



Legislative Assembly
of Ontario

First Session, 37th Parliament

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de l'Ontario

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**Official Report
of Debates
(Hansard)**

**Journal
des débats
(Hansard)**

Tuesday 23 November 1999

Mardi 23 novembre 1999

Speaker
Honourable Gary Carr

Clerk
Claude L. DesRosiers

Président
L'honorable Gary Carr

Greffier
Claude L. DesRosiers

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO

Tuesday 23 November 1999

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO

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*The House met at 1333.
Prayers.*

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

SAULT COLLEGE

Mr Michael A. Brown (Algoma-Manitoulin): I call on the Minister of Colleges and Universities and Premier Harris to directly intervene to prevent the impending layoff and forced retirement of over 35 employees at Sault College. This action is a direct result of the Harris attack on colleges and universities. It has forced administration to cut the services and programs that it has offered, like eliminating the Wawa and Elliot Lake campuses of the college.

Minister, this is unacceptable, as is last week's proposal to cut another \$160 million in funding from our colleges and universities. The results of these cuts threaten to undermine the future of this province. These days, colleges are finding they can no longer fund their existing programs adequately and are being forced to cut programs offered. The result is especially devastating in northern Ontario.

Three weeks ago my leader, Dalton McGuinty, and I met with students, faculty and administration at Sault College. Minister, the message they want you to hear is that your government has hurt this college and made it more difficult for the students to complete their education. Not only has your government made access more difficult through astronomical tuition hikes, but now these institutions are being forced to cut programs and staff, undermining the education of our students.

Minister, Premier, take action to save and augment the programs at Sault College and do the right thing for once. We all know that once these cuts are made there is little chance of having them reversed. Restore the funding; restore the money you've taken from the children of Ontario.

CHARLES WHITE

Mr John O'Toole (Durham): I'd like to take this opportunity to congratulate one of my constituents, Mr Charles White. Mr White was recently named by the Toronto Sun as one of the top 10 teachers of the year. Mr White is a secondary school teacher of instrumental

music, vocal music and guidance at Port Perry High School.

Charles White is a very special teacher, following in his parents' footsteps since 1970 as a teacher in Port Perry. Mr White was one of the recipients of this year's Toronto Sun Teacher of the Year Award. The award was established to promote public awareness of teaching excellence and to encourage parents, students and teachers to focus on the positives of education.

I'd like to congratulate Mr White on being chosen for this important award. There were more than 1,500 nominations from across Ontario. A former principal of Port Perry High School, Mr Morrison, has said the following about Mr White:

"Charles White creates positive, self-confident students while refining raw musical talent into professional quality performances. Once Charles has touched you, you will be motivated to reach for the stars. He is the kind of teacher you will tell your children and grandchildren about—he is the essence of outstanding teaching."

I applaud Mr White and all the dedicated teachers in the riding of Durham. Teachers teach by example, and professionalism and excellence are the kinds of methodologies they use.

DOCTOR SHORTAGE

Mr John C. Cleary (Stormont-Dundas-Charlottenburgh): I rise today to talk about the shortage of doctors in the province, especially in eastern Ontario. There have been numerous studies that clearly show that the people of eastern Ontario are underserved, and the province knows that.

In my riding, the Ministry of Health figures indicate that the city of Cornwall and area should have 41 practitioners. They only have 30 at the present time, a figure that is 25% below the normal average.

A few years ago, the city had 33 family physicians, which means that there has been a 10% decrease in the past few years. The result is that people are not getting the service they need, and something has to be done about it.

The Cornwall Academy of Medicine, the Cornwall General Hospital, the hospitallers of St Joseph's and the local municipalities have put together a plan. They are attempting to recruit new physicians, and they have established a task force. I salute them for their efforts. The province has to do its share.

In our area, general practitioners, orthopaedic surgeons and obstetricians are in short supply. Both in the short term and in the long term we have to have a plan, and the government has to take action now and give eastern Ontario the service that it needs.

1340

LAURIE PALLETT

Mr Carl DeFaria (Mississauga East): I rise today to pay tribute to Laurie Pallett, who is with us in the members' gallery, as she moves on from her position as executive director of the Mississauga Arts Council. Under Laurie's leadership currently more than 100 performing groups, 45 visual arts groups, 22 ethnic groups and several literary and multicultural groups are organized under the Mississauga Arts Council. She is a true cheerleader for local artists. Laurie has inspired hundreds of people in the community through commitment to the arts throughout her 17 years with the Mississauga Arts Council and has been an integral part of the establishment of major milestones in the history of the arts in Mississauga.

Laurie was also instrumental in the founding of the Living Arts Centre, a world-renowned state-of-the-art facility for the performing arts and visual arts in Mississauga. She recently took centre stage herself at the Living Arts Centre, picking up a Paul Harris Fellowship Award from the Mississauga Rotary Club.

Tomorrow evening I'll be joining Laurie's friends, family, arts council members and colleagues to thank her for her many years of service. I'd like to welcome Laurie Pallett to Queen's Park today. Please join me in wishing her all the best as she moves to meet new challenges in her career. Thank you, Laurie.

GREATER NAPANEE

Mrs Leona Dombrowsky (Hastings-Frontenac-Lennox and Addington): I would like to take this opportunity to make the Legislature aware of one of eastern Ontario's finest treasures, the municipality of greater Napanee.

Monday's Toronto Star business section featured a full-length article about this wonderful location for urban alternatives. Fishermen already know Napanee as the walleye capital of Canada. However, the local BIA and the economic development office want Ontarians to know what else this historic community has to offer.

Under the guidance of a dynamic business improvement association, Napanee is revitalizing its downtown and enhancing its image as a place where you can get away from it all and still have it all. Eighteen businesses have recently opened or expanded in the town, including a tea room, a stained-glass shop and a financial services office. Napanee wants its downtown to be a tourist destination, an expression of the community and a place for growth. Several beautification initiatives are also restoring the community's historic charm.

I can personally vouch for the welcoming nature of this quaint community because in June of this year I established my constituency office in the downtown and have been very warmly welcomed there. Today I am pleased to welcome a group of students from Centre Hastings Secondary School in the public gallery. This group has come to the legislature from Madoc and we welcome the students today.

DAVID BRIDEL

Mr Bart Maves (Niagara Falls): I am pleased to inform the Legislature that on November 10 this year the most courageous police officers in Ontario were honoured in a ceremony here at Queen's Park. The Honourable Hilary M. Weston, Lieutenant Governor of Ontario, and Dave Tsubouchi, Solicitor General, awarded the Ontario Medal for Police Bravery in the main lobby of the Legislative Building.

This year, seven police officers received the province's highest honour for bravery in their profession. I'm proud to stand in the House today and inform colleagues that one of the recipients was Constable David Bridel of the Niagara Regional Police Service.

On the morning of August 30, 1998, police officers responded to a 911 call involving a motor vehicle accident in St Catharines. The accident had left a truck on its side and in flames in the roadway with the driver still trapped inside. Constable Bridel needed to climb into the rear of the still-burning vehicle to cut the driver's lap belt. Constable Bridel was able to free the driver and managed to drag the victim out through the back of the vehicle to safety.

Constable Bridel was recognized for the perilous situation he placed himself in to save the life of the driver. I want to thank Constable Bridel for his demonstrated bravery and his continuing dedicated work with the Niagara Regional Police Service.

MICHAEL IRWIN

Mr Steve Peters (Elgin-Middlesex-London): I'm very proud that a monument will be raised dedicated to the police officers in this province who have lost their lives in the line of duty. In the throne speech, the government mentioned the case of Barbara Irwin, whose husband was shot and killed while protecting the safety of the people of Ontario. However, the government has not cast attention on the fate of Barbara's son, Michael Irwin. Michael was also a police officer.

While serving the people of Ontario, Mr Irwin shattered both his knees pursuing a criminal who had stolen a truck and robbed a store. A specialist informed him that he would never walk again.

Officer Irwin was eventually transferred to the Ontario Police College as a firearms instructor. However, the barriers he faced as a person with a disability, combined with the constant pain in his knees, made the job an

uphill battle. Eventually Michael had to give in and resign his position.

What has the government done for Officer Irwin, a fallen member of our province's police force? A 53% disability pension. This officer has gotten no settlement from the police force or the province. When the time came to make his home wheelchair-accessible, the province left him with a \$53,000 debt.

The former Solicitor General said that this case would be a priority. I have the details of the case here and I hope that the new Solicitor General will take a personal interest. As someone who has defended our safety and our property, giving his own health for us, Mr Irwin deserves better treatment than this.

I will close with Michael Irwin's own words: "Being a police officer was the only job that I ever wanted. I was happiest on the road and loved helping people. Now I am the one needing help."

NORTHUMBERLAND CHRISTMAS LIGHTS

Mr Doug Galt (Northumberland): I rise in the House today to bring to your attention the sea of colour and beauty that arrive in Northumberland each year during the holiday season.

With the intention of warming people's spirits, the town of Campbellford-Seymour has erected more than 100 light displays in Old Mill Park along the historic Trent Canal.

The Showcase of Lights officially opens on Saturday evening, the highlight being the giant illuminated \$2 coin.

Last Friday, Christmas Magic arrived in the town of Cobourg. The historic Victoria Hall and Victoria Park are brought to life with a festive light display.

Last Sunday evening the special lights came on in the town of Brighton.

In Port Hope the historic surroundings of this community are also complemented. Thousands of colourful lights honour the majestic town hall and the bandshell to celebrate the holiday season.

These named communities, along with the many others, are indeed to be congratulated. Their efforts serve to enlighten the festive spirit and to help us shed the dismal feelings that the onslaught of winter generally brings.

I take this opportunity to encourage everyone to come to Northumberland and take just a few moments to enjoy the displays, the surroundings and the wonderful hospitality that are offered in that county.

OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH AND SAFETY

Mr David Christopherson (Hamilton West): I rise today to pay tribute to Trish Balon and the labour movement she was a part of. This morning Trish Balon was laid to rest. She died of breast cancer. She was a mother of three and only 36 years old.

Trish found out in 1994 that she indeed had breast cancer, and within 18 months she discovered that eight

co-workers were also diagnosed with cancer. That's when her real fight began. In fact her fight was so well known and so well respected that *Chatelaine* magazine named her Woman of the Year in 1998.

Trish's name was mentioned yesterday at the Ontario Federation of Labour convention meeting this week, when they were dealing with their policy paper, Occupational Disease: Shifting the Burden. Trish's name was mentioned along with those of many other brave workers who have died because of exposures in the workplace, and we know what's happening in Sarnia right now, as we speak.

This government's agenda has been one of attacking and taking away those things that protect the health of workers in the workplace, not the least of which is that you're killing the Workplace Health and Safety Agency, dismantling the WCB and, probably most awful of all, destroying the Occupational Disease Panel. As a result, labour will respond and rise to the occasion. Labour is going to create their own royal commission to make the linkages between these exposures and workers who are dying in the workplace, and they ought not to be.

1350

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

BLUE MOUNTAIN VILLAGE ASSOCIATION ACT, 1999

Mr Murdoch moved first reading of the following bill:
Bill Pr14, An Act respecting Blue Mountain Village Association.

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

GAS PRICE WATCHDOG ACT, 1999

LOI DE 1999 SUR L'AGENT DE SURVEILLANCE DES PRIX DU CARBURANT

Mr Colle moved first reading of the following bill:
Bill 18, An Act respecting the Price of Motor Vehicle Fuel and the appointment of a Gas Price Watchdog /
Projet de loi 18, Loi concernant le prix du carburant pour véhicules automobiles et la nomination d'un agent de surveillance des prix du carburant.

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

A short explanation by the member.

Mr Mike Colle (Eglinton-Lawrence): Mr Speaker, the main purpose of the bill is to ensure that retailers, wholesalers and manufacturers of motor vehicle fuel be accountable to the public with respect to the pricing of this fuel.

The bill would establish the office of gas price watchdog, to be appointed by the Lieutenant Governor in

Council. The gas price watchdog would monitor and report to the minister on pricing practices in the province with respect to motor vehicle fuel and conduct inquiries into pricing practices on the order of the minister.

DEFERRED VOTES

TAXPAYER PROTECTION AND BALANCED BUDGET ACT, 1999

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

Deferred vote on the motion for third reading of 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 7, 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 Speaker (Hon Gary Carr): Call in the members. This will be a five-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1354 to 1359.

The Speaker: All those in favour of the motion will please rise.

Ayes

Agostino, Dominic	Ecker, Janet	Mushinski, Marilyn
Arnott, Ted	Elliott, Brenda	Newman, Dan
Baird, John R.	Galt, Doug	O'Toole, John
Barrett, Toby	Gerretsen, John	Ouellette, Jerry J.
Bartolucci, Rick	Gill, Raminder	Parsons, Ernie
Beaubien, Marcel	Guzzo, Garry J.	Peters, Steve
Bountrogiani, Marie	Hardeman, Ernie	Phillips, Gerry
Boyer, Claudette	Harris, Michael D.	Pupatello, Sandra
Brown, Michael A.	Hastings, John	Ramsay, David
Bryant, Michael	Hoy, Pat	Runciman, Robert W.
Caplan, David	Johns, Helen	Ruprecht, Tony
Chudleigh, Ted	Johnson, Bert	Sampson, Rob
Clark, Brad	Kells, Morley	Sergio, Mario
Cleary, John C.	Klees, Frank	Skarica, Toni
Clement, Tony	Kwinter, Monte	Snobelen, John
Coburn, Brian	Lalonde, Jean-Marc	Sterling, Norman W.
Colle, Mike	Levac, David	Stewart, R. Gary
Conway, Sean G.	Marland, Margaret	Stockwell, Chris
Cordiano, Joseph	Martiniuk, Gerry	Tascona, Joseph N.
Crozier, Bruce	Maves, Bart	Tilson, David
Cunningham, Dianne	Mazzilli, Frank	Tsubouchi, David H.
DeFaria, Carl	McGuinty, Dalton	Turnbull, David
Di Cocco, Caroline	Molinari, Tina R.	Wettlaufer, Wayne
Dombrowsky, Leona	Munro, Julia	Witmer, Elizabeth
Duncan, Dwight	Murdoch, Bill	Wood, Bob
Dunlop, Garfield		

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

Nays

Bisson, Gilles	Hampton, Howard	Marchese, Rosario
Christopherson, David	Kormos, Peter	Martel, Shelley
Churley, Marilyn	Lankin, Frances	Martin, Tony

Clerk of the House (Mr Claude L. DesRosiers): The ayes are 76; the nays are 9.

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried. Be it resolved that the bill is now passed.

Ms Marilyn Churley (Broadview-Greenwood): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: On this 10th anniversary of the resolution put forward by Ed Broadbent in the House of Commons to eradicate child poverty by the year 2000, I ask for unanimous consent for all-party statements to confirm our commitment to eradicating child poverty in Ontario.

The Speaker: Is there unanimous agreement? I am afraid I heard some noes.

ORAL QUESTIONS

ONTARIANS WITH DISABILITIES LEGISLATION

Mr Dalton McGuinty (Leader of the Opposition): My first question is for the Premier. This afternoon we'll be debating a motion put forward by the Liberal caucus in the name of Steve Peters, our critic for disabled issues. The motion calls for the enactment of an Ontarians with Disabilities Act no later than two years from today's date.

This will afford you a third occasion to endorse a motion that is going to be adopted by this House. The last two times this motion was adopted—unanimously, by the way—you did nothing. Ontario's disabled now know that the single greatest barrier they face in reaching their full potential is not their disability; it is your inability to keep your promise.

We've got the technology today to overcome virtually every conceivable disability. All we need is a Premier with the integrity to follow through on his promise and the leadership to get the job done.

Will you show your integrity? Will you take some leadership and pass a real Ontarians with Disabilities Act today?

Hon Michael D. Harris (Premier): I don't believe we're in a position to pass an act today. I think that was the question. There is no act before us today. What we have, though, is a government, for the first time in the history of Canada, that had the courage (a) to commit to an act and (b) to bring forward a piece of legislation to the Legislature. When some of the groups for the disabled, who must have been sorely disappointed that the Liberals for five years did nothing, that the NDP for five years did nothing, that no other government in Canada had the courage either to commit to or bring forward a bill—we said, "Just being the first, the best and the most comprehensive in Canada is not good enough." So we complied with the wishes of the disabled community and those who support it and said, "We'd like some more time."

The Speaker (Hon Gary Carr): The Premier's time is expired.

Mr McGuinty: I'll do the Premier a favour. Since he forgets his record, I will remind him of his record. Five years ago, you delivered a written promise to pass an Ontarians with Disabilities Act in the first term of office, and you did nothing. In fact, you did something worse than that. You introduced a sham, a gutless and toothless bill, which was an embarrassment and an insult to the 1.5 million Ontarians who have disabilities. That's the record. That's exactly what you did.

We have put forward another resolution. We intend to keep bringing this matter forward again and again, Premier. When are you going to have the decency to honour a commitment that you made over five years ago?

Hon Mr Harris: I reiterate for the Liberal Party, who are johnny-come-latelies to a disabilities act, that yes, we committed to a bill; yes, we honoured the commitment and introduced it in the Legislature; yes, we had the courage when those groups said: "We'd like the bill to be more comprehensive or changed here or changed there. We'd like some time for some more consultations." Not only did we have the courage to be the first in Canada, to be the first Legislature—and I know the Liberals looked at it. It's in the records in the ministry—

Interjections.

The Speaker: Please take a seat. The member for Windsor West, please come to order. I cannot hear the Premier's answer.

Hon Mr Harris: I know the Liberals looked at it when they were in office. The records are in the ministry. You rejected it. You said, "Oh, too difficult to do; too expensive to do; not a priority for Liberals." I know the New Democratic Party did the same, "Too expensive to do; not a priority for New Democrats." We accepted the challenge, and we will meet the challenge, just as we have with cutting taxes, with bringing excellence in education, with revamping the health care system. We accept—

The Speaker: Order. Premier, time.

Mr McGuinty: You continue to insult the 1.5 million Ontarians who have disabilities. If you wanted to act in a flash, you could. That's what you did when it came to 200 squeegee kids in downtown Toronto. You had that law on the books and passed in short order. But now, when it comes to dealing with 1.5 million Ontarians who suffer from disabilities—and remember, Premier, they're not asking for goodwill here. These are people of ability, who merely want a place at the table, who want to make a contribution, and you are the guy who stands between them and making a contribution to the Ontario economy. This is a lot more than just social policy; it's good economic policy. If you had a feeling for what's happening in this province, you would understand that.

Premier, I want you to stand up now and explain one more time to the disabled community why you are continuing to let them down.

Hon Mr Harris: The overwhelming vast majority in the disabled community understands very well that this is

the first government with the courage to actually come forward, commit to a bill and to bring a bill before the House. I would not say it is unanimous. I don't expect unanimity; I don't expect everyone to agree. But I think there is unanimity in the fact of this: The Liberal Party didn't have the courage, the NDP didn't have the courage and this party, this team of men and women, had the courage to say, "As challenging as it is, as difficult as it is, we're going to strive to bring forward a bill for the disabled of this province, and we're prepared to lead Canada in that."

I understand you have a resolution today. You committed in the campaign three years; the New Democratic Party two years. I understand you're playing catch-up with the New Democratic Party. We all know the hokey politics you play. We know the hokey politics of your resolution today. Now you've caught up to the NDP, a party that did nothing, just like you did when you had the chance.

