubled by the first section of the bill, which deals with referenda. We'll vote for that because we believe the government has left—

The Acting Speaker: Thank you.

ADJOURNMENT DEBATE

STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

The Acting Speaker (Mr Michael A. Brown): Pursuant to standing order 37, the question that this House do now adjourn is deemed to have been made. The member for Parkdale-High Park has given notice of dissatisfaction with the answer to a question given today by the Minister of Education. The member has up to five minutes to debate the matter and the minister, or parliamentary assistant, may reply for up to five minutes.

Mr Gerard Kennedy (Parkdale-High Park): I'll be sharing some of my time with the member for Essex, who shared in the question that we tried to ask today on behalf of special needs students across the province but also on behalf of students across the province, because the minister today neglected to address the problem that she and her ministry and her government are directly responsible for, and that's the underfunding of education.

Most conspicuously, some of the members opposite have not been fulsome in putting forward the case of their constituents because it is not just about special needs kids, it's about all kids. The funding formula is first being played out in terms of specific needs for the children, for example, we brought in last week, who came to us with their parents saying, "Why should we, parents of special needs kids, have to be singled out?" In the one case, someone who was not able to come to school had to come to the Legislature instead to be given access to school.

We have some of the Conservative members from the Hamilton area blaming the board. Again today we had the minister trying to claim, without foundation at all, that somehow the boards have the money, that they just lack the will and the ability. This is where this incredible claim on the part of the minister and on the part of the members of the government caucus in the Hamilton area has hoisted the educational future of 550 children in the Hamilton area and, as we raised again today, 210 children just in the area adjacent, in Haldimand-Norfolk.

This lack of responsibility is what has caused us to be here tonight to discuss this issue further. The minister will well know that the supervisory officials of this province made an unprecedented statement about her lack of handling of this issue, of the fumbling of the educational needs of special needs children, of how that has caused the cannibalization of other programs in the boards, of how teachers have had to take it upon themselves to do what this government should have done, tried to get the things that these students need. When they do that, they do it at the expense of the other students. So this is at a direct cost.

The minister today tried to say that there's more money. The supervisory officials said clearly that there is no way to make that claim. They said there are more special needs kids without proper supports this year than before this minister's funding formula was in place. The superintendents of the boards from across this province,

including many of the boards represented by the members opposite, said that in black and white. It's shameful that there aren't more of the members opposite prepared to stand up and talk to their minister and say: "These kids deserve an education. The ripple effect it's having on the rest of the children in the education system is serious; it needs to be dealt with now."

Instead, we had the shame of the members from the Hamilton area allowing students to stay out of school for up to eight weeks. The same thing is happening in Brantford, the same thing is happening in the rest of Haldimand-Norfolk and the same thing is happening in board after board across the province, as my colleague the member for Essex will tell you.

Mr Bruce Crozier (Essex): Minister, I appreciate the time you're taking to come here late this afternoon. I just want to point out, and not in an adversarial way, that you have a letter dated October 20 from the Greater Essex County District School Board that points out a shortfall in their special education funding of \$2.5 million. They point out in their letter, "We hope to again revisit the ISA funding." That's the intensive support funding.

I attended a forum at Villanova high school last week conducted by the Windsor-Essex Catholic District School Board, at which time they pointed out that they are some \$2 million short. What they point out in part is that the intensive support dollars do not cover the salary and benefit costs of an education assistant. Additional students with special needs will continue to register with the board, and we do not have funds to meet those needs.

I pointed out one example, that of Denise Dupis and her 11-year-old son. The question there is that the boards can't make up for these fundings because you've frozen the ISA funding. What choice are you giving families like the Dupises? Is your message that there's no room for the young lad, Bobby, in school, and are you treating this with urgency?

Hon Janet Ecker (Minister of Education): Thank you to the honourable member for Essex. I appreciate his concern and the time that he has spent on this. Many members of the caucus here on this side of the House, for example the members for Stoney Creek and Wentworth-Burlington in the Hamilton area, have certainly been very vocal on this issue as well.

I think what's very important here is that there is room in these schools, and there should be room in these schools, for children with special needs, because they deserve an education as well. That is why our government has taken so seriously the need to improve the way that special education is provided in this province. For example, we are spending today more than has ever been spent in Ontario, \$1.2 billion, on special education. This is funding that has increased this year and increased last year to give the boards additional resources. When you look at some of these boards, they have had significant increases in their resource to meet special education needs. For example, the Windsor-Essex Catholic board has seen a 53% increase in their special education funding.

