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Wednesday 17 November 1999

Mercredi 17 novembre 1999

Speaker
Honourable Gary Carr

Président
L'honorable Gary Carr

Clerk
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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO

Wednesday 17 November 1999

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO

Mercredi 17 novembre 1999

*The House met at 1334.
Prayers.*

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

NATIONAL CHILD DAY

Mr Richard Patten (Ottawa Centre): As both children's critic and human rights critic for the official opposition, I am pleased to stand today and give special recognition to National Child Day.

The government of Canada designated November 20 as National Child Day to commemorate two historic United Nations events: (1) the adoption of the Declaration of the Rights of the Child on November 20, 1959, and (2) the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child on November 20, 1989.

The adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the creation of National Child Day as a special day just for children reflects the growing recognition that children are important and valued members of our society.

National Child Day does something else too, something simple. It recognizes children just for being themselves. It reminds us that children need love and respect and stimulation to grow to their full potential. It's a day to listen to children, to marvel at their uniqueness and all they have to offer us.

A key objective of National Child Day, 1999, is to increase awareness of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. This year is extra special because it marks the 10th anniversary. Since its adoption by the United Nations on November 20, 1989, the convention has been signed and ratified by more countries than any other international treaty. Over the past decade, the convention has proved to be a valuable tool for promoting the rights of children everywhere around the world.

GALLAHER PAPER MILL

Mr Bart Maves (Niagara Falls): I'm pleased to inform the Legislature that on November 12, Ernst and Young and TD Bank found a buyer who intends to run the Gallaher paper mill in Thorold. This news was greeted with celebrations from the 310 workers and their families at this plant, the residents of Thorold and the entire Niagara region.

A tremendous amount of effort and time went into trying to convince Ernst and Young and TD Bank to select a buyer who would run the plant. The reopening of the plant shows what can be done when governments, unions, businesses and local communities work together towards a common goal of economic development, growth and job creation.

Many individuals and organizations were involved in assuring that Gallaher remains in production. I would like to thank Premier Harris for his intervention in the matter. After I spoke to the Premier on October 19, the Premier immediately contacted Ernst and Young officials and encouraged them to select a bidder who would run the plant.

I also want to thank economic development and trade minister, Al Palladini, for diligently impressing on TD Bank our government's desire to see the plant operating again.

In addition, I would like to thank Thorold mayor Tim Kenny for all of his Herculean efforts in this matter.

Finally, I would like to congratulate the workers at Gallaher and Mike Lambert of the Communications, Energy and Paperworkers Union for their hard work. Your patience and determination have paid off. Everyone in this deal, from the Premier to the Gallaher workers, should be proud of their efforts.

EDUCATION FUNDING

Mr Tony Ruprecht (Davenport): In 1996, the Harris government cancelled Ontario welcome houses, a recommended referral agency for newcomers. Three years ago it also cancelled the Anti-Racism Secretariat. Then this government reduced funding for English-as-a-second-language programs which were designed to speed up a working knowledge of English in order to get employment. The government then cancelled publication of books designed to help newcomers access jobs in trades and professions.

Today we find out that the Harris government plans to cut \$800 million from education. This of course would mean the death of basic literacy and English-language education to adult immigrants.

This government seems hell-bent on destroying the infrastructure of services to immigrants. When immigrants settle here, they wish especially to participate in the economic activity of Ontario. They don't want welfare; they want jobs, but in order to get them they need basic tools to participate: English-language literacy

and orientation to where the jobs are, and training. To cut these orientation programs is penny wise and pound foolish because it postpones their contribution to our economy.

The Liberals urge that this government rethink its ill-thought-out proposal to cut \$800 million from education and consequently eliminate and decimate dozens of programs—

The Speaker (Hon Gary Carr): I'm sorry, the member's time has expired.

1340

FIRE SAFETY AWARDS

Mr Bert Johnson (Perth-Middlesex): Yesterday I had the opportunity to congratulate a fine member of the Perth-Middlesex community, Ms Joan Nichol of Ailsa Craig, at the fire safety awards ceremony.