1410

GASOLINE PRICES

Mr Dalton McGuinty (Leader of the Opposition): My second question is to the Premier. Premier, I've got a question for you and it's about gas gouging and buck passing. You are passing the buck, as is your wont, in keeping with your nature, to the federal government while Ontario motorists continue to be gouged by gas companies, people who prime your fundraising pump on an ongoing basis. When are you going to stand up and take some leadership and defend the interests of Ontario motorists?

Hon Michael D. Harris (Premier): I think we should put a few things on the record today. When the Liberals were in office, on January 1, 1988, the gas tax was 8.3 cents a litre; they hiked gas taxes on April 1, 1988, to 9.3 cents a litre; they hiked gas taxes again in 1989 to 10.3 cents; they hiked gas taxes again on January 1, 1990, to 11.3 cents per litre.

The one thing there is undeniable full control of within the provincial jurisdiction is the provincial taxes. Your record was to hike them; our record was to freeze them. For the first time in the history of this province we have a government that has not increased gas taxes the way you did.

Mr McGuinty: Gas prices have gone up 20 cents a litre on your watch, Premier, and now what you are effectively saying is that you are washing your hands of this, that there is nothing you can do. Ontario consumers are not only getting hosed at the pump, they're getting hosed by their own Premier, a guy who refuses to stand up for their interests.

Twenty cents a litre, Premier, translates into an additional \$8 million in costs for Ontario motorists every single day. That's \$240 million every month. If you go through four and a half months, Ontario motorists are paying another \$1 billion.

They're looking to you, Premier, to stand up and protect their interests. We've put forward three solid ideas—you can pick any one of them—that will help defend the interests of Ontario motorists. Premier, again, when are you going to stand up and start protecting the interests of Ontario motorists?

Hon Mr Harris: I think it's important for Ontario motorists to understand that when you were in government you had the opportunity and you did nothing to protect consumers. In fact, what you did is you gouged consumers. You not only increased income taxes to record levels, you not only increased sales taxes, but you increased gas taxes as well. The one thing that a provincial government has control over with gas prices is provincial gas taxes. Your record is very clear.

Let's look as well at what happened when we got Liberals in Ottawa. What kind of ilk do we have there? In 1995, from 8.5 cents to 10 cents a litre. Ottawa also decided to apply the GST to gas tax—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon Gary Carr): Premier, take your seat. I cannot hear the Premier's answer and I need to be able to hear the Premier's answer. Thank you. Premier.

Hon Mr Harris: The Liberal record on gas is clear: Do nothing, whine, bitch, bellyache and hike taxes as high as you can in Queen's Park and in Ottawa.

The Speaker: Order. I would ask the Premier to withdraw that comment.

Hon Mr Harris: I will withdraw that comment and double the bellyache.

Mr McGuinty: I can see that this is just not that big an issue for the Premier. Premier, may I suggest that one of these days you physically remove yourself from your chauffeur-driven car, get into your own car, drive into a gas station, approach the kiosk and find out how much Ontario motorists are getting hosed. If you are so distant from Ontario motorists, so removed from what's going on in real Ontario that you don't understand how pressing an issue this is for Ontario motorists, we do. We put forward three solid ideas: You can outlaw predatory gas pricing, you can appoint a watchdog with the clout to protect consumers, and you can protect whistle-blowers who expose price fixing.

Premier, you can stand up for Ontarians by passing our bill today. I'm telling you, stop passing the buck and pass a law here in Ontario that protects our motorists.

Hon Mr Harris: I understand there is a leadership review this weekend, and I understand on the road from Damascus—I understand the inaction of the Liberal Party. Your only record on gas prices is the same as on sales tax, the same as on income tax, the same as on corporate tax: to increase taxes.

We have taken definitive action. We froze taxes for the first time in the history of this Legislature. Then, today, we passed a historic piece of legislation, third reading, to make sure that no government this century or next century, this millennium or the next millennium, can ever again rip off the taxpayers the way the Liberal Party and the New Democratic Party did in this province.

SPORTS FACILITY TAXATION

Mr Howard Hampton (Kenora-Rainy River): My question is for the Premier. With Liberal support, you've just passed legislation that will require future governments to hold a referendum before they make tax changes. But at the same time, you're going to give millionaire NHL hockey franchises \$16 million in tax subsidies, and you admit, and your finance minister admits, that those tax subsidies will require other taxpayers to pay higher taxes.

Premier, if you think referenda are a good idea, why don't you hold a referendum on forcing other taxpayers to pay higher taxes in order to give NHL millionaires more money?

Hon Michael D. Harris (Premier): I appreciate the question. It's a very thoughtful question. It demonstrates an understanding that if you cut taxes in one area, you either have to reduce spending or you have to increase taxes in another area. It's something the Liberals never seemed to understand when they were in office.

I can tell you that we have offered a potential tax break, if you like, to no NHL team in Ontario. What we have offered is to owners of facilities, where they are public arenas, if they have been built at private-sector expense instead of completely built at taxpayer expense the way most of them are. There are four such facilities in this province that accommodate all kinds of activities, not just professional hockey but concerts and other activities. We have offered the municipalities an option to put them on a level playing field. In Ottawa-Carleton, this would mean, should they opt to do that, the other taxpayers will have to make a decision and increase their taxes in support of having this Core!—

The Speaker (Hon Gary Carr): The Premier's time. Supplementary.

Mr Hampton: You can try to disguise this however you wish. I had a debate with the owner of the Ottawa Senators last week, and he recognizes this for what it is. He says very clearly that this is going to be a tax subsidy for NHL hockey teams.

He also said that he's not done yet. He intends to go to the municipality and he intends to go to the federal government and perhaps back to you and ask for even more money.

All we need to do is look at the Winnipeg Jets. We know where this leads. First they wanted \$2 million. They got it. Then they asked for \$20 million. They got it. Then they asked for \$50 million. They got it. Then they left town and now they're down in Phoenix asking taxpayers there for a US\$330-million subsidy.

1420

Premier, you have clearly started us on a slippery slope. What I'm asking you is this: Before you get us into this subsidy game where NHL hockey franchises keep coming back and asking for more tax subsidies, will you at least follow your own instincts and hold a referendum, hold public hearings—

The Speaker: Premier.

Hon Mr Harris: As this is not within our hands, because we don't intend to increase anybody's taxes, it would be within the purview of the municipal government, in whose hands this is now, to hold a referendum. We would certainly encourage them either to hold a referendum or ensure there is public support for whichever action they take.

I want to say, with reference to your comments about the owner of the Ottawa Senators, we know that at this moment in time the ownership of the Senators is tied in with the ownership of the Corel Centre. We have no idea if that will be the case in the future, but I can say unequivocally that if they wish to ask the federal government for money, Minister Manley has said, "Yes"; "No"; "Maybe"; "I'm the champion"; "No, I'm not"; "Who knows?" Who knows what the Liberals will say, but that will be up to the Liberals in Ottawa. Any further subsidy from the municipal government will be up to them. Any subsidy from us for an NHL team, the answer has been flat out, "No."

Mr Hampton: Premier, you can try to disguise this any way you wish. You know that your bill provides for municipal subsidy, and then you are also going to subsidize them off the education portion of the property tax, money that would go to education. Since I think I heard you say you're not going to increase anyone else's taxes to subsidize NHL millionaires, that can only mean further cuts. That can only mean taking money away from some of the public necessities.

I've got another proposition for you, Premier. Since this means taking money away from education and other public necessities, how about doing something to replace some of that money? I even brought you an Ottawa Senators shirt. You can wear it.

The Speaker: Take your seat, member. The member will know you're not allowed to use props.

Leader of the third party.

Mr Hampton: Premier, if you want the Ottawa Senators shirt, here's the proposition. We know this either means other taxpayers paying more taxes or it means cuts to other public necessities. You can have the Ottawa Senators shirt. We'll hold a charity shootout and we can give the proceeds to the United Way or something. But your government has to do something to replace the money that's going to be lost if you're going to give tax subsidies to NHL millionaire hockey franchises. Which is it? Are you going to cut them or are you going to replace the money? Here's a proposition to replace the money. What's your answer?

Interjections.

Hon Mr Harris: No, no, listen, I don't know why the Liberals mock the NDP when they come up with a constructive suggestion and an idea to help the people of this province.

Let me commit to you a couple of public policy things, since that was in your question. Let me commit to you this: It should, the municipality, and we don't know whether it will. We've had a pretty clear indication from Toronto, but should the municipality of Ottawa-Carleton

or Kanata opt to put the tax situation at the Corel Centre on a more level playing field with other arenas across the province? And that will affect the education portion, which you know we've frozen for the first time in the history of this province. I commit to you this: Not one penny as a result of that will be cut out of any government program here in Ontario. I can commit that to you because now we're going into a decade of budgetary surpluses in Ontario for the first time certainly in recent—

The Speaker: Order. The Premier's time is up.

Interjections.

The Speaker: Order. The Premier will know that he has about a minute. I would appreciate it if, when I call order, he would take his seat.

New question, leader of the third party.

Mr Hampton: I would say, Premier, you'd have us believe that the money is going to come from thin air. It's either going to come from someone else paying higher taxes or it's going to come from someone else being cut.

CHILD POVERTY

Mr Howard Hampton (Kenora-Rainy River): My next question is also for the Premier. I want to ask you about another difficult question. Today is the 10th anniversary of the House of Commons resolution that aimed to eliminate child poverty by the year 2000. As we reflect on your government, your government has put in place measures that have actually increased child poverty. Let me give you one example: Your 22% cut to social assistance involved a very heavy cut to the shelter allowance subsidy. Meanwhile, you've all but eliminated rent controls such that rent has gone up by 13% over the last two years.

Premier, how do you justify putting in place policies which cut the shelter allowance for families and children and, meanwhile, you put in place policies which raise the rents by 13% in two years?

Hon Michael D. Harris (Premier): The Minister of Community and Social Services can answer.

Hon John R. Baird (Minister of Community and Social Services, minister responsible for francophone affairs): The welfare of young children living in poverty is obviously a tremendous priority for everyone in Ontario. It's a priority for this government, it's a priority for the federal government, for the municipal governments, for the private sector and for volunteer organizations.

We believe there are a whole host of things we can do to help raise the standard of living of children. We're putting more money towards children's aid societies; we're putting more money to support services for children, Healthy Babies, Healthy Children, more money for autistic children, more money in children's mental health. We also know that the single greatest thing we can do for a child living in poverty is to help their parents get a job. That's why economic growth and job creation is a tremendous priority for this government. That's why our

number one priority since we were elected is the creation of jobs. While more than 600,000 jobs have been created, that's not enough. We realize we've got more work to do, and that's why we're committed to a growing Ontario economy, to create more hope and more opportunity.

Mr Hampton: We're talking about children here, Minister. While you brag, the fact of the matter is that child poverty is growing faster in this province than anywhere else in Canada and child poverty is a bigger problem today than it has ever been in Ontario.

The question was very simple. You've done away with rent controls. That has forced rents up by literally 15% over the last two years. At the same time, you cut the shelter allowance, which means that poor families have less money to pay for rent when the rent is increasing. A very simple suggestion was put forward by Anne Golden: Will you raise the shelter allowance portion of social assistance so that it equals 85% of the average rent, so that children will at least have a roof over their heads? Would you do just that simple thing to start to deal with the problem?

Hon Mr Baird: Addressing child poverty is a priority of this government. Children at risk need a whole host of specialized services to improve their lives. With respect to social assistance rates, our rates in Ontario are substantially higher than the average of the other nine provinces. They're a tremendous priority. No level of poverty is acceptable. That's why we're providing an economic growth agenda to try to provide more jobs to people in their community. We also provide a whole host of opportunities: \$2.5 million provided annually for the child nutrition partnership, to create 756 child nutrition programs; the Healthy Babies, Healthy Children program, providing \$57 million in funding this year; \$5 million provided to the Better Beginnings, Better Futures program, providing programs to more than 4,000 children across the province; a \$10-million grant to the Invest in Kids Foundation, to support early intervention initiatives for high-risk children; an additional \$170 million for child welfare, to help our children's aid societies protect children. Children are a tremendous priority of this government and we're looking—

The Speaker (Hon Gary Carr): Time.

1430

GASOLINE PRICES

Mr Mike Colle (Eglinton-Lawrence): I have a question for the Minister of Consumer and Commercial Relations. Gas prices continue to soar across Ontario as we speak. All you have done so far is to blame, whine and finger-point at the feds, and you set up your worthless, pass-the-buck committee which will study the issue for another six months.

Minister, why won't you act to protect Ontario consumers? Why are you so afraid and unwilling to take on the big oil companies? Why don't you use your power to freeze and roll back gas prices just like Bill Davis did in 1975? When are you going to stand up for the consumer

and bring these oil companies to account just like Bill Davis did in 1975?

Hon Robert W. Runciman (Minister of Consumer and Commercial Relations): The only things reminiscent of 1975 are Gerry Phillips's ties and the fact that the Liberals are going through a leadership review again.

Interjections.

Hon Mr Runciman: We're trying to be very constructive in this exercise. We're not simply playing the blame game, like other governments before us. We're trying to offer a very significant look at the gasoline pricing situation in Ontario.

We have appointed four outstanding members of this assembly—Mr Tascona and Mr O'Toole, who are co-chairing; Mr Newman and Mr Chudleigh, who will be supporting—and we're going to be reporting back to the government and to the assembly and to the federal government and other jurisdictions by May of this—

The Speaker (Hon Gary Carr): The minister's time. Supplementary.

Mr Colle: Since July 3, Ontario motorists are being gouged up to \$6 million a day because of the price hike brought about by the big oil companies, and all you've done is blame Ottawa.

You have the legislative power to protect consumers. For the last four years we have introduced three bills to stop the gouging. We don't need six more months of study and finger pointing. Your pass-the-buck committee is a sham, an excuse to do nothing. The jump in gas prices is a windfall for big oil companies at the expense of Ontario consumers.

Again, why don't you do what Bill Davis did in 1975, stand up to the oil companies and protect Ontario motorists?

Hon Mr Runciman: There has never been an investigative review of gasoline pricing in Ontario under the Liberals or under the NDP. Despite what the member is suggesting here, I go back a long way in this assembly, and in 1986, when I was the critic for consumer and commercial relations, I asked the then Treasurer to have a special debate. Mr Nixon at the time said, "That's not an important enough issue for this assembly to deal with." Later that year I asked the question—

Interjections.

The Speaker: Minister, please take your seat. Order. I cannot hear the answer. Minister.

Hon Mr Runciman: Later that year, 1986, I asked the Minister of Consumer and Commercial Relations, Mr Kwinter, to conduct an investigative review of gasoline pricing in Ontario. His response at the time was, "It's a federal problem; it has nothing to do with the province." Get your act together.

Interjections.

Mr Monte Kwinter (York Centre): On a point of order, Speaker: I have framed in my den at the moment the exchange that took place between Mr Runciman and myself, and at that time his answer was in fact that he could do nothing about it when he was the minister.

The Speaker: That is not a point of order.

Interjections.

The Speaker: Order.

Mr James J. Bradley (St Catharines): On a point of order, Speaker: I'd like to ask for unanimous consent from the House to allow the minister to have more time to answer the question, to tell us whether he'll pass my bill.

The Speaker: Unanimous consent? I heard some noes.

COST OF ELECTRIC POWER

Mr Garry J. Guzzo (Ottawa West-Nepean): My question is for the Minister of Energy, Science and Technology. Municipal utilities all across the province are accusing this government of forcing them to make huge profits by gouging customers, not unlike the oil companies, and leaving them no choice but to raise rates. How do you reply to these outrageous misstatements of fact?

Hon Jim Wilson (Minister of Energy, Science and Technology): I thank the member for Ottawa West-Nepean for the question, because all members, I think, see in their local papers and through the media that our public utilities commissions or municipal electric utilities are all dreaming up various schemes on how they might make a cash grab out of their electrical utilities. I simply want to reiterate to the honourable member, the members of this chamber and to the mayors and councils across this province that there is nothing in Bill 35, the Energy Competition Act, that would drive up prices.

This whole restructuring of the electricity system and bringing in true competition beginning next year is all about increasing our competitiveness, having the lowest possible prices and ensuring that we attract even more jobs and build on the record job creation that has occurred in this province under the leadership of Mike Harris and this government.

I warn municipal leaders not to do anything that would drive up local distribution costs. At the end of the day, there's only one electricity customer and that customer—

The Speaker (Hon Gary Carr): Minister, it's time. Supplementary?

Mr Guzzo: Currently, decisions being made by municipalities in and around the Ottawa-Carleton area will see them cash in on a huge windfall, ignoring the advice of the Ministry of Municipal Affairs to wait until local restructuring decisions have been made. Recently, the regional chair in Ottawa-Carleton, my predecessor of happy memory in the Ottawa West part of my riding, has said that action is needed to prevent the balkanization of hydroelectric assets.

What are you prepared to do to ensure that local politicians don't try to bail themselves out of their financial mistakes by stealing money from electricity customers, creating huge election slush funds for themselves and blaming this government?

Hon Mr Wilson: Again it's an excellent question from my colleague. I'll remind all honourable members

that Mr Laughren, who was appointed by this government as the chair of the Ontario Energy Board to protect consumers, has made it very clear that he and the Ontario Energy Board, as the regulator, will not tolerate a cash grab and will not tolerate any actions by municipalities that will drive up local distribution costs unnecessarily.

There are four principles, which I want to ensure all members are aware of, contained in the energy board guidelines, which are available to municipalities, the draft guidelines now and the final guidelines in a few days. The four principles are to protect consumers, facilitate competition, provide non-discriminatory access and promote economic efficiency.

My challenge to the municipal electric utilities, given that there are still 250 MEUs in this province, that's 10 times more than in the rest of Canada combined, is: Show some backbone and come to this government with a plan to lower your costs.

ONTARIO DISABILITY SUPPORT PROGRAM

Mr Steve Peters (Elgin-Middlesex-London): My question is for the Minister of Community and Social Services. On November 9, I had the opportunity to meet with Penny Hartin, the executive director of the Canadian National Institute for the Blind, and tour their facilities. While on my visit there that day, she relayed to me a most disappointing fact. She would like to know something, and Ontario's thousands of people with visual impairments would like to know something: Why are the self-assessment application forms in the Ontario disability support program not available in Braille?

Hon John R. Baird (Minister of Community and Social Services, minister responsible for francophone affairs): Obviously, providing services to people with disabilities is a priority for the government, particularly under the Ontario disability support program. We proclaimed that new legislation just this past year, designed to provide a higher benefit rate for recipients, designed to provide greater employment supports. I will be very happy to take the issue back to the ministry. In fact, as the member opposite has suggested, I would think it would be a rather easy opportunity to pick the solution. I'll certainly commit the undertaking to the member opposite that we'll look into the matter and make the change if it's required.

1440

Mr Peters: This is not a new program. As you've just relayed to us, the program has been in place for over a year. You've been minister for over five months, and I appreciate your comments today.

Minister, there are copies of the resolution that I wrote two weeks ago already available in Braille. I wouldn't want any people attending the debate this afternoon to be unable to receive and read a copy of that motion. You've had years to put this application in Braille and your office and your department obviously haven't done that. Do you know what your staff is telling people? "Come in and

we'll fill out the forms for you. We'll treat you like an illiterate child and rob you of your dignity."

Minister, I appreciate your comments today because I believe you're doing the right thing, but I would really appreciate an apology to those visually impaired people who have been discriminated against by this government because of your thoughtlessness.