We recognize the money needs to grow with enrolment, and it has done that, but I think what's also important to recognize here is that there's a dual obligation in this.

We as the province have made a commitment to develop an appropriate policy that has responded to what we've heard from boards and from parents. We have indeed done that. We've been asked for more money. We've done that. We've been asked for money that recognized high needs. We've done that. We were asked for money that protected the base funding. We've done that. They needed flexible money. We've done that for the boards as well.

They also asked for a year of stability, which is this year, so that we could sit down, as we are doing, and go over the data from the boards on the ISA money to see what exactly is happening, what are the needs and how we can better meet those needs, because we do recognize that this is a significant change. We've been cognizant of the fact that it has taken boards some time to do this. Some boards have reported that they've had some difficulty getting students identified to qualify for the funding. We understand that. But to sit there and say that somehow or other nothing has been done, nothing is happening to respond to this, I think is quite frankly inaccurate and not true.

As I said, there's a dual obligation for us to develop an appropriate policy, to provide more funding. I believe we have the correct policy, the fundamentals. The feedback we've been hearing from boards and from the Education Improvement Commission is that the way that money goes to boards is appropriate but that there may need to be changes. We recognize and acknowledge that and are working at doing that. But there is also a dual obligation for those boards.

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For example, I find it not helpful, not acceptable for a board to send students home. I understand that there may be disagreements about funding; there may be things that we need to argue out between the ministry and the boards. That has happened in every previous government that I've ever had any experience with and I'm sure it will happen in future governments, as boards and governments always argue over how much money. That's part of the process. But to send those children home, to not give them supports and help, I don't think was an acceptable or a helpful response by the Hamilton board in this particular circumstance, with all due respect to them. Those children deserve help; they need help. I met with the parents who were here last week, to talk to them about this, and those students do need that help. That is the obligation of the boards. They are the ones who have the responsibility to deliver this service, who have the trustees elected by the community to give them the guidance in how they deliver those services.

So we're prepared to continue to work with the boards to find ways to take the increased money, to make it work better, to find ways to make the policy work better so that these young students get the supports they need.

But it has to be a two-way street. We've provided them with things they've asked for. We are asking them to provide the education to those students. If we have disputes, let's have those disputes, but let's not do it by sending children home, because I don't think that's appropriate.

MEMBER'S COMMENTS

The Acting Speaker (Mr Michael A. Brown): The member for Hamilton East has given notice of dissatisfaction with the answer to a question given today by the Premier. The member has up to five minutes to debate the matter and the parliamentary assistant may reply for up to five minutes.

Mr Dominic Agostino (Hamilton East): I rise as a follow-up to the question to the Premier today in regard to the comments made by the member from Haldimand-Norfolk-Brant, MPP Toby Barrett, who is also the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of the Environment.

This is a very serious matter, as it is not an isolated comment. It is the framing of the restructuring debate in a very dangerous, divisive way that we have not seen in this province before as it deals with municipal restructuring.

The comments made by the member were offensive, discriminatory and insulting to all Ontarians, regardless of where you live, regardless of where you come from. This wasn't one comment made by accident or mistake, bad enough as that would be. There's a sequence of events. It started with the comments made in a submission by Mr Barrett's father to the restructuring adviser. He said: "Residents of the old Haldimand are conservative in their spending and rooted in the British tradition, while those in Norfolk are," and I quote, "European immigrants of peasant stock who borrow heavily and expect a substantial profit." That was in the Brantford Expositor.

The member had an opportunity to clarify this, to adjust the record on his own behalf, as the MPP. What did he say to the Hamilton Spectator on October 30? This is Mr Barrett: "There are very significant differences between the two [sides of the region] and the regional census would show that. There is census data and the facts are out there."

So we now have his code words being used to say the same thing, that the regional census would show this. Show what? The comment that his father had made: The division of people from different backgrounds is how we should base it, and that's how restructuring should happen in that particular region. I don't think anybody in this House would for a second agree with that. Mr Barrett, the member, goes on to say: "There's so many differences between the two counties and part of that is that it all derives from the soil structure. Haldimand is clay and Norfolk is sandy. It really has had an influence on the makeup of the people."

It gets better; it continues. Today in the Toronto Star, Mr Barrett, the member, again: "There is no question

there has been an invisible [ethnic] boundary between the two counties ...; 25 years ago there was a forced marriage and it just didn't work out."

These are comments made by a member of the Legislature about his own constituents, talking about a way of dividing a region due to restructuring.