Ms Nichol joined the Ailsa Craig and district fire department in 1991. Since then, she has given countless hours of her time to educate a wide range of individuals and groups in the community. Among other things, Ms Nichol organized fire safety displays, fire safety house visits and school poster contests. She delivered presentations to many groups, including children and older adults.

Although Ms Nichol left the fire department earlier this year, she continues to give her time to teach fire safety. Ms Nichol is one of 20 individuals and organizations in our province to receive a fire safety award this year. It's always a pleasure to thank the brave men and women who help protect our homes and businesses from the threat of fire.

At this time I would also like to thank all the brave firefighters who helped put out a five-alarm fire in my hometown of Listowel. Luckily, this fire took no lives but it did destroy seven buildings in our downtown core.

My community came together during this blaze as downtown businesses opened their doors to firefighters, whose wet clothing turned to ice in the cold November air. Local merchants, the Salvation Army and residents brought drinks, clothing, dry mitts and hot soup to firefighters recovering from fighting the blaze. I am proud to represent these people in this Legislature.

DIMITRI "MATTI" BARANOVSKI

Mr Monte Kwinter (York Centre): I've just returned from the funeral of 15-year-old Dimitri "Matti" Baranovski, an honour roll grade 11 student at Northview Heights collegiate in my riding.

Matti was born in Kharkov, Ukraine, and at age 6 moved to Israel. Two years ago his mother, Olga, anxious to keep her only son from harm's way, decided to bring him to the safe haven of Canada.

Last Sunday, Matti, doing what teenagers do, was hanging out with a group of his friends in a park that was within sight of his home. He was set upon by a group of

older youths demanding cigarettes and spare change and in an ensuing struggle was beaten and kicked to death.

The funeral chapel was filled to overflowing by Matti's fellow students and members of the public who were too numb to comprehend the event they were witnessing. How do you explain the unexplainable or make sense of the senseless? The uncontrolled sobbing of the students, most of whom were experiencing their first confrontation with the death of a friend or loved one, the sight of the stark coffin brought home to all the enormity of the problem that we all have to address.

Youth attacks are a major concern for Toronto police, who are reporting almost two swarmings a day. Experts say that it's just the tip of the iceberg, noting that school surveys continually show at least 50% of the attacks go unreported.

I know that all of us in this House wish to extend our condolences, our regrets and our prayers to the Baranovski family and hope that Matti's memory will be a source of comfort and blessing.

LIONS CLUBS

Mr Marcel Beaubien (Lambton-Kent-Middlesex): It is my distinct honour to bring to the attention of the House two special anniversaries. The Lions Clubs of Glencoe and Parkhill, located in my riding, are celebrating 25 and 60 years of service to each of their respective communities.

Twenty-five years ago the Glencoe Lions first president, Ray Hooker, said, "Whenever there exists an urgent need, our Lions will perform the deed." Likewise, 60 years ago, H.L. Turner told the Parkhill Lions, "We must constantly endeavour, in keeping with Lions tradition, to be of service to the underprivileged and to the community as a whole."

In just the past 10 years, the Glencoe Lions have raised more than \$400,000 in support of summer and winter sports for boys and girls. I must point out that this is a community of 2,000 people. They have provided bursaries and travel expenses for students and they have hosted several exchange students from around the world. In 1989, with support from the provincial government, they opened a much-needed seniors housing complex that has enjoyed full occupancy ever since.

Not to be outdone, the Lions Club of Parkhill has provided eyeglasses free of charge, sent children to camp, financially supported the Red Cross, the Boy Scouts, the crippled children's fund and others too numerous to mention here. In addition, the Lions Club of Parkhill has also raised thousands of dollars towards the cost of the Parkhill Community Centre and most recently provided funding for major renovations and improvements to the town's park.

Because volunteers like those in the Lions Clubs care, the lives of many in rural Ontario are richer and fuller. In closing, I certainly would like to recognize the contribution that those two Lions Clubs have made in their respective communities.

EDUCATION FUNDING

Mr Rick Bartolucci (Sudbury): Here's a children's story for the House today.

There once was an outrageous Ontario Premier who said he loved schoolchildren. This Premier decided one day he was going to show families how much he cared. "I'm going to put kids first," he said. Then, with a down-home, friendly grin, he picked up a freshly sharpened axe and hacked \$1 billion from the education system.