Hon Mr Baird: The Canadian National Institute for the Blind does some tremendous work around the province of Ontario. They provide a significant amount of good work to citizens in Ontario. They provide the government with a substantial amount of good advice. I certainly will commit and undertake to the House that I'll take the issue back to the ministry and we'll have the necessary forms put into Braille so that all Ontarians can take advantage of an outstanding program, the Ontario disability support program.

FISH AND WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT

Mr Bert Johnson (Perth-Middlesex): My question is for the Minister of Natural Resources. Like many Ontarians, I have been following closely the dispute between Minnesota and Ontario regarding walleye stocks in Lake of the Woods. I know that Minnesota has insisted on treating this conservation issue as a trade issue and that through the United States—

Interjections.

Mr Johnson: I'm sorry, do I have the floor? Well, then, keep quiet.

Interjections.

Mr Johnson: Well, shut up and listen then.

The Speaker (Hon Gary Carr): Member, it is not helpful when you yell across to other members to shut up. I will try to maintain order, but it's not helpful when you do that. Question?

Mr Johnson: I'm sorry I did that. I really apologize. I just didn't want to be interrupted continuously, that's all.

Through the United States trade representatives they were pushing a NAFTA challenge to gain open and unfettered access to the walleye on Ontario's side of the lake. Minister, can you update the House on this issue?

Hon John Snobelen (Minister of Natural Resources): I want to thank the member for Perth-Middlesex for the good question that was so eloquently put.

First and foremost, let me advise members of this chamber that the difference between Minnesota and Ontario in the conservation of walleye stock is the determination of Ontario anglers and Ontario tourist operators to protect our stocks now and for the future.

Sadly, the state of Minnesota and the United States government have viewed conservation efforts as a trade issue. In reviewing our regulations, we had three goals: to protect our walleye stocks in the Lake of the Woods area, to ensure that the regulation could not be positioned as a trade issue, and to ensure that the new regulation had the support of anglers in the Rainy Lake and Lake of the

Woods area. I am proud to say we've achieved all three goals.

Mr Johnson: Now that the trade issue has been resolved and you have established Ontario's right to manage its own natural resources as confirmed, what is the next step?

Hon Mr Snobelen: This is an important issue in natural resources and obviously an important issue for people in Ontario. I've said already there's a very big difference between the conservation efforts of anglers in Ontario and the conservation efforts of the people in the state of Minnesota. I am glad to say that during our discussions with the state of Minnesota we were able to point out to them that they had a daily catch limit in Minnesota of some 14 walleye, while the people of Ontario had a daily catch limit of four walleye—a big difference.

During this dispute and during our conversations, Minnesota made a key concession. They have agreed to lower their catch limit to put less pressure on the fish stocks in this very important area. I think that bodes well for the future of cooperation between Minnesota and Ontario, and well for those people who are interested in conservation.

ONTARIANS WITH DISABILITIES LEGISLATION

Ms Marilyn Churley (Broadview-Greenwood): My question is for the Premier. Today is the one-year anniversary of your government's pathetic excuse for the Ontarians with Disabilities Act. It was an embarrassment and an insult and another broken promise. Your government has continued to treat persons with disabilities like second-class citizens. As the NDP has pointed out repeatedly, the Ontario disability support program is in a state of chaos because of your mismanagement.

Premier, you're obsessed with cutting red tape for everybody else, but when it comes to persons with disabilities you are satisfied to create more barriers. A year has passed and all you can come up with is some vague promise of an action plan. Tell me why it is that your government can turn around record amounts of legislation overnight, but when it comes to the needs of 1.5 million Ontarians with disabilities you stall, delay and make excuses. Tell us why, Premier.

Hon Michael D. Harris (Premier): I'm surprised, actually, after the abysmal record that the Liberal Party has on this issue that they raised it and I'm surprised, after the abysmal record of your party, that you raise this issue.

Clearly this is a challenging issue, to find the right balance. Obviously, it is challenging and difficult, because if it was easy even you would have done it. Recognizing the challenges and the difficulties, just as we tackled the \$11-billion deficit you left us, just as we tackled the record-high taxes that were destroying any ability to have programs in this province, just as we tackled hospital restructuring that you and the Liberals talked about, we have tackled coming in with a meaning-

ful disabilities act, the first of its kind in the history of Canada. I would have thought you would have stood up and said, "Thank you, Premier, for having that courage."

Ms Churley: Premier, since you came to power in 1995, your government has made things worse for people with disabilities. You got rid of the NDP's Employment Equity Act and replaced it with nothing. Disabled people would be able to find work if you hadn't gotten rid of that act. You dumped our transportation accessibility programs. You've even cut the Human Rights Commission. On top of that, the Ontario disability support program is in a state of chaos.

Premier, don't you stand there today and tell me that our party did nothing. Your government has the worst record of any in the history of this province on disability issues. You're the government. You made the promise. You commit today to keep that promise. Enough of this nonsense.

Hon Mr Harris: Nice speech today in opposition, but here's your record in government: The last New Democrat who actually cared enough to bring something forward was Gary Malkowski. He brought a bill forward. We got it forward to committee. You had a majority government. Your government buried his bill, refused to carry it forward. You would not deal with it and you would not act on it.

Interjections: Shame.

Hon Mr Harris: "Shame" is right.

Now, the same Gary Malkowski has expressed concern. He would like to have a Premier with the courage to deal with the bill. This is the Gary Malkowski who came here of his own volition, now that he was no longer a member, probably discouraged with the New Democratic Party, and when we created a separate category and took those with disabilities out of welfare, stood up and said, "This move by Mike Harris and the Ontario Conservative Party is the best thing to happen to the disabled in my lifetime."

EDUCATION FUNDING

Mr John Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands): My question is to the Minister of Education. Last week, in a leaked cabinet document which you denied existed but the Minister of Colleges and Universities acknowledged indeed was a leaked document, your government proposed to cut a further \$800 million from our educational system. Senior officials of both my boards of education, both of which were cited by your Education Improvement Commission as excellent examples of being proactive and forward looking in such things as joint purchasing, transportation and even operating a joint school, say they cannot absorb any further cuts. This was confirmed by the report of the Education Improvement Commission as well. You did not announce those cuts, but, Minister, there is still a lot of fear and anxiety on the part of parents, teachers, students and the entire education community that you will make further cuts unannounced in the near future.

Will you categorically state in this House and to the people of Ontario that you have no plan, no intention and that there will be no further cuts to our publicly funded education system in Ontario?

Hon Janet Ecker (Minister of Education): With all due respect to the honourable member, I would ask him where he has been for a week, when this question was raised in the Legislature before and I answered it here, and I've answered it in the scrums and it has been in the media.

I would like to say, first of all, that I have never, ever made any comments about any kind of proposals that may or may not be before ministers or cabinet. I do not discuss that. It is not appropriate for ministers to discuss that. What I very clearly said, and I'll say it again, is that the Toronto Star article is not the government's plan. I authorized no such plan. It is not the government's plan.

I appreciate that there are circulation battles going on in this town, but when I went to journalism school they told me that a newspaper should check both sides of the story before they printed it. It might have been helpful if they'd done it on that paper.

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Mr Gerretsen: I take that as a no, that you will not have any further cuts to education in any way, shape or form during your mandate.

Senior officials in both of these boards of education, the Limestone and the Algonquin and Lakeshore boards, say that any further cuts in their funding will put at serious risk such programs as special education assistance, adult education, training programs, English as a second language and further losses in speech and pathology as well as clinical staff to the school boards. As a matter of fact, they say that any further cuts will marginalize the poor and those with the greatest education needs, especially those requiring special education assistance.

Will you confirm and categorically state once again, because I take it you've already stated it, that you will not cut education any further at any time during your mandate within the next four years?

Hon Mrs Ecker: I would caution the honourable member to stop scaremongering here and to stop going for cheap political headlines.

My commitment, and this government's commitment, to classroom education is exactly today as it was in 1995, as it was in 1999 and as it will be in the future of this government. Our goal is to have the strongest and best public education system that it is possible to have in this province. We have taken many steps to do that. We're improving the curriculum, we're having higher standards, we have testing of students, we'll be introducing testing of teachers, all of these goals. We are protecting funding for special education. We are taking all of these steps to improve public education in this province, and our commitment stands.

TRUCKING SAFETY

Mr Bart Maves (Niagara Falls): My question is for the Minister of Transportation. As you know, with our booming economy in Ontario, we've seen a large growth in trade and an increase in truck traffic crossing between Ontario and New York. In my riding, we have three bridges which see a lot of that truck traffic. We also have a big boom in tourism traffic, and of course that puts more cars on the road with those trucks.

Truck safety continues to be an issue that is of great concern to many of my constituents. During Remembrance Day week, I was on the Thursday in my own Legion, branch 479, and one of the ladies who talked to me that day said she loved the Premier, loved everything he was doing, but still had concerns about truck traffic in Ontario.

My constituents want to know that their government shares their concerns and is taking actions to ensure that our roads are safe. Last Friday, you attended a truck safety blitz in our region. What were the results of that safety blitz, and what are the results of other blitzes you've been doing around the province?

Hon David Turnbull (Minister of Transportation): That's a very good question from my colleague from Niagara. Indeed, our government takes truck safety extremely seriously. In our blitz on Friday, which I attended down in Welland, there were six MTO officers and five Niagara regional police officers. Some 44 charges were laid, of which 30 were for seat belt offences and nine were for equipment related offences.

If a truck has severe defects, the plates are taken from the truck. If the defects are critical, trucks are impounded for a minimum of 15 days.

Across the province since 1995, out-of-service rates have fallen by 42%. So our tough approach to trucking is paying off. We've taken tough action. I thank my colleague for the question.

Mr Maves: Minister, thank you for that update. I guess the answer shows us two things. One is that there has been a dramatic improvement across the province over the last four and a half years, and it also shows that there are still some unsafe trucks on the road. How is this government working to improve the safety on our highways by dealing with the very important issue of truck safety?

Hon Mr Turnbull: Our truck measures are the most stringent in the whole of North America. Our action on truck vehicles has included commercial vehicle impoundment. We're now operating 10 of our inspection stations 24 hours a day. We have absolute liability laws for wheel separations of \$50,000; that's the highest fine. The highest fines in North America are in this province for other safety-related offences on trucks at \$20,000.

We're proceeding with the carrier safety rating system, and of course I have announced a five-point action plan for road safety in this province, including 21 additional MTO enforcement officers in southwestern Ontario.

Out-of-service rates have reduced by 42% since 1995. Safety is our top priority.

DOCTOR SHORTAGE

Mr Pat Hoy (Chatham-Kent Essex): My question is to the Minister of Health. You are aware that for the first time, the doctor shortage in southwestern Ontario is the worst in the province. For the past four years I have been urging your government to introduce meaningful incentives to attract doctors to southwestern Ontario, and you have failed. One day you acknowledge the shortage and the next day you say no, it's distribution. While you dither about the cause, the doctor shortage is getting worse.

Let me tell you what it means in my community.

A patient is faced with the choice of waiting for your government to take action or seeking treatment elsewhere. This is the reality. Judy Vanderpol is a sole-support mother of three who desperately needs reconstruction surgery for her hip that was replaced 14 years ago. She has stomach bleeding and GI problems from the morphine and Tylenol medication she must take to cope with the pain. She doesn't know how much longer she'll be able to continue work. Her appointment is not until October 30, 2000. That is totally outrageous.

Do you think it's acceptable, Minister, that patients like Judy are forced to seek timely treatment outside the province because you have constantly failed the patients of Ontario?

Hon Elizabeth Witmer (Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): I certainly share the concern of the member opposite. As the member well knows, this is an issue of long-standing concern. We do have an issue in this province of distribution. As you know, we have worked collectively and collaboratively with members in this House, we've worked with the Ontario Medical Association, in order to ensure that physicians can be encouraged to go to areas where they are most needed.

We have introduced incentives, we have introduced disincentives to physicians to stay in the overserved areas, and presently we are doing what no other government before us has done: We have asked Dr McKendry to examine the scope and the cause of the problem and come up with a report that will enable us to bring forward short- and long-term strategies in order that we can respond to all people in this province no matter where they live.

Mr Hoy: Minister, I don't want to hear about any more studies. Your solutions have failed. Only the policy you lifted from the Liberal election platform to pay for tuition fees for med students willing to practise in under-served areas can help. Yet you still float big stick approaches to beat up on doctors. Thank God you failed. Communities don't want indentured labour. There are many other solutions to attract doctors in our campaign document. When are you going to implement the rest of those?

1500

Hon Mrs Witmer: I would just like to correct the record. I believe it was our member, Mrs Johns, who brought forward the proposal whereby we would provide free tuition for medical students in order that upon graduation they would go to areas where they were most needed. I would also hasten to add that our government has not penalized physicians. Our government has worked very collaboratively with physicians in this province and we have brought forward many, many initiatives.

We have, of course, the 20 northern underserved communities that are getting additional money to retain physicians and also being provided with overhead costs. We have the \$70-an-hour sessional fee. We have the community development officer program. We have the medical service corps. We have the community-sponsored contracts. These are all incentives that are designed to encourage doctors to go to areas where they are most—

The Speaker (Hon Gary Carr): Order. The minister's time is up. New question.

GASOLINE PRICES

Mr Wayne Wettlaufer (Kitchener Centre): My question is for the Minister of Consumer and Commercial Relations. This morning, Ontarians woke up to more newspaper headlines and media stories about the soaring price of gasoline. Despite substantial price hikes at the pumps yesterday, again today petroleum analysts are warning consumers that gas prices may soon reach 70 cents a litre. Consumers and business people in Ontario do not need headlines to tell them that price instability for gasoline is unacceptable.

The petroleum industry spin doctors tell us that the cause of the most recent price hike is the international cost of fuel; it's rising. They fail to take into account that prices at the pumps were lower when the international costs were higher than they are today and my constituents are irate with this explanation.

Minister, unlike the Liberals, except for the member for York Centre, I realize that ensuring competition in the petroleum industry is within federal jurisdiction. Is there any action our government can take on behalf of consumers to ensure they are benefiting from the lowest possible prices for gas?

Hon Robert W. Runciman (Minister of Consumer and Commercial Relations): I want to thank the member for his genuine interest in this issue, unlike the members of the Liberal opposition.

The member makes the point that the gasoline market price is the responsibility of the federal government, and Dan McTeague, a Liberal MP, has been trying to make this case with his federal Liberal colleagues for a number of years now, supported by, I think, 47 Liberal backbenchers, to make the case for change to the federal Competition Act, but the Liberal government has refused up to this point.

My predecessor, Mr Tsubouchi, approached the federal government on numerous occasions in the last two years asking them to act and they continue to refuse, not only refusing the request of the provincial government in Ontario, but their own backbench. We have decided, faced with the refusal of the federal government, to act, to go outside the box to conduct—

The Speaker (Hon Gary Carr): Order. The minister's time is up. Supplementary.

Mr Wettlaufer: Price hikes at the gas pumps are infuriating my constituents. They view the petroleum industry as an uncontrolled oligopoly totally ignored by the federal government. I'm glad to see that we are not letting the federal government off the hook on this issue. I would like to be able to advise my constituents of some of the recommendations that the task force might make to the federal government. Are there any recommendations you could advise me of at this time?

Hon Mr Runciman: I don't want to prejudge the results of this review. This is going to be a very full and thorough review. We have some outstanding members of this assembly serving on the task force, and I want to say that this review is something that was called for by the leader of the official opposition in July of this year. Mr McGuinty asked for a review. We are following his advice. Unlike some members of his own caucus, we're following his advice and initiating this review.

It's regrettable that the Liberal opposition continues to try to make political hay of the situation, rather than dealing in a responsible and co-operative way with respect to addressing the concerns of consumers, not only in this province but right across our country.

We hope that by early next year we're going to be able to provide some very solid evidence and productive and workable recommendations and solutions to the federal Liberal government so they can no longer stonewall the consumers of Ontario.

The Speaker: The time for question period is over.

Mr James J. Bradley (St Catharines): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: I would like to ask for unanimous consent to give the member another minute to answer, so he can answer whether he's going to pass my gas pricing bill.

The Speaker: Unanimous consent? I heard some noes.

PETITIONS

GASOLINE PRICES

Mr Rick Bartolucci (Sudbury): This is a petition that has been duly certified by the table. It is to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas we, the consumers, feel gas prices are too high throughout Ontario;

"Whereas we, the consumers, support the Ontario Liberal caucus's attempt to have the Mike Harris

government introduce predatory gas pricing legislation” and the Gas Price Watchdog Act;

“Whereas we, the consumers, want the Mike Harris government to act so that the consumer can get a break at the pumps rather than going broke at them;

“Whereas we, the consumers, are fuming at being hosed at the pumps and want Mike Harris to gauge our anger;

“Furthermore we, the consumers, want Mike Harris to know we want to be able to go to the pumps and fill our gas tanks without emptying our pockets;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to introduce predatory gas pricing legislation” and the Gas Price Watchdog Act, 1999, “in order to control the amount of money we, the consumers, are forced to pay at the gas pumps.”

Because I am in agreement, I affix my signature.

HIGHWAY SAFETY

Mr Bill Murdoch (Bruce-Grey): I have a petition 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.”

MEDICAL LABORATORIES

Mr Monte Kwinter (York Centre): I have a petition to the Parliament of Ontario.

“Whereas the Ontario government has recently imposed a retroactive cap on revenue earned by medical laboratories for services provided under the health insurance plan; and

“Whereas the Ontario government has also required these businesses to refund revenue for services rendered in previous years where the amount of that amount revenue exceeds the retroactively imposed cap for those years; and

“Whereas this legislation amounts to expropriation of economic rights without adequate compensation or due process of law; and

“Whereas the greatest incentive to the provision of efficient and quality services and products by the private sector is competition and the ability to make a profit; and

“Whereas the removal of these incentives by government negatively affects all of society and particularly patients in need; and

“Whereas this type of legislation also unfairly discriminates against one sector of the society;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Parliament of Ontario as follows:

“That adequate protection of property rights is needed to ensure that government cannot erode the property rights of certain sectors of society without fair compensation and due process of law.”

This petition has been certified by the Clerk and I am pleased to present it.

PORNOGRAPHY

Mr Jean-Marc Lalonde (Glengarry-Prescott-Russell): I have a petition of concerned citizens of the Maxville area. It reads:

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas children are exposed to sexually explicit material in variety stores and video rental outlets;

“Whereas bylaws vary from city to city and have failed to protect minors from unwanted exposures to sexually explicit material;

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

“To enact legislation which will:

“Create uniform standards in Ontario to prevent minors from being exposed to sexually explicit material in retail establishments;

“Make it illegal to sell, rent, or loan sexually explicit materials to minors.”

This contains over 300 signatures and I too affix my signature to it.

1510

MARRIAGE

Mr David Tilson (Dufferin-Peel-Wellington-Grey): I have a certified petition. “This is a petition requesting the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to invoke section 33 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms in order to use the ‘notwithstanding clause’ to preserve provincial legislation threatened by the undemocratic Supreme Court decision to redefine the term ‘spouse.’”

EDUCATION FUNDING

Mr Tony Ruprecht (Davenport): I also have a certified petition today, stamped by the Clerk as valid. This petition goes to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario and reads as follows:

“Whereas the Ontario government’s decision to slash education funding could lead to the closure of many more neighbourhood schools, including one of the most community-oriented schools like Earls court Public School; and

“Whereas the present funding formula does not take into account the historic and cultural and demographic links that have communities connected to their areas 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 Earls court Public School is a community school with many links to the immediate neighbourhood, such as daycare, a games room, an open gym, fitness classes and a site for sports activities;

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

Since I agree with this petition, I am signing it as well.