What is sad today is that the Premier, although he took a step in the right direction by totally distancing himself—rightly so—and his government from the comments made by that member, didn't take the next step. The next step was simply to discipline the member. The member has not had the courage yet to apologize for those comments. The Premier had an opportunity to act, and the action would have been to fire that member as the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of the Environment. The Premier has the power to do that. He failed miserably to do that today.

Look at the danger. Andrew Dreschel, a columnist in the Hamilton Spectator, put it best: "Anyone would think he was talking about the political restructuring of the Balkans, not a section of rural southern Ontario."

I understand restructuring debates are emotional everywhere, as they are in my region of Hamilton-Wentworth. That is their nature; when you bring change or potential change, people are going to get emotional about it. But there isn't a place in this province anywhere, in any debate, for comments that discriminate against Ontarians. All Ontarians are equal. All Ontarians, regardless where they came from, should be treated equally. Think in your own region for a second—as the member from Perth is shaking his head. I presume he agrees with the member, and maybe he should tell us that. Maybe that's the first member on the government's side of the House that agrees with Mr Barrett—Mr Johnson does.

Think of it in any community in your own region where you draw ethnic boundary lines. This is not 1800. We live in this province generally in harmony with each other. We respect each other, our traditions and our backgrounds. I believe that Mr Barrett's comments are an insult to all Ontarians regardless where you come from, regardless how long you've been here. Municipal restructuring has to be based on many factors, but not for a second should the ethnic background of the people who live in those areas be a factor.

I ask the parliamentary assistant today to take this back to the Premier and hopefully the Premier tomorrow will have the courage to stand up and do the right thing. And if he truly believes that Mr Barrett's comments were wrong, inappropriate, harmful, divisive and dangerous, then he'll do the right thing and fire Mr Barrett as a parliamentary assistant to the minister.

Mr Morley Kells (Etobicoke-Lakeshore): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: I'm here tonight on behalf of the Premier as his parliamentary assistant. To answer the member's concerns I would like to read back into the record the Premier's response from earlier today.

"I think the member's comments do not, by any interpretation, and certainly do not in any way reflect a view

that I or this government shares and I'm happy to clarify that and make it very clear.

"I want the member and I want the members of this Legislature and I want the public, and I want to be very clear about what we are doing in reforming local administration. We're doing so to cut down the size of government. We're doing so to reduce the number of politicians. We're doing so to find savings, by doing this, which will then be passed on to the taxpayers through property tax cuts or through improved services.

"I want to say this to you: Any suggestions to the contrary would be inaccurate, and any suggestion to any other motivation is false."

HOMES FOR THE AGED

The Acting Speaker (Mr Michael A. Brown): Pursuant to standing order 37, the member for Hastings-Frontenac-Lennox and Addington has given notice of dissatisfaction with the answer to a question given today by the Minister of Citizenship, Culture and Recreation. The member has up to five minutes to debate the matter and the minister or parliamentary assistant may reply for up to five minutes.

Mrs Leona Dombrowsky (Hastings-Frontenac-Lennox and Addington): My issue is of course with the Minister of Citizenship, Culture and Recreation. At this time I would like to thank the minister. I believe that being here this evening required some change in her schedule, so I very much appreciate that she would accommodate and be here at this time.

On two specific occasions the minister has referred to me as a new member. I'm not sure the point that she's trying to make with that reference, but I would remind the minister that she's a rookie too. I think that maybe her inexperience in that particular role has resulted in her ability to directly answer the questions that have been posed to her.

She has had several direct questions come to her over the past two weeks with regard to the situations in retirement homes in the province. The responses to the questions have been literally all over the map. One of the responses offered the idea that there is an elder abuse task force. My office last week contacted several key provincial senior agencies and they had no idea about the round table, who was on it, what it was going to talk about other than issues relating to elder abuse. All of that is really very worthy and noble and important, and I certainly look forward to an announcement very soon from the minister's office about that particular initiative, but I'd like to make the point at this time that the elder abuse round table has nothing to do with the situation in retirement homes right now, today, and how this government is going to address the very immediate need in that particular area.

1820

The minister has also responded on more than one occasion in recent weeks about the responsibilities that municipalities have with regard to this issue. My office

had contacted the city of Toronto, and they've been told that there really isn't any assistance from the government to help them as they are struggling to deal with this issue. They have, to their credit, established a hotline for people in retirement homes who would find themselves in difficulty. My office has been able to find out that that hotline has received over 150 calls. Half of the calls have been from residents, the other half have been from family members, and 10% of the calls have been from outside of Toronto. We applaud the city of Toronto initiative, but what about the other municipalities that don't have a hotline? What about the people in retirement homes in other municipalities that don't have a number to call? Is the city of Toronto to bear the burden of all the situations across the province because at the present time they are the only municipality that has a hotline to deal with this?