He then said, "There is more work to be done." So he took away services from special needs children, leaving kids at home and parents frantic. Soon, he established a one-size-fits-all funding formula that resulted in school closures. "This is the icing on the cake," he exclaimed.

In reaction to the resulting furor, he smiled and said, "But we are putting kids first," as school boards across the province scrambled, scrimped and cut to try to make ends meet.

He also decided to demonstrate the rewards of earning a buck. He got elementary school kids to sell chocolate bars and other products so that they could purchase textbooks, computers and other supplies. "This is a wonderful hands-on experience," he said. "This way, our kids will be prepared to accept low-paying, dead-end jobs right after high school," because they can't afford to go to university or to college.

But the Premier didn't stop here. Today he said: "We plan to cut \$800 million more from education and literacy programs, from special education, from universities. Heck, what's another \$800 million from education?"

There was dead silence. Ontario students didn't live happily ever after.

LONG-TERM CARE

Ms Frances Lankin (Beaches-East York): Today I'm pleased to rise to share with the House the results of a very important study that was commissioned by the Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario. This report is called *Reclaiming a Vision: Making Long-Term-Care Community Services Work*.

I was fascinated in reading the report. Much has been talked about in this Legislature of concerns that we have, as members of the opposition, on behalf of our constituents with problems with the long-term-care system. I believe that on many occasions we have pointed out how cuts to hospitals have meant that more and more people are being released from hospitals quicker and sicker, that they are using up more and more of the home care budget that has been allocated by the province. So more of that money, which had been intended to support long-term-care services in the community—chronic care, to help people remain well and stay in their homes, live with independence, live with dignity—is going to subacute care, to people who are being released from hospital.

That's one thing when we say it, but now we've got the Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario's report finding exactly that. They have some really interesting

critiques of the government's program. First and foremost, they find that the program does not meet the vision that consumers have put out. I think most importantly, they find that the government's managed competition, bringing the private sector in, has meant less care, less quality of care, less accessibility of care.

It's a wake-up call to the government. I hope they pay attention.

1350

HANOVER WEB SITE

Mr Bill Murdoch (Bruce-Grey): A new project announced by this government recently is a perfect match for many of the communities in my riding of Bruce-Grey. The \$11.5 million to be invested by the province, Bell Canada and two public sector partners will extend high-speed data services to 270 communities, including six in my riding.

One of the shining examples of how a community is using the Net to enhance its profile is Hanover. From its Web site, residents and visitors alike can find out everything they need to know about this pretty town, from its regional aquatic centre, which offers programs suitable for any age, to the Hanover and District Hospital or the Hanover Raceway. Within its fine stately homes and modern subdivisions, the town is poised for progress and profit, and its commitment to business growth and promotion is strong and unwavering.

Surrounded by green farmland and fresh air, Hanover supports an energetic business community while offering all the comforts of community life: community living, but connected to the world by up-to-date, modern technology. This is truly a town that's on-line, ready for business and proud to strut its stuff.

Hanover has benefited from the Web and now, with this new provincial initiative, more communities in my riding will be able to follow their exciting example.

VISITOR

The Speaker (Hon Gary Carr): For the members' benefit, in the members' east gallery today we have a former member, Howard Sheppard, the member for Northumberland who was here during the 32nd and 33rd parliaments. I would like all the members to join in welcoming him.

WEARING OF RIBBONS

Mr Frank Mazzilli (London-Fanshawe): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: I ask for unanimous consent of the House to wear red ribbons in support of Mothers Against Drunk Driving. Today they launched their red ribbon campaign, and I leave that with the House.

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

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

TOWN OF PICKERING ACT, 1999

Mr O'Toole moved first reading of the following bill:
Bill Pr7, An Act respecting The Corporation of the
Town of Pickering.

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

GASOLINE PRICING ACT, 1999

LOI DE 1999

SUR LE PRIX DE L'ESSENCE

Mr Bradley moved first reading of the following bill:
Bill 16, An Act respecting the price of gasoline /
Projet de loi 16, Loi concernant le prix de l'essence.