OPPOSITION DAY

ONTARIANS WITH DISABILITIES LEGISLATION

LOI SUR LES PERSONNES HANDICAPÉES DE L'ONTARIO

Mr Steve Peters (Elgin-Middlesex-London): It gives me a great deal of pleasure today to move the following motion:

That an Ontarians with Disabilities Act that is strong and effective should be enacted no later than two years from today, November 23, 1999.

This resolution today is not about publicity and it’s not about which party has done what or has not done what. This resolution is about improving the lives of 1.5 million Ontario citizens.

Today is the first anniversary of the introduction of Bill 83. That was a piece of legislation that did not do justice to the idea of an Ontarians with Disabilities Act. However, we now have an opportunity to move beyond that bill and to set a deadline for the introduction of a strong, effective and enforceable Ontarians with Disabilities Act—an ODA with its own enforcement mechanism; an ODA with relevance to the private sector, government agencies and ministries; an ODA with some teeth.

Let me explain why this resolution must be passed today, and passed unanimously. Here are some basic facts that are beyond dispute. There are fully 1.5 million Ontarians right now who have a disability, and probably

many more. That number is growing because our society is aging. As each of us gets older, each of us is likely to get a disability. Looking at our future, the rate of children with disabilities is also growing significantly.

Disability touches everyone’s life, and getting rid of barriers facing Ontarians with disabilities should be everyone’s business. This is not a partisan issue. What party could possibly be in favour of preventing a person from getting a job and getting off social assistance? What MPP could vote to keep children from having a chance to educate themselves? Who could even consider voting to deny 1.5 million people the chance to participate in public life in Ontario? That is what a person would in effect be doing if they voted against this resolution today.

People with disabilities face unfair barriers every day of their lives, and Ontarians as a whole suffer as a result. They face barriers if they seek a job that they are qualified to do. They face barriers when they try to use services and facilities that others take for granted, like a bus, library, school, university or this very building. These barriers hurt us all. These barriers help no one. People with disabilities deserve to live in a province that is barrier-free.

When you walk into a skating rink to watch a child play hockey, count how many stairs you have to walk up. Think about the parent, though, who uses a wheelchair, who can never get to the rink to see their child play. Think about how a ramp would not be a costly modification to make, particularly if the building were designed to be accessible.

Consider the difficulties that a person with a visual handicap faces trying to work for a government ministry. Documents are rarely if ever available in Braille. Government Web sites are not designed to be read by audio reader computer programs. The elevators in most government buildings do not have Braille on the buttons to tell you the floors. This is how easy it would be to change things on a system-wide basis.

Children with hearing problems face a number of barriers in school. Because of a lack of qualified sign language interpreters, some students who are deaf have had to rely on unqualified, untrained interpreters such as family members and friends when they are at school. Teachers are given insufficient training to meet the needs of students with disabilities.

Even this building, designed to be open to all the people of Ontario, is closed to those with disabilities. Both the east and west doors are completely inaccessible to those with disabilities. The front doors are completely inaccessible. The only doors open to the public lead into the basement. What is the symbolism of that?

Sign language interpreters are difficult to find and expensive to hire. Ontario Interpreter Services for sign language interpretation are only available for certain types of appointments, and with a problematic time limit. Assistive listening devices are not routinely available in the House. Poor acoustics in this chamber tend to amplify background noise, making it very difficult for people who are hard of hearing. During question period, it is

almost impossible for someone in the gallery with a hearing problem to make out what is being said in the debate. The two public galleries are inaccessible to the public if they are in a wheelchair. There is room for fewer than half a dozen people with wheelchairs in the Speaker's gallery.

Government documents are rarely available in Braille or on tape. The same goes for large print, which is needed by those who are hard of sight. When people with visual impairments come to the Legislature, many of the documents they request are not available in a medium they can use.

There is no Braille in almost all the elevators of this building. The pay telephones are not accessible for people in wheelchairs. This building has an exceptional number of small curbs and steps that limit access to many offices. A person who is powering his or her own wheelchair can find even a half-inch rise in the floor an insurmountable barrier. There is a lack of facilities where opposite-sex caregivers can accompany their employers into the washroom to undertake attendant care tasks.

Our offices are not marked in a medium that is legible to the visually impaired. It makes it very difficult for those who are visually impaired to find an office for the first time if a sighted person is not accompanying them. Parking spaces for drivers with disabilities are not always wide enough, and there are only a handful of accessible handicapped parking spots in the legislative parking lot.

1520

I understand that this is a historic building, but leaving persons with disabilities on the outside looking in marks Ontario's history. That must change. We need to eliminate these barriers and free persons with disabilities from a prison constructed through our own ignorance and apathy.

How are we going to get to that goal? We need a strong and effective law that is designed to achieve the goal of a barrier-free Ontario for all persons with disabilities. This is what a disabilities act must be. It is not good enough to point to the Charter of Rights and the Human Rights Code. In the most recent annual report, the Ontario Human Rights Commission itself acknowledged the need for this new law, and one that is strong. In its report last year, the commission told the Minister of Citizenship that "The Human Rights Code alone has not been enough to achieve equal participation in society by people with disabilities." It stressed the need for meaningful legislation with "teeth." The commission recommended to this government that "a regulatory approach" is needed and that "barriers should be defined more broadly than those related to physical impediments."

In any event, the party that wants to cut red tape surely can't think it is better to have a system where every barrier must be removed using a costly and time-consuming human rights process when they could be prevented with strong and effective legislation. Surely the operators of small businesses would rather know the rules ahead of time than be faced with complaints after the fact.

This government should not only pass a strong and effective Ontarians with Disabilities Act because it is the right thing to do and because it is good for all Ontarians; it should do so because it promised it would. In fact, during the 1995 election campaign, Mike Harris promised in writing in a letter dated May 24 that "a Harris government would be willing to enact an Ontarians with Disabilities Act in the first term of office...." That promise was twice reiterated and reinforced by this House through unanimous resolutions. On May 16, 1996, three and a half years ago, this House voted unanimously to pass a resolution calling on the government and the Premier to keep those promises. Then again last year, on October 29, 1998, this House unanimously passed a resolution, proposed by my colleague Dwight Duncan, repeating this commitment and approving the 11 principles that this legislation must incorporate to be strong, effective and enforceable.

Where are we today? The Premier, who got re-elected saying he keeps his promises, has had four and a half years to keep the one that almost 20% of Ontarians care about most. During that time, there have been three ministers responsible, two elections and two unanimous resolutions from this House showing strong bipartisan support for this new law. But there is no law. There is no Ontarians with Disabilities Act. None has been enacted; none is before this House.

Whatever your political stripe, whatever your feelings on this government's track record on the treatment of people with disabilities, no member can credibly vote against this resolution.

What does this resolution say? It says that an act must be passed. All three of our parties have endorsed this. It says that an act must be "enacted no later than two years from today." This government has already had four and a half years to put legislation together. It shows that it can turn legislation around overnight, though, when it wishes. Two years is more than enough time.

This resolution requires legislation to be strong and effective. Who could say no to this? Who could argue that the law should be weak and ineffective? Who could vote to keep one and a half million of Ontario's people imprisoned in prisons constructed through our own apathy?

We need to pass a strong and effective Ontarians with Disabilities Act, and we need to do that within two years from today.

The Acting Speaker (Mr Tony Martin): Stop the clock. I'd like to recognize in the members' gallery the member for Nickel Belt for the 36th Parliament, Mr Blain Morin. Welcome back.

Further debate? The member from—

Ms Marilyn Churley (Broadview-Greenwood): Broadview-Greenwood.

The Acting Speaker: Broadview-Greenwood. How could I forget that?

Ms Churley: As a former Deputy Speaker, I understand and forgive you. I'll bet you're at home studying photographs a lot, trying to match us up with our ridings.

Let me start by saying that I am supporting, as is my whole caucus, this resolution before us today. All I can say at the outset is that I'm disappointed, as I'm sure the people who are watching this debate at this very moment are, that we're here yet again debating another resolution on the Ontarians with Disabilities Act. We have been through this. Our party, through Marion Boyd, introduced a resolution in October, 1998, which got all-party support, and furthermore, Marilyn Mushinski, the Premier's parliamentary assistant at that time, supported it. There has been a resolution, as mentioned, by the Liberal Party.

I have to say that this is one area where there's a lot of partisan politics, because that's what politics is all about in many ways, but the opposition have been working closely with persons with disabilities and the committee who have been pushing for this act for some time. Together, we've been wanting to work co-operatively with the government to make sure that a strong, effective act is passed. That's how we began after the Mike Harris promise in the 1995 election that he was going to pass such an act. We all said, "We'll support you," and we were supportive of proper consultation and coming forward with a bill.

As we all know, that is not what happened. What the government did was delay and delay and delay. Then, after some sham, by private-invitation-only consultation, they came forward with a pitiful excuse of a bill that was so embarrassing. As the Ontarians with Disabilities Act Committee said, it was like a kick in the stomach. That's exactly what it was after all of that. That was the best the government could do.

I want to spend a few minutes responding more to what the Premier said today in question period, because I can't tell you how disgraceful it is that the Premier continues to say over and over again, in jovial-type terms, "We're doing this, and we're doing that, and we're the only government that has had the courage to do anything," when he knows that isn't true. He knows, or he should know if he'd look at the sad history of why we are here today, that persons with disabilities have tried over the years to find the right avenue by which to make sure that their rights were upheld in Ontario. They've tried through the Constitution; they've tried through the Human Rights Commission. It was, I believe, in 1994 that the idea of an Ontarians with Disabilities Act came forward, after attempts through other avenues didn't work.

Essentially what this government has been doing is saying, "Go to the Human Rights Commission." In the meantime, they cut, for the second time in the latest round of cuts. There have been even more cuts to the Human Rights Commission, which is already backed up. That has been their answer so far.

I want to say clearly that when we were in government and were consulting with communities, including persons with disabilities communities, on what some of the biggest barriers were, it was made very clear to us that employment was a major barrier. If people have work, then they have much more likelihood of getting a roof over

their heads and having the money to achieve some of the other things that we count on in our society. So employment was one of the top priorities.

We chose, at that time, to focus on the Employment Equity Act. As you remember, we consulted for a very long time with all kinds of people across Ontario. The final act was passed, and what did this government do? One of the very first things they did—in fact, they ran on it—was to get rid of that act. They said they would replace it with something else; they didn't. They got rid of it. They wiped it out and left persons with disabilities and others who were among the target groups high and dry. They did that. They put nothing in its place. They took away the accessible transportation policies that our government had put in place. What is so disturbing and why I'm so upset today that we're standing here debating this resolution is that this government has in fact created more barriers for persons with disabilities.

1530

It's one thing to stand here and talk about the fact that Mike Harris did not keep his 1995 promise, which he made so clearly, but they have made things even worse. The Premier got up today and spoke as though they've improved things, when we had members from the committee sitting there listening to this. I can warn the Premier that he will hear back, that his remarks today were well noted. He will be hearing back; let me just leave it at that.

I don't think there's a person in Ontario who does not support moving forward on this. When the government talks about "real people"—as they did in the throne speech—they certainly do not consider persons with disabilities as some of the deserving real people in our province. It's like they're not on the radar screen as far as this government is concerned.

What they've done is a disgrace. I would say that not only those of us in this House will not stand for it, the people of Ontario will not stand for it any more. I would say to the people—through you, of course, Mr Speaker—the persons from the disabilities community who are watching this debate today, that they should know there is strong support for the disabilities act. I know they know a poll was done and it was made very clear that the people of Ontario support them.

What do we have? The bill the government put forward did not even come close to the demands of persons with disabilities who participated in the government's own hoax consultation. They made their demands heard. They fought their way into those hearings. I congratulate them for that. They forced the government to hear the principles that had to be contained in the Ontarians with Disabilities Act to really provide access. The government chose not to hear them.

The pathetic bill we keep hearing about, which they had to remove in embarrassment, had no enforcement mechanism and no penalty for failure to comply. It did nothing to address barriers to people with disabilities in the broader public sector, in municipal services and in the private sector.

I want to give you just a few examples of the barriers that exist. One of the barriers that is most disturbing, and totally unacceptable to a wealthy, caring society, is that we have disabled people living on the streets now, disabled persons who are homeless. That is such a crying disgrace. That is directly due to the policies of this government.

They've gotten rid of rent control, so rents are skyrocketing. They're not building any more affordable housing, so the waiting lists are longer and longer. They cut welfare and even though they came up with a new category for persons with disabilities, they under-resourced it, underfunded it, so it's in chaos.

Furthermore, there are people who used to get benefits who have been cut off, because their goal is to actually get people off the rolls. When we tried to find out how many people were actually on the family benefits before the new program, we couldn't get the numbers, which is interesting in itself. We will keep trying to get those numbers.

Let me give you a few examples of the barriers. Students with disabilities face incredible barriers when they try to get an education. For example, far too many of our schools are inaccessible buildings. This government's own former minister responsible for people with disabilities had planned to go to an all-candidates debate in her own riding in the last election in just such an inaccessible school building.

Limited availability of Braille and other alternative formats for print information creates barriers for people who are blind or who have visual impairment or other print disabilities. This includes information as basic as circulars about job postings, which are rarely provided in alternative formats.

As we know from Queen's Park itself, people encounter doors that are too heavy to handle. Even accessible housing designed for people using wheelchairs requires that people have significant upper-body strength, which means that some people with certain problems may be sitting out in the cold until someone comes along to help them open the door.

Let me give you one personal example of that. In my riding of Broadview-Greenwood, a Bank of Montreal, my own local bank which I use, for many years did not have a ramp. When I would go there, quite frequently there would be an elderly gentleman in a wheelchair, an elderly woman pushing him in that wheelchair and waiting patiently at the door, no matter how cold it was, until somebody, an able-bodied person, came up and opened the door to let them in. One day, after I'd helped them a few times, I spoke to them about what was going on. They told me that they had been trying to get a ramp in that bank for years and they kept being put off. I don't think it was the staff in the local bank; they were very supportive. But head office kept saying, "We have to look at our master plan and blah, blah, blah." It took a letter from me, a strong letter, to the bank saying: "Please move on this. This is the result of your inaction. If you

don't, I'm going to go public." Shortly after that, there was a ramp put in at that bank.

That's just one example, and we shouldn't have to do this piecemeal, bit by bit, when we discover when we're walking in our own ridings that there are disabled people waiting for an able-bodied person to come along and open the door. The kind of act that we're talking about today, the Ontarians with Disabilities Act, would mean that those kinds of situations wouldn't happen. That's pretty basic, isn't it?

I want to end by talking briefly about government waste and red tape. The government's failure to put in place a strong and effective Ontarians with Disabilities Act has wasted time and resources and those hard-earned taxpayer dollars that they are always talking about. As I said earlier today, the government seems very clear that they want to cut red tape for everybody else, it seems, particularly business in Ontario. They're cutting red tape, or attempting to, although some of their cutting of red tape gets them into trouble because they don't think it through. That's another story for another time. But what is really disturbing is that, as they do all of this cutting of red tape and push through bill after bill after bill in this House, they can't find the time and they can't make the commitment to put forward an Ontarians with Disabilities Act, which frankly, in my view, doesn't need further consultation. However, because the government, in the last term, didn't consult with people and because the minister, who is here today, did say that she was open to consultation, real consultation—although we're very worried now. Today, a couple of months afterwards, we hear that there has been no follow-up and the minister now seems to be consulting privately about how to consult.

Minister, let me say to you that in committee rooms 1 and 2 right now are many people associated with, involved with this committee, and have been for years, who are here today, any time, to assist you in getting this act in the House. The resolution before us today gives you two years. Who could not support that? Personally, I don't believe it should take another two years, because every day that goes by that we don't pass this act means that more people are experiencing health problems and accessibility problems in all walks of life that they shouldn't have to.

What I would like to see happen today, once and for all, is for the minister to get up and tell us, not only that she supports this resolution but that she is coming into the House before we break for Christmas with a strong act that we can take a look at and have committee hearings on and go out there and get on with it.

1540

Enough is enough. These people who are here today and who have been involved since 1994 in trying to get this going, have seen accesses taken away since this government came to power. They've seen things get worse for them. It's not just me saying that. Speak to the people who are here themselves today, Minister. They will tell you that. That's where we're hearing it from. We

see the results of your cutting and your policies. The time is now. The government made the promise pre-election in 1995. So far they have been silent and done nothing except bring forward a bill which was a disgrace, which embarrassed them and embarrassed us all.

Hopefully we will not have to come back here with yet another resolution a few months from now or a year from now, but the minister will commit today to meet with those people who are sitting here—they're accessible to her today; they're sitting in those two rooms—to get input to start the consultation if that's what she wants to do and just get on with it. No more excuses, as the Premier gave today. He's the Premier, you're the government and you're the ones who made this promise in 1995. Other governments before you have done things to increase accessibility. This government has taken those away. They have the opportunity today to remedy all that.

I would ask the minister if she would come forward today and tell us that is exactly what she is going to do.

Hon Helen Johns (Minister of Citizenship, Culture and Recreation, minister responsible for seniors and women): I am pleased to have the opportunity today to rise and participate in this important discussion that's affecting persons with disabilities throughout the province.

I will be sharing my time and will be speaking for a very short period of time as a result of so many of my colleagues wanting to be involved and on the record with this debate.

This topic is of interest for all Ontarians, but before I begin, I would like to address the rhetoric that happened today in the House from the two opposition parties.

To be quite truthful, I'm a little surprised that the Liberals and the NDP are all so ready to add empty bluster to their words. Oh, there are the cries of outrage from the opposition benches and there are the cries of anger, but mostly there are the empty cries of opposition parties that failed to attempt to come up with their own legislation.

We are here to debate a resolution that demands that within two years this government table strong and effective legislation to remove barriers for the disabled community. Frankly, I don't know why the Liberals are in such a hurry. They certainly weren't in that hurry when they formed the government under David Peterson.

The Liberals continue to be all over the road when it comes to this issue. Today I have in my hand a letter to the Ontarians with Disabilities Act Committee signed by the Leader of the Opposition. It reveals the timeline the Liberals agreed to when they were going to enact legislation for an Ontarians with Disabilities Act. It reads, "Our goal is to complete this work during the first three years of our mandate." Wait. It doesn't say, "two years," it says, "three years."

Yet today the member for Elgin-Middlesex-London proposes a resolution that calls for legislation in two years. I know that the question of leadership has been a distraction for the Liberal members of late and I would just like to know which member is really speaking for the

Liberal party. There's a lack of leadership in the Liberal Party of Ontario and I fear they're just not up to the job.

The NDP is no better, I have to admit. In the third session of the 35th Legislature, one of their members introduced Bill 168. This was a private member's bill called the Ontarians with Disabilities Act. This happened in 1994.

Mr Dwight Duncan (Windsor-St Clair): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: The minister referenced a letter from our leader with respect to the ODA. He's not here to make sure that his words were correctly interpreted. She did not cite the date, which was seven months ago, so in fact the opposition is on time and the minister, in my view, has misled the House.

The Acting Speaker: That's not a point of order and I would ask the member to withdraw that comment.

Mr Duncan: I would withdraw it and say that it does not accurately reflect—

The Acting Speaker: Just withdraw the comment.

Mr Duncan: I withdraw the comment.

Interjection: Read the letter again.

Hon Mrs Johns: "Our goal is to complete this work during the first three years of our mandate."