Minister, the province is the only agency at this time that has the resources and the expertise to assure residents in retirement homes across the province of some reasonable level of care.

The minister in response has referred as well to self-regulation. Yesterday I met with the executive director of the Ontario Residential Care Association, who said to me that we need a provincial solution.

The minister has referred to reports from previous governments, and I have those reports. I have the 1989 report, Rest and Retirement, a report on the regulation of residential care facilities. I have the 1992 Dr Lightman report. I have the Regulation of Standards of Care in Rest Homes report issued by Anne Johnston in 1987. All three reports very clearly indicate that the province has a role in dealing with this important issue.

My question is, what is the government going to do today to address the very serious issue of safety of people in retirement homes in the 586 municipalities in the province?

Hon Helen Johns (Minister of Citizenship, Culture and Recreation, minister responsible for seniors and women): It is indeed a pleasure to be able to speak one more time in the House about seniors and their safety. Of course it's paramount to me as the minister for seniors, and I care very deeply about this issue as a result of having parents who are seniors in the province of Ontario.

Let me just give you a little bit of background to tell you about seniors in the province. Let me tell you that 8% of the people who are seniors in the province live in retirement homes, 24% are in chronic care hospitals, nursing homes or homes for the aged, and the balance are at home, either alone, with relatives, or with some government help.

When the member opposite talks about the lack of commitment by the government with respect to seniors, let me say that as a result of the inaction of the previous two governments, this government made a commitment to put \$1.2 billion into long-term-care facilities. It was the largest investment that had ever been made in health care before. The reason for that was that we acknowledged the fact that there need to be 20,000 new long-

term-care beds in the province, and we're working to do that.

If they had been built in the 1970s, 1980s, 1990s, then we might not have the backlog that we have. We acknowledge that in the long-term-care area we need to build new beds. We've made a huge dollar commitment to the taxpayers of the province to do that.

A large number of our seniors are at home, and with respect to that the government has made a commitment to increase home care for these seniors. We put \$1.7 billion into home care in the province. What we want to do is ensure that people have the ability to stay in their homes as long as they'd like to.

I'm probably one of the fortunate people in this House whose parents still can stay at home and who live with me most of the year. I'd like to say that those home care services are important for seniors, and they're necessary.

We now are into talking about retirement homes, which is 8% of the population. We need to do more to make sure that our seniors are safe, so let me tell you what's happening in the province right now.

There is a combined need to work together with respect to retirement homes and I look forward to working with any municipality that has any issues with respect to it. The province has approved and passed a number of bills that protect our seniors in the province: We have the Tenant Protection Act; we have the Ontario building code and the Ontario fire code; we have the Regulated Health Professions Act. Each of these bills provides protection to seniors wherever they are in the province. For example, if a senior receives health care from a health care provider, there are regulations that ensure their safety, and the public health care they receive from these health care professionals is monitored, regulated and it can be checked.

We also have the Tenant Protection Act, which ensures that residents of retirement homes are protected when it comes to their accommodation.

Interjection.

Hon Mrs Johns: I know that you're new and you don't want to hear the answer, but I give you this opportunity to hear it.

We have the Ontario building code and the Ontario fire code, which ensure that buildings that are built to standards, so we have the opportunity to ensure that people are safe within their own jurisdictions.

Who has the ability to look at these and to regulate them? These are provincial laws; the municipalities can put bylaws through to regulate.

I'm mystified, because in the last three or four weeks the city of Toronto has done exactly that. They've set up a hotline; they've gone out and looked at, I think it was 12 homes last week; they looked at them through a number of different areas. Last week I quoted the public health official for the city of Toronto. He said he didn't need any new bylaws from me, he didn't need any new legislation; he could go out there right now and do that. And out they went.

Interjection.

Hon Mrs Johns: It's in the paper. I'll be happy to quote it again, but that's what was said.

I would like to say that I continue to work with the Ontario Residential Care Association; I continue to work through the seniors' secretariat to help any municipality that needs any help, because I'm deeply committed to the seniors of the province.

The Acting Speaker: There being no further matters to debate, I deem the motion to adjourn to have carried.

This House stands adjourned until 1:30 pm tomorrow.

The House adjourned at 1829.

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