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

Mr James J. Bradley (St Catharines): The bill, which is strictly within provincial jurisdiction, prohibits the sale of gasoline at retail for a price that is lower than the cost to a retailer of purchasing and reselling gasoline. That is, it prevents predatory pricing by major oil companies of independents.

LOI SUR LES SERVICES EN FRANÇAIS

FRENCH LANGUAGE SERVICES ACT

The Speaker (Hon Gary Carr): The Minister of Community and Social Services on a point of order.

L'hon John R. Baird (ministre des Services sociaux et communautaires, ministre délégué aux Affaires francophones) : Et des Affaires francophones.

Je veux demander le consentement unanime pour un représentant de chaque parti politique de faire un discours à l'occasion du 10^e anniversaire de la mise en oeuvre de la Loi sur les services en français.

The Speaker: Is there unanimous consent? Agreed.

L'hon M. Baird : C'est avec grand plaisir que je souligne aujourd'hui le 10^e anniversaire de la mise en oeuvre de la Loi sur les services en français.

La Loi sur les services en français a vu le jour en 1986. C'était le résultat des efforts de beaucoup de monde, des efforts qui avaient commencé au début des années 70 par la nomination d'un Coordonnateur du bilinguisme pour le gouvernement ontarien, des efforts qui ont continué, notamment sous l'ancien premier ministre Bill Davis quand il a créé le Bureau du coordonnateur provincial des services en français en 1977, et des efforts qui ont été poursuivis, par la suite, par d'autres partis au pouvoir.

La Loi sur les services en français a commencé son vrai rôle pendant la même semaine il y a 10 ans, en 1989.

Dans 23 régions désignées de la province, les francophones peuvent avoir des services en français de leur gouvernement provincial. Il y a 185 agences de services

sociaux, de santé et de services juridiques qui sont désignées pour donner des services en français aux gens de l'Ontario.

Depuis, les acquis se sont multipliés. Il y a maintenant cinq centres de santé communautaires francophones à Cornwall, Hamilton-Wentworth, New Liskeard, Sudbury et Toronto.

Ça faisait très longtemps que les francophones de l'Ontario demandaient le pouvoir de gérer leurs propres écoles. Eh bien, ce gouvernement, le gouvernement Harris, a créé 12 nouveaux conseils scolaires de langue française, des conseils scolaires autonomes avec un financement équitable, partout dans la province pour la première fois. Il y a une télévision éducative en français dont les productions soutiennent les programmes scolaires.

Aujourd'hui, en 1999, la qualité de la vie des Franco-Ontariens est meilleure.

Je veux souligner aussi le travail de toute la fonction publique de la province de l'Ontario qui a contribué à la mise en oeuvre de la loi, particulièrement les coordonnateurs des services en français dans les ministères, les communicateurs bilingues et tous ceux et celles qui donnent des services directs aux francophones dans toute la province.

Je veux aussi remercier le personnel de l'Office des affaires francophones pour son travail pas toujours facile de coordination, de surveillance, d'éducation publique, de liaison avec la communauté francophone et aussi de conseiller au sein du gouvernement provincial.

Je suis très fier d'être le ministre délégué aux Affaires francophones et de pouvoir me réjouir avec tous les francophones de la province. En Ontario, on a la majorité de la population francophone hors Québec dans ce pays, et notre province est une meilleure place à cause de la grande population franco-ontarienne, une population très dynamique dans toute la province.

La provision de services en français est importante pour notre gouvernement et aussi pour notre province.

The Speaker : Further comments?

M^{me} Claudette Boyer (Ottawa-Vanier) : Je remercie le ministre délégué aux Affaires francophones d'avoir demandé le consentement unanime afin de souligner le 10^e anniversaire de l'entrée en vigueur de la Loi 8 sur les services en français.

Après 10 ans d'existence, il est temps d'en faire une évaluation, d'examiner ses forces et ses faiblesses et de proposer des améliorations.

La Loi sur les services en français garantit le droit de recevoir des services en français par le gouvernement provincial, et ce dans 23 régions désignées. La présence francophone en Ontario remonte à plus de 350 ans. La population francophone de l'Ontario constitue la plus grande communauté francophone canadienne hors Québec.