I was talking about the NDP, and in the third session of the 35th Legislature they introduced Bill 168, a private member's bill. The NDP was so committed to this legislation that it didn't even pass second reading—not even second reading. They could have moved it up on the legislative calendar.

Interjections.

Hon Mrs Johns: I'm obviously touching a nerve here. It's beautiful to see.

They could have moved it up on the legislative calendar. They could have shown that they would match their calls for social justice with legislative action. But sadly, they did not. Instead today they're howling for action when they could have produced it themselves. The government of Ontario will produce action as a benefit for people with disabilities in this province.

In our communities, in our public institutions, in our workplaces, we are all striving to reduce and to eliminate barriers that limit participation.

I believe that all of us here today share a common goal actually: to create opportunities for all members of Ontario society. That is why I continue to meet with and listen to individuals and groups that have ideas or opinions on how to achieve this goal.

While I'm proud that this government was the first in Canada to introduce the Ontarians with Disabilities Act, debate in this House and concerns expressed by people from the disability community made it very clear to the government that additional consultation and planning were required before we proceeded.

Earlier this fall, the speech from the throne recognized this government's commitment to further consultation and to moving forward with a new action plan during this session. But I think it's important to recognize—and I know from the people I've been talking to within the disabled community—that legislation is only part of the

picture here today. In Ontario we have already made considerable progress and we can build on that progress. Our new action plan will continue to build on this progress. It will build upon the progress that has been made by all of those who had a stake and responsibility in making Ontario more accessible and creating more opportunities for all members of our society.

We all understand that there is a great deal more to be done, and nobody in this House refutes that, but the advances that have been made are certainly significant and they inspire all of us as we look forward to the future.

Through advances in public policy and through dedicated financial resources, our public institutions and services in the community are becoming more accessible. Investment in new technology has improved access to information, communication and learning.

This year, our community access-ability program is supporting the work of approximately 200 community partners working together towards a barrier removal project—partners from the not-for-profit sector, the business community and the municipalities.

1550

Business and industry have also made advances. They have recognized that making workplaces accessible to people who want to work makes very good business sense. They are recognizing that persons with disabilities are productive and industrious, given the opportunity to compete in the workforce and in our economy.

I and my colleagues on this side of the House are very proud of the many advancements that have been made for people with disabilities by this government since 1995. We have announced more than \$500 million in spending on disabilities programs. The government's economic policies and achievements have resulted in record job creation. In fact, 615,000 new jobs have been created for Ontarians since this government took place in 1995. Without job creation, employment programs cannot and will not work. Without job creation, barriers to employment are truly insurmountable, and we need to break down barriers.

There are many stories to be told, and today I am very pleased that we have the opportunity to consider both our achievements and the important next steps as we continue to move to create opportunities for absolutely every member in our society.

Like many people in Ontario, I believe that we can work together and, working together, we can create important advances in many areas. I believe that the private sector, the broader public sector, the voluntary sector, persons with disabilities and those who advocate on behalf of the disabled community are all prepared to work with the government to make further advances for Ontarians with disabilities.

We are committed to the principle of eliminating barriers, not because they extend the hand of charity; indeed, they allow us to take our places at the table of humankind, at the table where our seats are marked by the true spirit of fraternity. We know that only then can

we enjoy the great bounty of a province that celebrates its equality.

Mrs Marie Bountrogianni (Hamilton Mountain): I've worked with disabled children and their families for 20 years, and I'm proud to support my colleague's important motion.

Of all of the actions of this government from 1995 to 1999, the draft of their Ontarians with Disabilities Act was definitely the hardest one to accept. It was a sham. Everyone knew it; they even knew it. It was a blessing that it did not pass. In effect, the provincial government attempted to wash its hands of the responsibility for the disabled.

I have three issues to bring forward in this short time: the first is stressing the need for appropriate funding for disabled children in the school system; the second is a property tax issue with the disabled; and the third is operational in nature and has to do with the assistance for the disabled, specifically the inefficiency of ODSP, the Ontario disability support program.

Seven years ago in Hamilton, the psychology department ran an outcome study regarding the progress of our disabled students. The results were promising. The majority graduated from secondary schools from regular programs, and 50% went on to college and university. This was a vast improvement from over 20 years ago, when the majority dropped out of school at the age of 16 and/or were institutionalized. With the recent cuts to the education system, the parents of children entering the system today are worried that their children will not be able to have these outcomes.

There is an important link between appropriate educational opportunities for the disabled and an act that embodies principles that are just. The lack of this education is a barrier and does not provide for equal opportunity and full participation in the life of the disabled.

The second issue is a property tax issue. I hope that we consider, all of us, granting property tax breaks to people who build new homes for disabled members. Not all existing homes can be modified for accessibility. There isn't enough time to go into this in detail, but it is a major issue for the disabled.

Now we go to the ODSP office. Next to the FRO, the ODSP office is the most frustrating. In a general sense, the problem with ODSP is that on the application it states that one should get a reply in four to six weeks. In reality, it is four to six months if you are lucky. Then, once a person goes to the pains of being deemed disabled, there is something wrong in the system between when the decision is made, from the disabilities adjudication unit, to the local office in getting the benefits to the disabled.

One case I had was Judy. She was deemed disabled on January 29, 1998. She phoned our office on October 7 because she was getting the runaround and no one in Hamilton knew that she was accepted because it didn't show on the system. My constituent assistant phoned a supervisor, who told her the same thing. She then called ODSP, which told her that a certain code was on the file and that was a problem. That wasn't true. She just

recently got an appointment with the counsellor to see if she qualifies for income. This is totally unacceptable. We have spoken with two supervisors on the general problem and they concur that the system is horrible and has to be improved.

Another case: Jason received his forms on July 9. He still hasn't received any money for his disability. These aren't people who are fortunate like us. They need this money to survive. The ODSP has to be looked at.

I would also like to challenge the minister, given that she has said we can all work together, to go down and speak with the 300 people in committee rooms 1 and 2. Tell them how we can all work together to make their lives easier, to give them the rights that we all have in Ontario.

Mrs Brenda Elliott (Guelph-Wellington): It is a pleasure for me to rise this afternoon and participate in this very important discussion about issues affecting Ontarians with disabilities.

Not only for those who are personally struggling with their disabilities, this is an issue that affects families, their friends, our communities as a whole. Disability issues are important to institutions and to businesses all across this province that provide services to all Ontarians.

Issues affecting people who live with disabilities in our community are important to this government and important to all of us. I want to emphasize that this government is committed to promoting opportunities for people with disabilities, and the minister is continuing to meet with interested parties. We are committed to seeking further input on this initiative, with a goal to introduce a new action plan this session.

In the lead-up to the 1995 election, we listened closely to Ontarians. In fact, our major election document, the Common Sense Revolution, was based on the advice of ordinary Ontarians. The Premier was listening closely to the people of Ontario, who indicated they wanted some sort of disability legislation, and we took action.

Clearly, the advice we received when that legislation was introduced was that further consultation was needed. Again, we are listening and further consultation is underway, with an eye to altering that original legislation.

But just as we promised in the last election that at some point in our term of government we would balance the budget, that we would reduce the \$11.4-billion deficit down to a balanced budget and that we would reduce taxes, the people of Ontario have come to know that we keep our promises. We have reduced taxes 99 times—far different from our colleagues across the way, who increased taxes 65 times. The people of Ontario in the last election not only recognized that we keep our promises, but appreciated that and returned us to government.

We have already taken significant advances to improve accessibility for persons with disabilities and to create opportunities for all members of our society. This government has already announced over half a billion dollars for disability programs since taking office in 1995.

I would like to take the opportunity today to inform the House of some of these very important initiatives. Our government has taken action to improve the transportation needs of the disabled by supporting building and motor vehicle modifications. An Ontario retail sales tax exemption provides an exemption of sales tax paid on purchases of motor vehicles for those who are disabled.

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As well, we know very clearly that those who are disabled want to be as independent as possible. We are enhancing community living and independent living facilities instead of requiring those who are disabled to be in institutions. We are helping students who have disabilities, from preschool right through to post-secondary education. We are implementing a new income support and employment program that better meets the needs of persons with disabilities. And we have established tax relief measures, including tax relief for low-income property owners with disabilities and tax credits for individuals with disabilities to help them get jobs and, of course, to help accommodate employers who modify their workplaces to meet the needs of their disabled employees.

Before I go further to discuss the initiatives our government has undertaken to help those in our disabled community, I think it's very important, because we are today debating a motion on an opposition day, to be sure that all members of the House, and those who may be watching us, understand what all the parties have stood for on this very important issue. I examined the election platforms of both the Liberal Party and the NDP prior to the last election and, interestingly enough, despite what you might have understood from the rhetoric today in the House, neither one of them had any position iterated in their election platforms. Absolutely nothing in the 20/20 Plan and nothing in the election document of the NDP.

This was particularly unusual for the NDP because in their administration they had enacted the employment equity legislation, which was of course the law that required Ontarians to have job quota laws. People overwhelmingly voted against this because the people of Ontario, and rightly so, supported by our government, support the idea of promotion based on ability and merit, not on quota.

I think it's very important that this is clearly in everyone's mind as we debate this issue today. We not only made a promise through the Premier, but we in fact introduced legislation. That is being refined. Our government did what we promised, and clearly we will be doing this again. Our actions have spoken louder than empty words.

As I said, we have undertaken initiatives since 1995 to spend over \$500 million in new spending on various disabled programs. This year the government announced a \$2-million partnership between the Ministry of Community and Social Services and the Ontario March of Dimes to deliver a new home and vehicle modification program for adults with physical disabilities. This program is offered in 60 locations across the province. Just

this past week I had a constituent visit my office who will receive over \$12,000 for modifications to their home.

The Human Rights Commission was mentioned earlier. In 1995 the waiting list was 28 months on average for cases to be heard. That has been greatly reduced, because we know that is so very important for people seeking redress through that commission.

In the area of community living and independent living, we have made important progress. Disabled individuals often require specialized care. In 1996 the Ministry of Community and Social Services announced a four-year plan to provide community living opportunities for people with developmental disabilities. This includes \$60 million annually for local community agencies to develop and provide services in the area of community living.

This is interesting, because in 1997, in addition to that \$60 million, an additional \$15 million was added to support adults and children with developmental disabilities in the community. In 1998 that was increased to \$18 million a year, and in 1999 an additional \$35 million in new resources over and above the \$60 million was added for additional support and programs to help persons with developmental disabilities live in our communities. We are putting major investments in place.

New resources are also being allocated for people with physical disabilities living in the community. The Ministry of Health announced an important and innovative new program that enhances the independence of adults with physical disabilities by allowing them to manage their own support services and attendant services. This \$18.7-million attendant program provides people with greater flexibility, choice and control over the services they receive. It also results, from the government's point of view, in a more efficient use of health care resources.

I actually have a constituent by the name of Rick Goy who uses this program, and from the very first time I was elected has been a great supporter of this. He was very pleased our government took this on and made such a tremendous investment in it. He's very pleased because it provides him with independence, with control and with freedom, for the attendant in fact is his employee. He's very supportive of the strong stance our government has taken in this regard.

We have also invested a tremendous amount in health care dollars to provide services that would allow patients who have suffered brain injuries to return home to their families and communities here in Ontario; \$8.4 million is spent in this program. Again, one of the very first constituents I ever met when I was elected was from a family who had a brain-injured person. They were pleading with us to find a way to have this person return to the family and the community, and were thrilled, quite frankly, when we made this large investment. Their family member has been returned now for several years and is receiving care close to home. This means a lot for families, particularly when a disability is involved; it's so much better to be near to those who have a special concern for them.

In 1997, the Ministry of Health committed to a five-year, \$25-million contribution to match the money raised by the Ontario Neurotrauma Foundation for research into spinal cord and brain injuries. Of course, this is a personal commitment of Rick Hansen, who's worked all across Canada to make sure this is an issue at the top of the mind for many people.

Through a joint initiative with the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care, and in coordination with education and social services, we are expanding programs for pre-school children who have medically based speech and language disorders.

Students are also benefiting from a new program we enacted, a \$30-million, five-year project called Task Force on Learning Opportunities. Big words, but what it really means is seven pilot projects that have been undertaken to help students with learning disabilities to make the transition from high school to post-secondary school.

I'm proud to say that my own local university, the University of Guelph, is involved in this pilot project. To quote Maclean's magazine, which ran an article on September 13 of this year, this is an excellent program that helps "professors teaching first-year courses adapt their methods" to assist the learning disabled. This program is funded by our government; 13 schools are involved, 400 students. We're very excited about it. In fact, one of the things noted in this article is that Ontario is a leader in this area. Other provinces like Alberta are watching it very closely. It's one of the most formalized programs. So they're expecting wonderful results from this program.

We've had major program and funding announcements to assist children with disabilities and their families. This includes \$20 million in annual mental health services and \$5 million, increasing to \$19 million for intensive early intervention for two- to five-year olds whose children suffer from autism. This is very welcome in my riding and in the area of Waterloo. We actually had a group of parents who organized to bring this very important issue to my attention. They were most pleased with our government's actions in this area.

As well, we've recognized that care for medically fragile or technologically dependent children is very important; \$17 million, which will serve up to 1,700 families has been earmarked for this program.

It's very important that employment opportunities are available to those who are willing and able to work. That's why our government introduced a program called the workplace accessibility tax incentive. Under this, Ontario businesses are able to offset the costs of support services and physical accommodations when they hire new employees who have disabilities. We estimate this will cost about \$7 million per year, but it's worth every penny. As you know, creating jobs is important to our government. We've already created almost 650,000 new jobs. Our original plan over five years is 725,000, 825,000 the year after.

We're very pleased to see the Ontario economy booming, and if we can find ways to allow the disabled to be

more and more part of our employment community, that makes us all very happy.

The employment supports program provided under the Ontario disability support program was established in 1999. This program will double the funding for persons with disabilities from \$18 million to \$35 million. This is a program that was long discussed prior to the election. We've received quite a bit of support for this program. What it did was move people off the welfare system into a program more specifically designed to meet their needs. I'd just like to mention some of the things that are hallmarks of this program. For instance, we removed the label of "permanently unemployable" and recognized that many people do, are able and want to work.

We reinstated disability benefits if a job attempt failed. We no longer require individuals with disabilities to go through eligibility testing every one or two years except in cases where their condition is expected to improve. We allow people to keep more of their assets and benefits from gifts and inheritances from their parents and from their families. We provide individualized employment planning which assists people with technological aids and devices so they can secure and maintain employment.

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This was something that was wanted by many prior to the election. It had been requested during the administrations before us. Interestingly enough, it was not supported by the Liberal caucus and I was very pleased to see our government take action on this file and to separate the welfare program from the disability program.

Last spring we also introduced the partners enabling change program, which is an important part of our initiative. This is about \$800,000 to support strategic alliances with businesses, not-for-profits and broader public sectors, to begin to undertake new programs that will have assistance for Ontarians with disabilities.

One of the groups that I think every government quite frankly is obligated to assist in any way possible is the group that we call the vulnerable adults, particularly those with disabilities. We've been pleased to fund 123 community projects to strengthen local co-ordination and partnerships among those working on behalf of vulnerable adults. We've also increased funding to enhance access for women with disabilities to domestic violence court. The violence against women with a disability prevention education grant program provides \$1 million annually for various community programs across the province that address the issue of abuse of women with disabilities.

Something that's often forgotten in the programs to do with disabled is the Good Neighbours program, which assists in developing informal support networks at the broad community level. This is a program that assists not only those who are disabled but seniors and others who are vulnerable and in need of assistance.

We have a broad range of new and enhanced initiatives that translate into personal stories of better accessibility, of greater independence and of new promise for

people in all parts of this province. These programs and new resources are providing access where before there were barriers. They are helping people with disabilities to participate and become more productive. They are making new opportunities and greater independence a reality in the communities in every part of the province.

We are committed. We have said over and over that we understand not everyone in Ontario starts with an equal opportunity in life. But we have moved, for instance, to take people with disabilities off the welfare rolls and into programs specifically designed to meet their needs. We have streamlined the Ontario Human Rights Commission and now 72% of cases, and this is interesting, are now resolved by up-front remediation and mediation, as opposed to having to go through long court cases that could last up to 18 or 36 months.

Our government is the first in Ontario's history to have the courage to introduce a law which would have required, by the way, every government ministry and agency to review its policies and operating practices in order to remove barriers to employment and service for disabled citizens. It wasn't perfect, but it was a wonderful start. It was the first, it was the best and it was quite comprehensive. Because of concerns expressed, we did withdraw the bill and we are consulting further on improvements before reintroducing an action plan.

What is important is that we did have the courage to act on our principles and we are working to develop a new action plan. I might say though that one of the things we do have to consider as we're under way is that in the development of any legislation or any action plan the people of Ontario and my colleagues would know that we established something called the Red Tape Commission. This was established to reduce needless red tape for businesses and institutions that provide service and carry on activities across the province of Ontario. Former governments added layer upon layer of red tape, tax upon tax. In fact, former governments added 65 total taxes. We responded to the people of Ontario by trying to find ways to reduce unnecessary red tape, and that's important in all the legislation and policies they undertake, no matter what file. This can be a crushing burden for small businesses particularly.

Some have suggested that an act like the American disabilities act, for instance, creates a great deal of red tape. More manageable red tape is not the way we want to go. If that in fact is a consequence, it's not something we want. It's not something we would want to introduce if unnecessary. This is important, not just to a business community but to the disabled as well, because if time is spent, resources are spent on unnecessary red tape, no one's objectives are accomplished. A prosperous economy, business taxes and the taxes that employees pay are what allow our government to provide the services we all want to provide across this province, whether they be for health, for the disabled communities or others.

As we approach a new millennium, we pause to take stock of our achievements just as we surely look to the future. Today, Ontario is indeed a better place for people

living with disabilities, better than it has been before in our history, but we acknowledge there is a great deal more to be done. As Minister Johns stated earlier this afternoon, we all have an important role to play in the ongoing task of eliminating barriers that limit participation. We look forward to this important task of creating opportunities for all members of our society.

Mr Dominic Agostino (Hamilton East): I'm pleased to rise in support of the resolution by my colleague the member from Elgin-Middlesex-London.

The sad part in all of this is that we're here today still debating this issue. The reality of the situation is that if Mike Harris and the Conservative government had kept the promise they made in 1995, we would not be here supporting another resolution, trying to again force this government to deal with the issues of an Ontarians with Disabilities Act, a meaningful act.

In the last term we saw this government take great pride in what they did on this. The promise in the Common Sense Revolution was clear. You said that within four years, within your first mandate, you would bring in an Ontarians with Disabilities Act. What did you do? You went through this process of public consultation, you went through the process of talking to people across Ontario, you consulted. The problem was you did not listen and your bill reflected that.

Clearly, we had a bill that was an absolute sham. It was a joke. It was universally condemned by the disabled community. You could not find any credible spokesperson at all to suggest there was anything worthwhile in that bill. Now you go back and say, "We're going to consult further." You consulted all you had to. All you had to do was listen to Ontarians who were disabled, listen to their views, listen to their suggestions and you would have had a decent bill. It was a disgraceful performance by this government. It was a clear betrayal of the disabled community four years ago. The disabled community does not believe and trust this government now, after their actions. They believed in 1995 that Mike Harris was sincere about bringing in meaningful legislation. They trusted you. They trusted your process of consultation. What did you do? You turned around and simply betrayed and denied the disabled community a basic right that we expect for all Ontarians. You have failed miserably.