The French Language Services Act, which came into effect on November 19, 1989, was passed unanimously in this Legislature on November 18, 1986. This unanimous support expressed the government and opposition

parties' commitment to recognize the contribution which the French-speaking population has made to our province's historical, cultural and linguistic heritage and their wish to preserve that contribution for future generations.

1400

Présentement, les francophones de l'Ontario contribuent pleinement à l'essor de la province, à tous les points de vue, que ce soit culturel, social, juridique, économique ou politique, pour faire de notre société ontarienne une force sur la scène mondiale.

La loi a vu la création de l'Office des affaires francophones, un outil clé pour assurer le succès, pour assurer l'atteinte des objectifs de la Loi sur les services en français. Malheureusement l'Office, comme tous les autres ministères et agences gouvernementales, a subi au cours des dernières années des coupures budgétaires très importantes et compte de moins en moins de coordonnateurs de services.

Pourtant, nous avons des attentes très élevées face à l'Office. Elle se devait d'être notre chien de garde. Elle est devenue notre chien de salon. On se doit de lui redonner les moyens pour remplir pleinement son mandat pour devenir plus efficace.

The French Language Services Act does not place any obligation on a municipality to offer services in French. Section 16 of the act does, however, allow municipalities within designated areas to provide services in French if their council so desires.

Avec le transfert des services gouvernementaux aux municipalités, les francophones se sont vus retiré des services qu'ils recevaient depuis l'adoption de la Loi 8. Il est temps que la Loi 8 reprenne de son mordant.

Comme vous l'a rappelé le père de la Loi 8, M. Grandmaître, en juin 1998, notre communauté n'a pas les moyens de perdre les quelques services sociaux et de santé de première ligne dont nous jouissons. Nous n'avons pas non plus les moyens de perdre notre temps à nous battre pour sauver nos services pièce par pièce. Pourquoi ne pas agir ? Pourquoi ne pas garantir aux francophones de l'Ontario qu'ils vont bénéficier des mêmes services ? Pourquoi ne pas inclure ces garanties dans la Loi sur les services en français ?

Following the municipal restructuring process, can the government guarantee to Franco-Ontarians that it will put in place a process and the funds to ensure the retention of existing services and programs in French and to improve the delivery of these services?

Je crois que les contribuables francophones ont le droit d'exiger dans ce contexte de réforme le droit de communiquer et de recevoir les services gouvernementaux dans la langue de préférence du contribuable. Cette loi se doit de retrouver son efficacité. Elle se doit d'être améliorée. C'est une question de respect. C'est une question de bon sens.

Les Ontariens et les Ontariennes, peu importe leur langue, s'attendent à ce que nous, qui les représentons, oeuvrons pour une société où règnent les valeurs qui nous sont chères, telles la justice, l'équité et le respect, et que

ces valeurs soient traduites en législation et en programmes gouvernementaux.

So I leave the minister responsible for francophone affairs with this thought: The French-speaking communities in Ontario want to be part of the solution. We no longer want to be statistics.

Je précise à ce gouvernement que nous, Franco-Ontariens et Franco-Ontariennes, ne voulons plus n'être que des statistiques. Nous voulons être valorisés en contribuant activement à l'élaboration d'une solution juste et équitable qui assurera le plein respect de nos droits.

M^{me} Shelley Martel (Nickel Belt) : Dès sa mise en application en 1989, la Loi sur les services en français donnait aux Ontariens et Ontariennes la possibilité de recevoir une vaste gamme de services gouvernementaux dans leur langue. La Loi 8 représentait également un symbole important pour toute la communauté francophone de l'Ontario, reconnaissant son rôle historique et son dynamisme actuel. Le fait que les trois partis présents à l'Assemblée aient donné leur appui unanime à cette loi envoyait un message clair : les francophones ont leur place en Ontario.

Comme gouvernement, les néo-démocrates se sont appliqués à étendre la portée de la Loi sur les services en français dans tous les secteurs du gouvernement. Nous avons créé plusieurs nouveaux centres de santé communautaires francophones, par exemple, à Sudbury et à Longlac.

Une fois l'implantation de la Loi 8 sur la bonne voie, il a fallu aller plus loin. Nous avons renforcé le réseau de collèges communautaires avec l'ouverture du Collège Boréal à Sudbury et du Collège des Grands Lacs, et le financement de nouveaux programmes dans les collèges existants.