This resolution today sets a clear timeline to bring in a meaningful piece of legislation. What did this government say? We heard the two previous speakers go on and on about all these government programs and all this rhetoric in regard to what this government has done for the disabled community. What you have done in dealing with this ODA is nothing more than a pure betrayal of the principles that we believe in, in this province: the principle of equality and the principle of fairness. Now you stand here and talk about something called an action plan. You're going to bring out an action plan. You had the opportunity.

The problem is very clear: The political will is not there. This government does not have the political will to

help the disabled community. This government cannot stand up to the few out there who criticized them for bringing in this legislation. You don't have the guts to do it. You can bring in squeeze kid legislation in a week. You can ram everything else through this House in a month or two months and bring in 50 or 60 bills and get them through, but in five years you have not had the courage to bring in a meaningful piece of legislation to deal with the disabled community and bring us in line with what the Americans did, frankly, well over 10 years ago—15 years ago. That's all we're doing here, and you have failed. Why should the disabled community trust you today? Why should we trust this government when they promise anything to do with this? You have let them down once. You're going to let them down again.

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We made it clear during the campaign we would act on this. This resolution today by my colleague Mr Peters brings that in line. We've had two speakers from the government, but you know what? Not one of them has yet stood up and said whether they're going to support this resolution that's in front of us. Two speakers have spoken for well over half an hour on behalf of the government. Not one has yet said if they're going to support this resolution.

I would ask and challenge the minister, every member of the House on the government side, the members sitting here, to go down to rooms 1 and 2. Look at the disabled community and ask them very clearly if they feel that you betrayed them. Ask them. I challenge the minister to go. If the minister is sitting in the House, as she is, I would ask her to take five minutes, go down to rooms 1 and 2 and speak to the community. Let's see if you have the courage to meet them face to face and tell them why you betrayed them four years ago and tell them why all we have is an action plan and no real help for the disabled community.

I urge the House today to support this resolution. I ask this government to carry through on the commitment you made four years ago. There have been enough betrayals; there have been enough letdowns; there's been enough disappointment. The community worked with you. They consulted. They spoke to you. They gave you ideas. What you gave them is the back of your hand. It was an absolute disgrace. You should be ashamed of yourself. You have betrayed the disabled community, to no end. It is now time to act. I ask this government to vote in support of this. Bring in some meaningful legislation and bring Ontario on a par with the rest of North America when it comes to dealing with the disabled community.

Mrs Tina R. Molinari (Thornhill): I'm pleased to have the opportunity to speak today about this very important topic. We have heard a great deal today about Ontarians with disabilities. We have heard from the opposition their concerns about disabilities, the Ontarians with disabilities being serviced.

I would like to remind the Liberals of the letter that was put forth by their leader, Dalton McGuinty, and I quote from the letter: "Our goal is to complete this work

during the first three years of our mandate.” Well, they did not complete it in the first three years. Now they’ve put a resolution forward for us to implement it in the next two years.

The previous government, the NDP government, put forth Bill 168, which didn’t go anywhere. This government has the courage to do what needs to be done and to serve Ontarians with disabilities. This government is very supportive of Ontarians with disabilities. We have a range of new services and initiatives that this government has undertaken since taking office in 1995, new services and initiatives amounting to more than \$500 million.

Today I would like to provide members with a sense of what this means to local communities all over Ontario. To illustrate my point, I’m going to talk about just one of our many programs and what this program means for people and communities across this province. This government’s community access-ability program, which was mentioned by the minister earlier in her speech, was announced in November 1998. The community access-ability program encourages community partners, such as not-for-profit organizations, local businesses, service organizations and clubs and persons with disabilities, to work together to make their communities more accessible. Community access-ability also supports community education about the barriers faced by persons with disabilities, including physical, communication-related and attitudinal barriers and shows how to prevent and remove these barriers.

The community access-ability program provides project grants up to \$5,000 to match financial and in-kind support from the community. In every case, tangible community support is a prerequisite to project funding. This year, 18% of overall project funding will come from private sector sources. In the first six months of this program, there are almost 200 organizations working cooperatively in communities across the province on barrier-removal projects that respond directly to needs identified by the community. It is a program which is creating tangible results.

This year community access-ability projects will directly involve more than 3,000 persons with disabilities in the planning, development and implementation of these projects. Thirty-two community access-ability sponsored events will be staged in communities across the province, ranging from conferences to artistic events. More than 600 community access-ability sponsored workshops will be conducted which will provide information, orientation and specialized training for persons with disabilities and help raise awareness of the needs of persons with disabilities and the services available in the community. More than 10,000 people are expected to attend or participate in the community access-ability sponsored events, conferences and workshops, and more than 20,000 pieces of information will be produced and distributed as a result of community access-ability projects.

However, as I said a moment ago, I want to focus on what this important and innovative program means

locally. In communities all over Ontario, the government has been asked to assist, and we are responding directly to community needs. For the Windsor and Essex County Transportation and Coordination Centre, it means additional resources for the promotion and advertising of their services assisting persons with disabilities, and others, with their transportation needs. In that same community, the Victorian Order of Nurses is working cooperatively with the Windsor Chamber of Commerce on a community access-ability project that will help to implement a voluntary access-ability survey and a complete physical access-ability checklist for local businesses.

In Kitchener, the Canadian Hearing Society and the Kitchener Public Library are working together to deliver educational workshops for an estimated 320 participants. These are workshops for and about persons with disabilities in Kitchener and the surrounding area. The workshops will focus on barrier removal, needs awareness and information about local services and resources available in the area.

In the London area, Participation House Support Services will develop a manual using peer trainers to assist young adults with multiple disabilities to become more independent. This innovative pilot will begin by training young adults who will, in turn, provide training to an anticipated 100 participants.

In southwestern Ontario, the community has looked to the government for partnership, and community access-ability was able to answer that request.

Here in Toronto community access-ability is helping the Toronto Association for Community Living to create a Toronto chapter of Youth Involvement Ontario, which is a partnership between youth with disabilities and youth without disabilities.

The Brain Injury Association of Toronto is working with Toronto’s parks and recreation department and Brain Injury Rehabilitation Inc to develop and deliver a pilot project to integrate individuals with brain injury into recreational and social activities in that community. Peer volunteer program leaders will be trained to operate the program on an ongoing basis.

Transportation Action Now of Toronto, in a partnership with the Bloorview MacMillan Centre and the Canadian Paraplegic Association, will develop a new information bulletin to assist drivers with disabilities to find answers and learn about options, components and devices that are available.

In my own riding of Thornhill, the community access-ability program helped the Reena Foundation in funding their international conference on developmental disabilities. Over 300 people attended this conference celebrating achievements in the field of developmental disabilities and sharing information on social, technical and medical achievements and innovation.

Organizations in Toronto and the GTA have asked the government for support, and they are receiving the support they requested.

In Peterborough, the Canadian Mental Health Association, together with five other partners in the community,

will provide a series of workshops to train people with mental health disabilities to deliver employment readiness and life-skill workshops to other persons in the community with mental health disabilities.

The Tayside Community Residential and Support Options will use a community access-ability grant to provide leadership training to youth on all aspects of living with disabilities. These young leaders will be able to share their knowledge with other young people of all ages through presentations in schools.

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In southeastern Ontario, communities have asked the government to work in partnership, and community access-ability is making those partnerships a reality.

The Canadian Hearing Society in North Bay is participating in community access-ability by developing and implementing a community awareness campaign. One hundred front-line staff from participating agencies will develop and deliver presentations and distribute information packages to local businesses, institutions and community organizations in the Nipissing area.

The Physically Handicapped Adults Rehabilitation Association in North Bay is also putting community access-ability to work. This organization, along with five other partners in the community, will develop and distribute a new employment resource booklet entitled Plain Talk. The booklet discusses the employment services and supports available for persons with disabilities in North Bay. The booklet, which will be introduced in alternative formats, will help to improve access to employment information for persons with disabilities and employers.

Persons United for Self-Help in Northwestern Ontario, or PUSH Northwest, is developing a resource guide with the assistance of a community access-ability grant. The guide will explain how to remove access barriers and establish barrier-free designs in buildings and public locations. Some 1,500 copies of the guide will be distributed to persons with disabilities, families, caregivers, businesses and the public.

In Thunder Bay, with support from community access-ability, the Independent Living Resource Centre is organizing Celebrating Ability, a one-day arts and crafts show in February 2000 that will showcase the talent of 30 local artists and craftspersons with disabilities.

In northern Ontario, community access-ability is supporting important partnerships in the community. Community access-ability is also supporting the effective use of technology. The program is assisting the Niagara Centre for Independent Living to complete the development and launch of a Web site to provide information about accessibility to residents and tourists visiting the Niagara region. The new accessible Niagara Web site will list and provide information about all accessible attractions, businesses and community services in the area.

In Stoney Creek, the Disabled and Aged Regional Transit System, or DARTS, is leading public transit travel training with the assistance of community access-ability funding. This training will allow individuals with

physical disabilities to learn how to use the regular transit system. The project will provide the level of individual training, coaching and support that each participant needs in order to make the transition from parallel transportation to the regular transit system.

In south-central Ontario, community access-ability is responding directly to requests from the community for the government to participate in important new initiatives. I have provided just a sample of these important community projects. These projects reflect new partnerships, leadership in the community, and the ongoing commitment of Ontario's disability organizations to working together to remove barriers to accessibility.

I'm very excited about this kind of programming. Community access-ability mobilizes community resources, including private sector support. It engages persons with disabilities in determining the kinds of supports and services that are appropriate in their communities. It also supports activities in the community that address barriers to participation and create new opportunities for Ontarians with disabilities.

Mr George Smitherman (Toronto Centre-Rosedale): It's a great pleasure for me to have a chance today to participate in the debate on the resolution brought forward by my seatmate, the member for Elgin-Middlesex-London. One more time on behalf of the Liberal Party, I challenge the minister to spend a little time, if she's half as good as she thinks she is by the speech she gave earlier, go down to the committee rooms and meet with the 200 people who have come from across this province because they think this is an important matter. Madam Minister, these are your constituents in your ministry. Earn that extra pay packet: Go downstairs and talk to these constituents in a very direct way.

She refuses to do so, I believe because this is one more example of narrowcasting on behalf of this government—that term coined by pollsters which essentially says as long as policies appeal to an electoral majority, then damn the rest. That is nothing short of an act of discrimination. The government of Ontario, by its very own policies, is a government for the few. They reflect that today in the way they reject this motion and moving forward on this item, that matters to 1.5 million Ontarians. There's no commitment to help those who struggle against bigger barriers, who have less.

I wanted to speak about the Ontarians with Disabilities Act today and to approach it on a very personal basis. In the members' gallery today is someone who works for me: Doreen Winkler. Doreen is a social worker. She lives in my riding. She was appointed to the immigration and refugee board by then Prime Minister Mulroney and reappointed by Prime Minister Chrétien. Doreen Winkler happens to be blind. We met during the election, when she came to lobby me on behalf of Ontarians with disabilities, because your government had failed to live up to the commitments it made then. Since I hired her and she began to work here in the legislative precinct, we've run fully into the problem that exists. In the broader Ontario government service, there are access funds avail-

able to managers who would seek to hire employees with disabilities, but alas, here in the Legislature of Ontario, with its budget of something like \$100 million, if I have the numbers right, there are no funds available to assist with computers that will read information that's on the screens, to assist with scanners or to hire readers who can help to get past the barriers that those who are visually impaired are dealing with.

I think this resolution today is something that can be supported by all. The time frames within it give the government a chance to act. I encourage them to support it, but I also encourage all members to speak to the House leader of their party to get to the point that the Legislative Assembly of Ontario is able to say that we have the same ability, as managers and as employers, to hire people and to access funds that will assist us in employing people and assist them in getting past the barriers that exist for them. Vote for the resolution.

Mr Michael Gravelle (Thunder Bay-Superior North): I'm very pleased to add my voice to the opposition day debate and to call on all members of the Legislature to support my colleague Steve Peters's resolution that a strong and effective Ontarians with Disabilities Act should be enacted no later than two years from today. The truth is that we shouldn't even be having this debate today. Had Mike Harris kept his word to the people of Ontario and enacted legislation during his first term in office, as he had promised, our party would not be putting forward a resolution today.

Having said that, we are proud to be taking the lead on this very important issue once again, an issue that is about equality and fairness and one that we will not and cannot allow to be ignored by this government.

I'm also very proud that the disabled community in Thunder Bay and northwestern Ontario is at the forefront of this fight for equality. Today in Thunder Bay, Persons United for Self-Help, PUSH Northwest, is leading the charge in support of our party's resolution this afternoon. The message I want to send to everyone back home and everyone else who has fought for the passage of meaningful disability act legislation is that your support continues to inspire us to press forward, to press this government to meet this commitment. All of us in this Legislature will be ultimately judged by our commitment to true equality in this province. Today, 1.5 million Ontarians with disabilities are counting on us to make a barrier-free Ontario a reality for them. That is what we must do.

This debate is not about ideology. It is simply about holding the government to its commitment to establish an ODA and to take some action towards respecting the rights and equality of persons with disabilities in Ontario. It's about reaffirming our belief that the barriers, whether social, economic, physical, educational or vocational, are unjust and that it is incumbent upon this government to take the needed steps to remove them and to prevent the erection of new ones.

1640

Quite simply, it's about respecting the dignity of persons with disabilities, people who should enjoy equal opportunity and full participation in the life of our province and share its prosperity.

On behalf of the constituents of the Thunder Bay-Superior North riding, I will be proudly supporting my colleague's resolution this afternoon. I implore all members of the House, particularly on the government side, to stand in their place today, look deep within their hearts and cast a vote today for equality and fairness.

M^{me} Claudette Boyer (Ottawa-Vanier): Permettez-moi d'abord de féliciter mon collègue de Elgin-Middlesex-London pour son travail sur ce dossier clé. Chapeau, cher collègue, pour tes efforts.

We have been waiting five years for legislation for Ontarians with disabilities. The groundwork has been done in the Ontarians with Disabilities Act Committee. What is this government waiting for to enact legislation?

Nous parlons aujourd'hui de l'absence d'une loi qui a comme but la protection des droits des Ontariennes et des Ontariens handicapés. Je suis profondément déçue que le gouvernement conservateur n'a toujours pas agi dans ce dossier. Nous sommes des législateurs et il est de notre devoir d'assurer la pleine protection des plus défavorisés et des plus démunis dans notre société. Il incombe au gouvernement de démontrer du leadership et d'assurer pleinement cette responsabilité primordiale.

La situation devient de plus en plus lamentable. D'un côté, le gouvernement parle d'une province pour tous les Ontariens. De l'autre, il coupe les subventions et les programmes destinés aux personnes handicapées. Il restreint leur accès à une pension. Il ne présente aucun projet de loi visant à éliminer des barrières et obstacles afin de permettre à ces mêmes Ontariens et Ontariennes de participer pleinement à la vie et de contribuer ainsi à la société ontarienne.

Two issues concern me particularly. They are universal access and the unreasonable delays in obtaining a response from the Ontario disability support program. Lately, I have received about 20 calls from constituents regarding the delays in obtaining support through the program. Let me remind the government that these calls are made by people, human beings who need help. These people are not cases, nor are they files or reference numbers. They are people like you and me.

While doing my best to help these people, I learned that the standard response times established by the program are not met because of bureaucratic hoop-jumping that can last from six to eight months. Ironically, the government created the new program in order to reduce delays.

As I stated earlier, I am also concerned about the issue of universal access. Let me tell you about one of my constituents, who is in a wheelchair. Lately, he could not obtain medical treatment in two separate clinics in Ottawa-Vanier because he could not climb the single step at the entrances of these clinics.

Following this distressing experience, he contacted two provincial offices regarding the lack of access to the medical clinics. Representatives in both offices told him that access is a municipal responsibility, so he contacted the city, only to be told that the building codes and guidelines are established according to provincial standards.

So this constituent has started a small business. He builds and sells lightweight, portable ramps. He may be handicapped, but he is working very hard to improve the quality of life not only for himself but for others. He is part of the solution, not part of a problem that exists in the mind and in the arrogant attitude of this government.

Lastly, I would like to mention that I promised during the election to have the entrance to my new constituency office modified to make it wheelchair accessible. It was my understanding that the government was to ensure accessibility to all MPPs' constituency offices, but I got tired of waiting for the government and I decided that it was incumbent on me to ensure that my office is accessible to all my constituents. We live in a democracy, and accessibility is a right, not a favour to be granted by the autocratic government.

C'est donc avec ferveur que j'appuie la motion de mon collègue et vous enjoins d'en faire du pareil.

Mrs Leona Dombrowsky (Hastings-Frontenac-Lennox and Addington): Today I am very pleased to speak in favour of the resolution before the House that will affect Ontarians with disabilities.

My riding is one of the largest in southern Ontario, over 12,000 square kilometres. The rural environment means that many disabled persons seeking medical treatment have to travel long distances to appointments with doctors.

Today the Premier has said that his government has had the courage to pursue a disabilities act. Well, I would like to talk a little bit about how Conservative courage has been translated in my riding.

The disabled persons of Hastings-Frontenac-Lennox and Addington want to ask, where is the courage in denying them adequate support for travel to medical appointments? This government is cutting mileage support for persons with disabilities from 30 cents a kilometre to only six cents a kilometre, and recipients must claim a minimum cost of \$15 in order to be reimbursed. In other words, that's a trip of 250 kilometres. In my riding, a return trip from Bancroft to Belleville takes three hours, and yet only qualifies for a \$14.90 mileage expense; conveniently, 10 cents under the \$15 claim limit. I would only suggest that it does take a lot of courage and nerve to say to disabled people that they don't deserve compensation for that trip.

Mr Victor Fleming of Bancroft is a volunteer driver for a number of public agencies. For 14 years he has helped people with disabilities—children, young parents and adults who live in Bancroft—to travel to medical appointments throughout the riding. For example, he regularly drives a gentleman to Kingston for kidney dialysis treatment. The drive takes almost five hours and is a 374-kilometre round trip. Every agency for which he

drives pays a minimum of 27 cents a kilometre. He used to be reimbursed \$100 to cover expenses for a trip to Kingston when he carried a disabled passenger, and he will now receive only \$22. That doesn't even cover the cost of gas. At 66 cents a litre, he cannot pay for his gas to take the disabled person from Bancroft to Kingston.

A 29-year-old woman in my riding with fibromyalgia must travel to Kingston 12 times a month. She used to get \$45 per trip to cover her expenses, and now she gets nine dollars. She's out of pocket that difference. This is a disabled person who has already had her support reduced.

Today the Minister of Community and Social Services called the Ontario disability support plan "outstanding." This very morning I had a person in my constituency office who has applied twice for ODSP and both applications have been lost by this "outstanding" social service system.

Ontarians with disabilities need legislation to ensure they receive the support and access to the services they need and deserve. I urge all members to support the resolution before the House today.

1650

Mr Joseph Cordiano (York South-Weston): I'm very happy indeed to speak on this resolution by my friend from Elgin-Middlesex-London. This is an important resolution because we have come to a point in time when enough has been said about this matter and we need to move forward.

The disabled community of this province deserves better from all of us, and as the minister sits in her place in this House, she needs to lead the way. This is something she can stand up and champion. In fact one of the more significant things I heard today came from the Premier. He said, "We live now in a new era, an era of budgetary surpluses." So he has signalled his willingness to move forward to invest in something as significant as an Ontarians with Disabilities Act, because it requires additional investment; there is no question about that.

I can't think of a better way for this government to lead us into the new century than by investing in this worthwhile initiative. I can't think of a better way to initiate a millennium project. Why not make this a millennium project? Why not do that on behalf of the people of this province? If it is true that we live in a new era, and many people have referred to the new economy which has made us more productive—of course largely led by the United States and the transformation that has taken place in the economy with regard to technological change—and we have greater productivity and an era of surpluses, it would stand to reason that we're going to need every single person, disabled or otherwise, to participate in our economy to make us as productive as we can be.

It's not good enough to leave those people behind, to leave them out of participation in our new-era economy. We need them. It's in our interest to enable them to be involved in the economic life of this province, and the only way they can do that is if we have a barrier-free society.

I urge the minister and I urge the members of this House to not only support this resolution, because that's easy to do and many previous parliaments have done the same thing, but it's far more important to have someone champion this cause and the minister can do just that. I urge everyone to support this resolution.

Mr Tony Ruprecht (Davenport): I rise in support of this resolution and my colleague Mr Peters. Advocates for the rights of the disabled have spent years trying to make government and the public aware of the needs as well as the abilities of disabled persons. Especially today these same advocates are saying to us, "You, as MPPs, have a special responsibility," and that is that we must treat every citizen of Ontario, not only with respect but we must open the doors so that they're part of our family, open the doors so that every person is able, not only to access a theatre and a library but also at least to some degree to participate in the economic development of our nation.

Unless we pass this resolution today, I am confident that the ideas of yesterday, the ideas of participation will be forgotten. I am confident that unless we pass this act today, we will not make any progress.

These advocates are reminding us today that MPPs—indeed MPPs of all parties—passed a special resolution in this Legislature over 10 years ago, a proclamation in the Decade of Disabled Persons. I have a copy right here. It says: "The government of Ontario fully supports the principles and ideals set forth by the United Nations and is committed to the goals of the fullest possible participation and equality of opportunity for persons with disabilities in the social and economic life of the province."

What is even more important, to the minister today and to all of us, is to review the principles that are at stake today. These principles are also found in this resolution of over 10 years ago. They read as follows:

"(1) The dignity, independence and potential of persons with disabilities will be respected in all aspects of life.

"(2) Persons with disabilities have equal rights and equal obligations, in common with all citizens, to participate in and contribute to community life.

"(3) Efforts will be made to increase public awareness of the abilities and needs of persons with disabilities in order to break down the barriers which exist due to a lack of understanding and outmoded attitudes."

I say to you today, let this minister go downstairs to those who are waiting right now to hear whether she and this government will indeed pass this act and give hope to all those who need access to institutions and to our country.

Mr David Christopherson (Hamilton West): I appreciate the opportunity to join in the debate. I wasn't in the House for the actual words that were spoken by a member of the government—by the minister, actually, I think—but the first thing I would like to do is correct the record. Someone on the government side said there was absolutely nothing in our election platform, and I know people watching this don't care too much about that sort

of thing, but nonetheless it is important to us to ensure that the record is kept straight. Indeed, we did have a clear policy.

You will recall that while the government implemented the 30% tax cut, and the Liberals refused to do anything about it, when we made commitments around education funding, health care funding, social services, and within that of course disabled individuals, we said: "That's where we'll get the money. We'll raise it by reversing the tax cut for the top 6% of income earners," who got the lion's share of the tax cut, and that's where we'd get the real money. There was a policy paper that clearly articulated that point of view; it was part of our platform. So the record should show that anything to the contrary of us having a detailed position and an explanation of how we were going to pay for it is at best inaccurate and at worst indescribable, using parliamentary language.

1700

Moving on, we know today that once again the Premier just doesn't seem to learn. He again has invoked the name of Gary Malkowski, a former MPP for the New Democratic Party during the time we were in government from 1990 to 1995; indeed, he was one of the parliamentary assistants responsible for this legislation. I just want to bring to the attention of the House that the Toronto Star reported—and I do this for a reason; that reason is Gary is here. He's downstairs in one of the committee rooms watching the proceedings this afternoon, as are a lot of other people who are leaders within the disabled community and supporters of that leadership. They're watching very carefully, because this means an awful lot to them. Gary is as furious this time as he was the last time that Premier Harris insists on misrepresenting Gary's comments.

On December 4, 1998—this is straight from the Toronto Star—"former provincial politician, says Mike Harris is taking his comments out of context to bolster support for his 'useless, toothless and patronizing' disabilities act.

"I can't believe what Mike Harris has done, using my name the way he has," Malkowski said in an interview yesterday. "He's using my name for some benefit."

"Last week, Harris stood up in the Legislature to defend his controversial Ontarians with Disabilities Act, and said Malkowski has publicly complimented the government on its disabled initiatives.

"We have had more people with disabilities, including a former New Democratic member who came forward and said of the move we made: "This is the biggest breakthrough in the history of the Ontario Legislature," Harris is quoted as saying.

"Regardless of the context, Malkowski is furious his name is positively linked to anything the Conservatives are doing when it comes the disabled.

"Malkowski has written a letter to the Premier asking him to withdraw the statement from the record, and to stop undermining his credibility 'by making false and public statements.'"

Speaker, I read this into the record because I assure you that Gary Malkowski intends again to call on the Premier to stop using his name in an inappropriate fashion in terms of saying that Mr Malkowski supports anything that this government has done with regard to an ODA.

My point in putting this in the record is to show that it's not the first time. The Premier knew better. When the ruckus is raised later today and tomorrow over what he has done to Mr Malkowski and his good reputation, I ask you, Speaker, and other members of this House to bear in mind that this is not a slip of the tongue. This is a Premier who has been here before, on this very issue, with the same member, which in my opinion just points to the fact that this government will say anything to make it sound like they care.

The reality, however, is in the bill they introduced: two pages. It's insulting, an absolute insult to all the people who have worked so many years. I know in our community Aznive Mallett and my former ward mate, Councillor Geraldine Copps, have played a leadership role in making sure that the issues in Hamilton—and my riding encompasses the largest concentration of people with disabilities in terms of the downtown area. So what Hamilton had to say, in my opinion, is important, and not just in the Hamilton context but in an Ontario context, which will take me, after I read one more quote into the record, to focus on process more than anything.

A lot has been said about the government's track record, the things they've done and the things they haven't done. I don't want to repeat those things. I want to focus on the process that was followed last time and the absolute, total requirement and responsibility this government has to provide a process that is transparent, that is responsible, accountable and accessible, much like the rights the disabled are asking to have certified here in the province in terms of barrier-free access in other matters.

I want to put again on the record, with regard to the last go-round, that we heard the Premier say—it's amazing he could say these things—the leaders in the disabled community were pleased—and I state clearly that I'm paraphrasing—with what he has done and they were supportive of what he has done. Let me assure you, Speaker, if that's the case, I haven't heard it. All I have heard from the leadership in the disabled community, and quite frankly anybody who cares at all about disabled citizens, is that their rights are not being accorded to them and that this government has shown no interest in sincerely honouring the commitment they made both in the election campaign and in this House.

I refer members to the debate of this Legislature on Thursday, October 29, 1998, where the then member for Windsor-Walkerville moved a motion that outlined 11 factors that must be included in any acceptable ODA. It's interesting that some of the members who voted in favour—no one voted against it—include the now chief government whip, who, as I understand it, has a seat at the cabinet table and has great influence. He supported this resolution that called for these 11 factors. Almost

every one of those factors was violated in terms of the insult that the government tabled prior to the last election.

Aznive Mallett, whom I have already mentioned, was the co-chair of the Hamilton ODA committee. She wrote an op-ed piece for the *Hamilton Spectator*. She starts off by saying:

“Since when does government spend time and money to develop and implement legislation, when an internal memo would achieve the same results?”

“This provincial government is enacting a law to require its own departments to write reports regarding access for persons with disabilities. To me, this is like using a nuclear bomb to remove a wart from Johnny's finger. And, isn't it ridiculous to remove a wart from Johnny's finger when Johnny needs heart surgery?”

She then goes on at great length to describe and explain why she not only doesn't support this legislation, but considers it an insult.

Speaking now to the process, I can recall when the government, as they saw their election timetable looming, set out to ask people what they thought ought to be—as if they didn't have enough information and studies and opinions, but they asked for one more go-round. I'm assuming it happened all across Ontario because it happened in Hamilton, and it was ordered from the minister's office that, yes, they were inviting people to make submissions about what an Ontarians with Disabilities Act would look like, but no one was allowed to hear what anybody else was saying. It was almost a Star Chamber. They literally ordered people to stay outside the room while each delegation came in.

Why would they do that? Because they knew the kind of legislation they were going to bring in, and if everybody sitting in that committee room had a chance to hear the submissions of others then they would readily realize—they did anyway which is what makes the thing so stupid and juvenile but they would have realized maybe a little quicker—that every one of us talked about maybe some of those 11 factors I've mentioned earlier and the importance of having substantive barrier removals outlined in legislation, and the resulting legislation was nowhere near that.

It's the only thing I can think of, that it was to try to keep expectation levels lower. What other reason and justification could there be for a government being so obviously undemocratic?

That's not just me. Al MacRury, a writer of some renown with the *Hamilton Spectator*, writes about disability issues. The heading of the article he wrote about that process is “Disabilities Bill a Waste of Time, Money.”

He said the following: “So now we know. No surprise really. A government only attempts to muzzle the media, manipulate the masses and deceive the disabled if it intends to railroad through its own Ontarians with Disabilities Act in the form it, and only it, considers acceptable.”

“What Isabel Bassett”—that was the then minister responsible—“has brought before Queen’s Park is an insult, say activists who’ve tried their hardest and given their utmost in a vain attempt to get the Ontario government’s attention.

“Instead, Bassett’s Ministry of Culture, Recreation and Tourism intends to introduce a disabilities act that’s basically a nonentity. Strange behaviour, considering her family’s wealth is rooted in the media—the very institution ordered banned from all committee meetings on the legislation except one.

“That was the August 12 session in Hamilton, which I attended and they didn’t like that one little bit. One ministry representative suggested I could watch proceedings (nice of her to dictate my civil rights) but not perform my job.

“The day my column ran in the *Spectator*, I received a call from Bassett’s executive assistant, wondering why I showed up.

“We’ve decided the meeting are closed,” he said. “We didn’t think it was a matter of discussion.”

“Well, it should have been. And if the Progressive Conservative government rams through this eunuch of an act, the legacy it leaves behind will cripple thousands of Ontarians with disabilities.”

Interjection.

Mr Christopherson: Thank you for that contribution, Bert.

We know, of course, that the historical result of all this is that yes, they did indeed introduce an insult of a bill, a couple of pages long. I would agree with Aznive Mallett that the same could have been achieved, given how little is in here, with a memo to most of the ministries. In fact, a lot of what they put in this bill, we as an NDP government had already directed ministries to do; and it was this government, as I understand it, shortly after they took power in 1995, that stopped that work. Now we know why they didn’t want anybody in the committee room. They wanted to play this as low as possible. They came in with this insult of a bill. I think they realized at the end of the day that even though this government is used to ramming things through and ignoring the public, even this one, in the context of Tory legislation, was over the top. So it didn’t move and it died on the order paper.

1710

That’s what’s so infuriating when we listen to Premier Mike Harris talk about how much he cares about individuals with disabilities, how much he really cares about making sure that barriers are removed. Then we heard the Minister of Social Services, and it was aggravating at the very least today to hear him stand up and talk. All he did was repeat a litany of a list of expenditures, and quite frankly those expenditures in most cases are nothing new. They were initiated by previous governments, and if we’ve maintained the same funding levels with this government, we’re lucky, let alone see any increases.

The fact of the matter is this is the same group that decided it was OK back in 1995 to cut the income of the poorest of the poor by 22%. “Oh yes, but we didn’t

include the disabled in that. We made sure that they didn’t take that hit. It was only the rest of the people who are in poverty that we hit,” like somehow that makes it OK. One thing they never addressed is the fact that some of the children of these families that had their income cut by 22.6% are disabled. How can you possibly argue that didn’t hurt people who are already disadvantaged, vulnerable and hurting? Then they had the audacity to stand up a couple of years later and beat their chest and say what a great job they’re doing for the disabled and how much they care about people who are in poverty.

I wanted to say to the members of the government across the way: You may think that you can compartmentalize the rich and give them continuing tax cuts and that’s going to keep them happy, and compartmentalize the poor and write them off because you know that demographically there’s a lower percentage of people with lower income and lower education who vote, and hope that somehow the middle class will disregard both those two categories and think that somehow this government’s agenda is good for them. The reality is that there’s an awful lot of working middle-class families out there who are scared of the future under Mike Harris.

Mr Brad Clark (Stoney Creek): A lot of them voted for us.

Mr Christopherson: Yes, you’re right, member from Stoney Creek, a lot of them did vote for you. That doesn’t mean that what you’re doing is the right thing to do. Neither does it mean that there won’t be a point in time, which I’m willing to bet there will be, where people are going to stand back and take a look at what these trade-offs have been and who benefited and who was hurt. I believe that’s going to happen very quickly. Anywhere you look in the health care system, education system, social services, environmental protection, labour law—go down the list—the big losers in terms of mass numbers at the end of the day are the group that you think aren’t paying attention, of whom you so arrogantly say, “Well, they keep voting for us.” It’s the working middle class that is still the largest group in our society, and you cannot continue to pamper the very wealthy and hurt the very poor and think that somehow the middle class will believe that they’ll remain unaffected by this.

Ask that middle class whether they think it’s a fair trade-off that there be tax benefits for the very wealthy but not enough money to provide a decent, appropriate Ontarians with Disabilities Act in this province. Ask them if they think that’s fair. That’s what is happening today as we, the opposition members, put that issue squarely in front of the government through this opposition day motion.

The fact is that we’re watching. You got away with it the last time. They did, Speaker. It breaks my heart to admit it, but there you are. There are the facts; can’t deny it. They’re still sitting on that side of the House with a majority. So, yes, they got away with it. They insulted the disabled community, they bamboozled the rest of the population, and I guess they’re hoping they can do the same thing again this term because now they’ve got to

cut another 20%. We heard \$300 million the other day. There's another \$600 million to go. Does anybody honestly think that with those kinds of cuts on the table, they are suddenly going to find the money necessary to make sure that disabled Ontarians are having their rights entrenched in law? I don't think so.

At the end of the day, the government will not be able to get away with this sham of a process, as they did the last time, where they tried to manipulate who came into the committee room, who would hear what's going on and who was excluded. You're not going to get away with that this time. You're going to have to come to grips with the fact that there are obligations and commitments that this government has given in election times and in motions and resolutions voted upon in this Legislature and that you're going to have to honour those commitments, unlike in the past.

Interjection.

Mr Christopherson: I want to end my comments not by talking about where we've been in the past and what that means. Much of that was dealt with in the last election. But I do want to say that you have an obligation, members of the government—especially new members like the one now who thinks he's been around here long enough that he can sit back and heckle. I can't hear what you're saying. The first lesson of heckling is to make sure you're heard.

Let me tell you something. I'm betting and I'm hoping that you would have been embarrassed by what happened here the last time. I would hope that as a new member you would say: "I'm not tied to that old process. I've got an obligation as a new member to ensure the things that I ran on are implemented." You've made commitments and you're now hearing from us and the disabled community; the leadership is here today. They're all saying to you and your colleagues, you have a moral responsibility to provide the kind of legislation that you promised. Your colleagues didn't do it in the last Harris government; maybe you'll be more successful this time.

I see you nodding your head. I hope we can count on you to vote in favour of this resolution as a first step in showing your good faith in wanting to see the commitments made to the disabled citizens of this community, who have rights, guaranteed in law so that they begin to see their rights showing themselves in our communities.

Mr John Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands): I totally support this resolution, and I would encourage all of the members in the House to support it. We need a meaningful Ontarians with Disabilities Act, and the only way to get it is for this government to move on a commitment that they made five years ago.

Ms Frances Lankin (Beaches-East York): I was going to say I'm pleased to participate in the debate, but boy, oh, boy, I know there are a lot of people watching this, many from their homes, many here in this building from the disability community and supporters of Ontarians with disabilities who have been fighting for fairness and access to full civic life, who really wish they weren't having to listen to a debate like this again, who really

wish that government and all politicians at this point in time would just live up to commitments.

One of the things that really distresses me—and it started again in question period today, when our member from Broadview-Greenwood, our disabilities critic, and others put questions to the Premier. The Premier either sloughs off the questions or answers them in a way that is so derisive of the serious nature of the concerns, so dismissive of the realities of everyday life that persons with disabilities face, whether it's needing to use a public pay phone that's too high to reach or being mobility challenged and not being able to get across a street in time, the way the street lights are sequenced, or not being able to go into a restaurant, a theatre or transit. Let's talk about transit, to be able to get to places, to be able to get to employment, to be able to get to enjoy recreational life. There are so many barriers—to work, to learning, to fully participating—and the Premier just, in such a derisive way, dismisses those concerns and gives rhetoric about this government having done more than any government in the history of the province.

Interjection.

Ms Lankin: Yes, he could get philosophical about this stuff. There's a quotation, citation; actually, it comes from the Bible. I'm not really good on biblical citations, but I can tell you the intent of it. It talks about the moral bankruptcy of leadership, of governing leadership when it uses hot buttons and plays on people's emotions and manipulates emotions to get support for what they want to do. That's one of the hallmarks of this government. But when you take it even a step further—it's not twisting the facts, it's not selectively using the facts in order to promote the case that you're trying to make, but you totally ignore the fact and the reality of the situation. You have citizens of this province, here in this building today and watching this debate, who are demanding, rightfully, full access to full participation in civic life. And he starts partisan shots about who did what when.

1720

The minister herself, in the debate here this afternoon, spent most of her time not giving full and valid facts about the record of your government and simply pointed fingers across the floor. People in this building and in this room and watching this debate want to know what you're going to do as a government, want to know how you're going to live up to the promise that you made to Ontarians with disabilities when you promised an Ontarians with Disabilities Act, a full and effective piece of legislation; want to know when you're going to retrieve yourself from the sham of the piece of legislation that you brought forward which did nothing to accomplish even the goals that you had set out in the beginning of the discussion paper that preceded the legislation. It was a terrible betrayal on the part of your government, and you have done nothing to indicate to people that you are prepared to take the steps necessary to retrieve yourself from that situation and to bring about the equity that people are rightly demanding.

When I think about all of the pointing of fingers, when I think about all of the promises that have been held out, I think about someone who right now is perhaps sitting in a wheelchair in committee room 1, who says: "You know something, I don't give a darn who said what when. I just want to be able to have access to go to restaurants, to be able to go to school, to be able to go to work. I want an end to the discrimination against me in terms of full participation and in terms of attitudinal discrimination." Quite frankly, I bet you they would also say: "I want employment equity legislation, which got stopped in this province. I want a policy of full access to transit, that transit must be wheelchair-accessible, a policy which was ended, shamefully, in this province. I want a piece of legislation that ensures that the new road to prosperity program that the Conservative government has announced and all of the building of infrastructure that they've talked about, that everything that is built is going to be accessible to me as a citizen, as a person with a disability."

I bet you that's what they want. They want a government that betrayed them once to stand up and say, "I'm sorry and we're going to get it right this time," instead of all of this nonsense—I was almost unparliamentary—that we hear in the chamber today.

People with disabilities—1.5 million Ontarians—have made their voices very clear. They have spent the time working with politicians, legislators, policy-makers of all three political parties and of the civil service, to articulate the principles that must be contained within an effective Ontarians with Disabilities Act. This Legislature endorsed those principles. What a PR move it was on the part of the government members.