Nous avons modifié la Loi sur les coopératives de crédit pour aider les communautés francophones à former leur Caisse populaire.

Il est donc devenu plus facile de vivre en français en Ontario. Mais le gouvernement conservateur nous a fait réaliser à quel point ces réalisations sont fragiles.

Ce gouvernement s'est mis à transférer des services aux municipalités sans s'assurer que les programmes continueront d'être offerts en français. Nous avons réussi à obtenir quelques engagements pour la protection des services en français l'année dernière, mais jusqu'à maintenant il semble que dans plusieurs communautés les Franco-Ontariens risquent de perdre des services dans leur langue dans les domaines de la justice, du logement et de la santé communautaire.

Le gouvernement Harris essaie depuis deux ans de fermer la plupart des services de l'hôpital Montfort, le seul hôpital de l'Ontario à former des médecins et infirmières en français, des professionnels de la santé dont tout l'Ontario français a besoin.

Voilà deux semaines, on apprenait que ce gouvernement a l'intention de couper le financement du collège d'agriculture d'Alfred, une précieuse institution d'enseignement et de recherche.

Et juste ce matin, on apprenait que les conservateurs s'apprêtent à couper l'éducation continue pour les francophones.

Les acquis de la Loi 8 doivent être mieux protégés et les services en français renforcés. Un bon commencement serait de continuer de reconnaître cette journée importante à l'Assemblée.

Mr Howard Hampton (Kenora-Rainy River): Mr Speaker, I seek unanimous consent on a motion that the assembly reaffirm its commitment to publicly funded universal health care and denounce the government of Ralph Klein for his move to privatize health care in Alberta.

You will know that last night Mr Klein announced plans to move to private delivery of health care throughout the province of Alberta. I am asking for unanimous consent that we pass a motion here today denouncing that direction.

The Speaker: Is there unanimous consent? I heard some noes.

ORAL QUESTIONS

EDUCATION FUNDING

Mr Dalton McGuinty (Leader of the Opposition): My question is for the Minister of Education. Today we learned of this government's real approach to public education in Ontario. It is both heartless and brainless, because anybody with any kind of a heart would not be attacking our deaf children, our blind children and our children who are suffering from severe learning disabilities.

Interruption.

The Speaker (Hon Gary Carr): Take your seat, please.

I apologize for the interruptions. I must remind our guests that there aren't any demonstrations, including applause, so I would ask that our guests kindly refrain from applause as well.

The leader of the official opposition.

Mr McGuinty: Anybody with an intelligent approach to public education in Ontario would understand that as we struggle to establish ourselves in a knowledge-based global economy, we would not cut computers, we would not cut textbooks and we would not cut literacy programs.

Minister, you were very clear and your government was very clear during the course of the recent elections: You were going to stand up for public education. There would be no cuts to public education. You would deliver top-quality public education to Ontario's children. Tell us, how dare you put forward this kind of a plan that undermines public education and is going to hurt our children?

1410

Hon Janet Ecker (Minister of Education): We made some very clear commitments to the voters of this province: (1) that we would protect classroom funding and classroom spending; (2) that we would enhance it; it must rise to match enrolment; (3) we also told the voters of this province that we were going to continue to find savings in administration, waste in bureaucracy if we could, and that we were going to—

Interjections.

Hon Mrs Ecker: I know the honourable members over there had some concerns about this—

The Speaker: The member for Kingston and the Islands, please come to order.

Hon Mrs Ecker: I would also like to caution the other member not to believe what he reads in the Toronto Star. Two weeks ago, we had another newspaper that had another story with another figure in it that said there wouldn't be anything happening to education. If that's the kind of research he wants to use—

Interjections.

The Speaker: Member, take your seat. The member for Hamilton East is interrupting and he isn't sitting in his seat. I would ask him to come to order.

Hon Mrs Ecker: Our commitments on classroom spending remain. We made them very firmly and we stand by them.

The Speaker: Supplementary.

Mr McGuinty: Minister, you cannot deny that this is not merely a proposal, it is your plan. The very plan itself says that you are supposed to deny that you are making these cuts. Don't talk to me about classroom expenditures. I'm talking to you about textbooks; I'm talking to you about computers; I'm talking to you about literacy programs; I'm talking to you about ensuring that our children have everything they need inside the classroom so they can make of themselves a success later on. That's what I'm talking about. Those are the commitments you made during the course of the recent election campaign.

Again, I ask you on behalf of Ontario parents and their kids, how dare you put forward this kind of a proposal? Is it not your responsibility as the defender of public education to stand up and say there will be no more cuts to public education in Ontario?

Hon Mrs Ecker: Perhaps the honourable member would like us to ignore where there's waste in the system and not take that dollar and put it into classroom spending. We said we were going to protect classroom spending. We are indeed doing that.

I would caution the honourable member that an article in the Toronto Star is not a plan from this government.

Interjections.

The Speaker: The member for Ottawa Centre, please come to order. Final supplementary.

Mr McGuinty: The minister's definition of waste inside public education has been made very clear. She thinks we should be making cuts to programs for our deaf children. We should be making cuts to programs for our blind children. We should be making cuts to programs

for our severely learning-disabled. We should be cutting back on computers. We should be cutting back on textbooks. That is this minister's definition of administrative waste found within public education. Well, we don't accept that. We reject that. We think those are essential programs and we think your job is to support these programs.

Again, Minister, on behalf of Ontario's children and their parents, how could you possibly put together this kind of a plan that attacks public education?

Hon Mrs Ecker: If the honourable member wants to think that a Toronto Star article is the government's plan, let him believe that, but that is not the government's plan. It is not the government's plan to cut services for the disabled and deaf and blind children. It is not the government's plan to spend less on textbooks. We're spending more on textbooks. We had an additional \$100 million for textbooks in elementary last time; we had an additional \$150 million for textbooks in secondary. We are spending more on classrooms. The Education Improvement Commission, in its recent interim report, also clearly showed that spending in the classroom was increasing while spending in administration was decreasing.

That is exactly the commitment we made to the people of Ontario. That commitment stands. There has been no change—

The Speaker: Take your seat. The member for Sudbury, please come to order. Is the minister done with her comments?

New question, leader of the official opposition.

Mr McGuinty: My second question is for the Minister of Colleges and Universities, who must bear some responsibility for the preparation of this plan as well.

Today we learn about this government's real agenda when it comes to colleges and universities in Ontario. This is their four-part plan:

We learn that you are planning to move to a two-tiered, American-style, private university. We learn that you plan to close two thirds of Ontario's community colleges. We learn that you plan to steal from our students tens of millions of dollars being paid by the federal government. We learn that you will take hundreds of millions of dollars out of our colleges and our universities.

Minister, how can you claim to be a defender of the interests of Ontario's young people who are struggling to be able to afford post-secondary studies in Ontario, struggling to make something of themselves, struggling to find success in the new economy? How can you claim to be their defender when you put forward this kind of a plan?

Hon Dianne Cunningham (Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities): I'd like to begin by saying, on behalf of Ontario's students and their parents, that if they believe everything you just said, they should be concerned. Even I did not read that in the Toronto Star, so that is bad enough.

I'd just like to say to this House, as we did during the campaign and as I have said in consultation with our students, the presidents of our colleges and universities and those who have taken the time to give us their best advice, that there will be a place for every qualified and motivated student who wishes to go to college and university in the province of Ontario.

Mr Dominic Agostino (Hamilton East): Rich students, rich students.

Hon Mrs Cunningham: The opposition says "rich" students. I would like to announce to this Legislative Assembly and to the people of Ontario that no government has helped poor students, students with need, to the extent that this government has done.

Interjections.

The Speaker: Order. Member for Ottawa Centre, this will be your last warning.

Sorry, Minister, were you finished?

Hon Mrs Cunningham: No, I'm not. I'd like to say that we will continue to assist students who need assistance in obtaining a university and college education.

Mr McGuinty: How quickly this minister is trying to put some distance between herself and this government's record. You took \$400 million out of Ontario's colleges and universities, you increased tuition fees by 60% and you deregulated tuition fees for professional programs. That's your record, without a doubt. There is no question about that whatsoever.