Obviously they stood—well, maybe with good intentions as individual members, not knowing their government was going to bail out on that commitment. I will give the benefit of the doubt to some individual members. Now is the time to stand up and be counted. If you were here and you stood and voted for that resolution, you should be part of the voice being raised today by Ontarians with disabilities, and by elected representatives on their behalf, demanding that the cabinet of this province respond with effective legislation.

The time for finger pointing is over. The time for aggrandizing what meager steps have been taken is over.

Hon Cameron Jackson (Minister of Tourism): That's a big word for a socialist.

Ms Lankin: There's a minister across who likes to snipe a lot. I say to him: I remember him in opposition, I remember him at one point in time being an advocate for persons with disabilities. I see him now sitting there and not raising his voice in support of doing the right thing, absolutely defending his government's lack of action. Worse than that is the scam they perpetrated on the people of Ontario and people with disabilities. Yes, I've provoked the minister. And you know what? That's my job. My job here is to try and provoke these ministers to do the right thing finally. It is shameful that we are here debating this one more time.

I have seen this government stand and take credit for initiatives like the Ontario disability support program. You will remember, Mr Speaker, that I'm one of those people who, when I see something that has potential and could be a good initiative, will say that. I stood and I said that the creation of that program was one of the things that had potential for persons with disability in this province, that it had potential for delivering, finally, a self-support program for people to live with dignity. I'm sad to have to stand and say that I was right at the time when I also said, "The devil is in the details and will be in the implementation."

When we see persons with disabilities coming into our offices, being treated the way they are through the Ontario disability support program—not through any fault of the staff; the staff and the offices are totally under-resourced—with real changes that are being done behind the backdoor and being pushed through without thinking through the implications of what it means, people whose lives are dependant, month to month, on receiving those benefits and receiving the support, like transportation support to get to, perhaps, the hospital for dialysis—one of the constituents I had had that money cut off and taken off the cheque inadvertently, incorrectly, we now find out, because of a rule change the minister put through and didn't understand how it would apply to people who were actual participants of the program.

When we see people lined up for appeals around eligibility, we worry. We all worried that the eligibility criteria would be implemented and put in place in such a way as to unfairly limit the number of people having access to that program. We were right about that. The line-ups, the lack of adjudication ability, the capability within the system means people are having to await their day and await justice. We don't at this point in time know what the end result of that will be.

I know, as I look across at the members opposite, that they know what I'm talking about. As constituents' representatives, your offices have to be receiving the same volume and number of calls that our offices have been receiving. You must know the nature of the problem. Who's standing up and speaking about it? Who's standing up for persons with disabilities and saying: "This model program we created that was supposed to be something good, our commitment to the disability community, is failing. We need to do something to show we were serious about that"? Who over there is standing up on behalf of persons with disabilities? Unfortunately, it sure isn't the minister.

That speech today was shameful. She was, I'm sure, being booed in the rooms downstairs. I am sure that people who were there listening were aghast that a minister who is supposed to be responsible for issues that affect their lives, that affect their livelihood, that affect their ability to live with dignity in our communities and to be full citizens, would stand and give a speech like that, that didn't even give acknowledgement to the legiti-

mate concerns and the legitimate grievances on behalf of that community—

Mr Christopherson: Shame.

Ms Lankin: People say, "Shame." It is shameful.

It would have been nice if once in today's debate someone on behalf of the government had said what your plan would be—not simply more study, not simply more talk—what is it you are going to do to fulfill your promise to bring in an Ontarians with Disabilities Act.

I presume, although none of you will admit it, that having abandoned the previous piece of legislation, you understand how woefully inadequate that piece of legislation was.

What is your plan to replace it and to live up to the commitments you have made? Who is going to stand and tell all the people who are here in the Legislative Assembly today to watch this debate, and all the people at home who have tuned in to find out about their future or the futures of their loved ones, family members of persons with disabilities, who is going to tell them what the government of Ontario plans to do with respect to the concerns they've brought forward, with respect to the legitimate demands they've made, with respect to the fundamental issues that are going to affect the rest of their lives?

The silence is deafening. It's an interesting phrase to use as we are talking about persons with disabilities, as we are talking about people who are hearing-impaired, people who are sight-impaired, who are mobility-impaired, people who have differing abilities, who want to use those abilities but who find barriers in the way of using those abilities because we as a society have not opened the doors. We have built those barriers. It is incumbent on all of us to be part of tearing down those barriers, and that can only be done under the leadership of a government that is prepared to live up to its commitment and prepared to do the right thing by all of the people of this province.

1730

Those who are here today who have been watching this debate, who yearn to hear a positive indication from the government of Ontario, have been disappointed once again. But, boy, they're a resilient lot. They have not given up. They are here. They will be back. They will continue to fight for their rights, and we will continue to stand beside them. We will continue to say that this government has failed 1.5 million Ontarians and others of us who support them. We will continue to ensure that you are held accountable for that. They will not forget.

Mr Duncan: It's with a mixture of sadness and anger that I stand today. I want to briefly review the history of this issue.

First of all, the Davis government put disabled issues into the Human Rights Code. The Peterson government expanded those rights. The Rae government, to their credit, on a variety of issues responded to the needs of the disabled community.

I listened and almost fell out of my chair today when I heard the Premier of Ontario suggest that both of the

previous governments failed to do an ODA. What he forgot to tell the people of this province was there was no request for it up until that time. What he didn't tell the people was that he signed a letter in May 1985, promising that in his first term he would bring in an Ontarians with Disabilities Act. He forgets that their caucus voted for Marion Boyd's resolution on dealing with an ODA in its first term. He forgot to talk about that, and he forgot to talk about the fact that his caucus voted for a resolution a little over a year ago defining the principles—it was a unanimous vote of this Legislature. Then a year ago today your former minister, the minister who was defeated, brought in a bill that your government found so appalling, so lacking, that they in fact withdrew the bill in their next throne speech and renounced the bill.

Then I heard members standing up and talking about what this government has done for the disabled people in this province. What you have is the most sorry legacy, the most broken commitments, the biggest failure of any government in this province or in any other province. You're behind the Americans. We're 10 years behind the Americans today in terms of a disabilities act with teeth that protects the people of this province. Your minister has not responded to requests to meet with the Ontarians with Disabilities Act Committee. You have an absolutely shameful record.

Today in Windsor at ALPHA House there are about 150 people watching this debate. They read your commitment. They saw your vote on the last two occasions. There are people in the north of Toronto—the member for Thornhill—who have been calling in. They've been watching. There's a group in Guelph. They've been watching, just as the whole province has been watching.

This government should be ashamed of its failure to act, and I urge you to vote for this resolution as you voted for the last two resolutions, to ensure fairness for all Ontarians.

Mr Bart Maves (Niagara Falls): It's my pleasure to rise today and join the debate on the resolution made by the member from Elgin-Middlesex-London. I want to congratulate that member for bringing the resolution forward. I was very encouraged at the start of his debate when he talked in very non-partisan terms about this issue, and for quite some time he led the discussion in that direction.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr Michael A. Brown): Order. Please keep the conversations down so that I might hear the member from Niagara Falls.

Mr Maves: Thank you, Speaker.

I was quite encouraged, as I was saying, about the direction in which the member opposite led off the debate, but then he let a couple of things slip in that I really found offensive, when he then equated that if someone decided to vote against this bill they'd somehow be against the disabled, they would be opposed to the disabled working in the mainstream in our society. Nothing could be further from the truth. When you do things like that you frustrate people and you make them

almost want to say: "No, that's not fair. There could be very good reasons why someone would vote against the resolution."

I had a resolution last week in private members' hour that I thought was a way we could solve the doctors' shortage, the distribution problem throughout Ontario and all the members of the Liberal party voted against it. I didn't stand up and say they were against solving a doctor distribution problem if they voted against it. That wouldn't be fair and that wouldn't be appropriate, but he's done that and I found that offensive. We don't do that on this side of the aisle and I'd appreciate it if it wouldn't be done on that side of the aisle.

The second thing I'd like to talk about is that I want to congratulate the minister, the member from Guelph, the member from Thornhill. I thought they did an excellent job of talking about a lot of the things this government has done in the ministries of Education, Transportation, and Citizenship, Culture and Recreation, and Finance and on and on in dealing with and putting in supports and trying to improve accessibility for the disabled. I think they did a very good job and I think it's appropriate during this debate that those initiatives were heard, so I want to congratulate them for that.

One thing I've noticed in this debate is that with the exception of the member for Elgin-Middlesex-London, who at the outset of his debate talked about some general principles, not one Liberal in the entire time has talked about any concrete ideas on what should be in an Ontarians with Disabilities Act. During the time they were having this debate you would think that they would stand up and talk about that, and that's a frustration for us on this side of the aisle.

Another part of this I'd like to talk about is quite simply that when we did brought in Bill 83—I have a copy here with me—we introduced a bill after a lot of consultation, and it didn't go far enough and the disabled community said it didn't go far enough, and so we're back at it again.

I've had people in my community asking me to do some more consultation with them, and I'm doing that. I've got a person in my riding who I'm dealing with—I'm not going to name her, a very capable person with cerebral palsy—who is very tied in with the Ontario March of Dimes and the disabled community. She's quite an activist, and we're working together to put together a survey for the people in the Niagara community. We're going to get some help with some of the local agencies and we're going to ask the people of Niagara what it is they want in an ODA. I think that's an important process to continue to move forward with.

We made changes to the building code, changes that the members opposite when they were in government didn't make, and these were improvements to access for the disabled. Let me just give you a few examples. Increasing the number of building entrances required to be constructed as barrier free: Currently only one entrance was required; we've changed that. We addressed the needs of the visually impaired by requiring warning

strips and prohibiting escalators or stair designs that have no barriers or construction underneath to warn the visually impaired. We required all building controls accessible to the disabled to be operable using one hand. These were some things, and there are more. I don't want sit and read the list all day long, but there more things that we have done in the Ontario building code.

In my survey that I'm working on, we're going to ask what are some more things this government might be able to put in the Ontario building code.

The Ministry of Finance: We brought in the workplace accessibility tax incentive program, which was announced in 1998 at an estimated cost of \$7 million. The program is going to offset the accommodation costs to businesses when they hire persons with disabilities. This is an incentive for the private sector to bring forward to make their workplaces more accessible and to hire very skilled people who might not right now be able to work in that workplace because of their disability. That's an important initiative and maybe we can look at more things along those lines.

I've recently had some more meetings. I've brought some people from the March of Dimes in the riding to meet with the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Municipal Affairs, and we raised some of these building code issues. That's important consultation that led to serious change.

1740

I've had some more recent conversations with the schizophrenia society in my riding. We had a very good conversation and we had a discussion about the possibility of having one centralized access point in communities throughout Ontario where people with disabilities can find out: What are the resources? What are the whole pool of things that are out there and available for me?

There are two groups here, under 21 and over 21. There are different services available, depending upon your age, in this province, and I find in talking to a lot of people in the community that they have difficulty. If they have a son or daughter born with a disability, what's available to them? It's very difficult to know. Their doctor might tell them a few things. When their child is four or five years old and goes to school, the teacher or principal might tell them what's available. But it becomes very difficult to get a good sense of what actually is available in the community. Maybe we can have something like that in an Ontarians with Disability Act, some central access point. When you turn 21, the basket of services that are available to you changes, and I think there needs to be some kind of central access point.

We need to talk about these things. We need to be serious, to have positive input from the other side about the specific things that they think should be in the bill.

I don't have much more time to go into this. One of the things that kills me about this debate is that the minister started off reading a letter from the Liberal leader saying that they would bring in an Ontarians with Disabilities Act within three years of being elected and being able to govern. I don't understand—not one of

them has answered the question of why three years was okay for them but two years is what the time line has to be on this side. If someone could come up with an answer to that, I would like to hear that. We asked the question several times and we never did get an answer.

There are a lot of things that were said during debate. The member opposite, Ms Lankin, from Beaches-Woodbine, made a very impassioned plea—

Ms Lankin: Beaches-East York.

Mr Maves: Beaches-East York, she wants me to say. She made a very impassioned plea. She's a very excellent public speaker, but we on this of the aisle wonder, where were these impassioned pleas when she was in cabinet and where was the Ontarians with Disabilities Act when they were in government? That's not to say that we shouldn't have one, and that's not to say we shouldn't have one soon. We will, and we're going to continue to work on it, but hypocrisy can only go on so far. This was what their bill was: non-existent.

Mr Dalton McGuinty (Leader of the Opposition): I am very proud to join this important debate here today.

Today for the third time, this House is going to ask Mike Harris to make good on his promise to the disabled community. While the two previous resolutions received the unanimous support of this Legislature, Mike Harris has ignored them both. Today we're going to send Mike Harris another message. We are looking for, and in fact we are demanding, a vote every bit as strong.

Some people are going to ask: "Why bother? Why bring a motion like this before the Legislature one more time? Mike Harris has ignored us before. Isn't he simply going to ignore us again?"

My dad used to tell us a story about a prize bull. He grew up on a farm, and apparently there was a farmer who owned this prize bull. People would come from miles around to visit this magnificent and proud beast, which was kept in a stall in the corner of a barn. When the people would come in to visit the bull, the farmer would pick up a two by four and hit the bull with all of his strength over the head. People would say, "Why did you do that?" and the farmer would say, "That's how I get his attention."

Today, for the third time, we're going to hit Mike Harris over the head with a resolution. Some people would say that's a lot of hits, three hits over the head, but I can tell you that when we're dealing with Mike Harris, that's a lot of bull. Quite frankly, if we have to drag this Premier kicking and screaming into keeping his own promise to pass an Ontarians with Disabilities Act, then that is exactly what I and my caucus intend to do.

It was in May 1995 that Mike Harris made a promise. Quite simply, he said, "Elect me, and I will pass an Ontarians with Disabilities Act in my first term of office." He also promised the members of the Ontarians with Disabilities Act Committee, "Elect me, and you will be able to help draft this important piece of legislation."

The painful truth—it's painful for the government to acknowledge this truth and painful for the disabled community because of the betrayal—is that Mike Harris

broke both these promises. And not only did the Harris government fail to bring in any kind of meaningful legislation, but in a move that smacks of the worst kind of arrogance, Mike Harris refused to even meet with the ODA committee, let alone consult them in any real fashion on a piece of very important legislation.

Unlike the Premier, I believe that when you make a promise, you stand by it. It's all about trust and integrity, and the people of this province have the right to expect from their Premier that he will be someone who can be trusted; he will be a person of integrity. Unfortunately, this government's betrayal of the disabled community doesn't end with Mike Harris's failure to enact an Ontarians with Disabilities Act. Sadly, there is more.

In the Common Sense Revolution, Mike Harris promised, "Aid for seniors and the disabled will not be cut." He felt this promise was so important, so essential to secure voters, that he bolded that statement for emphasis. Well, a promise from Mike Harris was supposed to be golden. This is the guy who was self-described as the only honest politician in Ontario. He was the guy who said, "If I don't keep my promises as Premier, I'll resign." Let's check out the record.

When it comes to keeping his promise not to cut people with disabilities, he cut \$50 million in direct services to people with developmental disabilities; he imposed mandatory user fees on prescription drugs for disabled persons on the Ontario drug benefit program; he changed the definition of "disabled," making it harder for people to receive financial support and reducing the benefits for many who were not cut off entirely; he has underfunded the special services at home program so badly that families needing support have seen an average reduction of 30%. Finally, Mike Harris's cuts to education funding have resulted in the tragic loss of programs like speech pathology and special education in our schools. It turns out that Mike Harris's promises were indeed as good as gold: Bre-X gold, absolutely worthless.

Like so much else in politics, it really boils down to a matter of values and priorities. Either you believe, like this caucus, that an essential role of government is to help people reach their full potential and you make that a priority, or you don't. From our perspective, a real priority of government, any government, should be to ensure that there is room for everybody at the Ontario table, that everybody finds opportunity, that everybody realizes their potential, that everybody is able to make a contribution, that everybody is enabled. This is not only a matter of good social policy; this is fundamentally a matter of good economic policy.

I want to recognize the tireless work of David Lepofsky and his ODA committee. If there is anybody in this province who thinks for a second that disabilities can't be overcome, they should meet David Lepofsky. David is blind, but his vision is crystal-clear. He sees a province where disabled people are able to make a contribution not only to their own success but to the greater success of our province. We are proud to join David in his fight for a real Ontarians with Disabilities Act.

I want to let everybody know how proud I am of the hard work done by our disabilities critic, Steve Peters. When I appointed Steve, I asked him to champion this fight on behalf of the 1.5 million disabled Ontarians, and he has not let me down and he has not let that community down. I thank him for that.

In conclusion, I want to say clearly to the people with disabilities who are watching or listening to this debate today that the single greatest barrier you face in reaching your full potential is no longer your disability, it's the man who is seating in the Premier's chair.

The Acting Speaker: Mr Peters has moved opposition day number 3. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour will say "aye."

All those opposed will say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

Call in the members. There will be a 10-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1751 to 1801.

The Acting Speaker: All those in favour of Mr Peters's resolution will stand one by one.

Ayes

Agostino, Dominic	Flaherty, Jim	Newman, Dan
Arnott, Ted	Gerretsen, John	O'Toole, John
Baird, John R.	Gilchrist, Steve	Ouellette, Jerry J.
Barrett, Toby	Gill, Raminder	Parsons, Ernie
Bartolucci, Rick	Gravelle, Michael	Patten, Richard
Bisson, Gilles	Guzzo, Garry J.	Peters, Steve

Bountrogianni, Marie	Hampton, Howard	Phillips, Gerry
Boyer, Claudette	Hardeman, Ernie	Pupatello, Sandra
Bradley, James J.	Hoy, Pat	Ramsay, David
Bryant, Michael	Jackson, Cameron	Runciman, Robert W.
Caplan, David	Johns, Helen	Ruprecht, Tony
Christopherson, David	Kells, Morley	Sampson, Rob
Chudleigh, Ted	Kennedy, Gerard	Sergio, Mario
Churley, Marilyn	Klees, Frank	Skarica, Toni
Clark, Brad	Kormos, Peter	Smitherman, George
Cleary, John C.	Kwinter, Monte	Spina, Joseph
Coburn, Brian	Lalonde, Jean-Marc	Sterling, Norman W.
Colle, Mike	Lankin, Frances	Stewart, R. Gary
Conway, Sean G.	Levac, David	Stockwell, Chris
Cordiano, Joseph	Marchese, Rosario	Tascona, Joseph N.
Crozier, Bruce	Martel, Shelley	Tilson, David
Cunningham, Dianne	Martiniuk, Gerry	Tsubouchi, David H.
Curling, Alvin	Maves, Bart	Turnbull, David
DeFaria, Carl	Mazzilli, Frank	Wettlaufer, Wayne
Di Cocco, Caroline	McGuinty, Dalton	Wilson, Jim
Dombrowsky, Leona	McLeod, Lyn	Witmer, Elizabeth
Duncan, Dwight	Molinari, Tina R.	Wood, Bob
Dunlop, Garfield	Munro, Julia	Young, David
Ecker, Janet	Murdoch, Bill	
Elliott, Brenda	Mushinski, Marilyn	

Clerk of the House (Mr Claude L. DesRosiers):
The ayes are 88; the nays are 0.

The Acting Speaker: The motion is carried. This House stands adjourned.

The House adjourned at 1805.

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