We have had a wonderful tradition in our province. It's one that says it doesn't matter how wealthy your parents are, that if you work hard and you get good marks, you get to go on to college or university. You're introducing this new concept: private, American-style university.

If you want to provide some assurance to this House today and to Ontario's parents and Ontario's young people, stand up right now and tell us that you have no plans whatsoever, assure us that the Mike Harris government will not be moving forward with any initiative to promote private, American-style universities in Ontario.

Interruption.

The Speaker: I have warned our guests. This will be the last warning. There can be no clapping and we cannot accept anybody yelling out. It's difficult to tell from my standpoint whether it's a member or somebody in the gallery. So I would ask the indulgence of the guests that you do not shout out, and if you do, I will have to have you removed.

Minister.

Hon Mrs Cunningham: It has been our government's plan from the very beginning to get rid of waste, overlap, duplication, administration within the college and university system. I'd also like to remind this Legislative Assembly that the university and college system has never been more accessible, in response to the question from the leader of the opposition party. We're always willing to make the system better. We have a record number of students from within Ontario attending our

university and college system and we have a record number of students coming from other provinces.

With regard to the question about private universities, the Liberals and the NDP, when they were in government, looked at all alternatives to make sure that their system was better. We are looking at all alternatives—

The Speaker: The minister's time is over. Final supplementary.

Mr McGuinty: That answer is yes and that is completely unacceptable. To the Minister of Colleges and Universities, I would think that your very first responsibility is to defend the accessible systems that we have had developed over the years by our parents and our grandparents. It has been the Ontario way. The overwhelming majority of the members of the House have benefited from accessibility to our colleges and our universities.

So how dare you, Minister, claim as your record the establishment here in Ontario of American-style private universities? Tell us now that was just a slip, that there is no way we are ever going to have, on your watch, American-style private universities in Ontario.

Hon Mrs Cunningham: In just looking at the numbers on accessibility, I want to remind the member from the other side—

Interruptions.

The Speaker: Stop the clock. I'm afraid I'm going to have to ask our guests to leave. Clear the gallery. The House is adjourned for a 10-minute recess.

The House recessed from 1422 to 1432.

The Speaker: I believe we were at a new question. New question; the leader of the third party.

EDUCATION FUNDING

Mr Howard Hampton (Kenora-Rainy River): My question is for the Deputy Premier. I have a transcript from an interview given by Mike Harris on Monday, November 15, at CFRB radio, where Lorrie Goldstein asked him a question about funding formulas for school boards, particularly the Toronto school board. He said, "You're going to give them more money?"

Mike Harris replied: "Yes, I think they need more money. Yes, we have to approach the federal government. Yes, they have to manage their own finances more. And yes, we're prepared to look at a whole level of flexibility of the funding formula."

Mr Goldstein: "So the province will be putting more money into it?"

Mike Harris: "The province will ensure the dollars are there that they need."

Now we find today a proposal to take yet another \$800 million, much of it centred on the large, urban school boards. Can you tell me, Deputy Premier, who was telling the truth? Mike Harris or your proposal?

Hon Ernie L. Eves (Deputy Premier, Minister of Finance): Mr Speaker, through you to the leader of the third party, I think the Premier's comments speak for themselves.

Mr Hampton: I've got another document. This is from the Toronto District School Board. In fact, they're debating these cuts right now as we speak. They know they're going to have to cut \$216 million out of their budget. If they read your proposal, you take away their mitigation funding and they'll have to cut another \$272 million, for \$488 million: prep time, \$41 million; textbooks, \$7.4 million; classroom computers, \$7.2 million; child care, \$31.5 million; continuing ed, \$15.3 million; school secretaries, \$17 million.

Minister, I ask you again. Either the Premier is right and your proposal is wrong, or it's the other way around. Do you agree with the Premier or do you agree with your proposal? If so, stand in your place and say that proposal is dead.

Hon Mr Eves: It's not our proposal and I agree with the Premier.

The Speaker (Hon Gary Carr): Final supplementary.

Mr Rosario Marchese (Trinity-Spadina): These cuts, in my view, are not a trial balloon. I know you're squinting with doubt, as if somehow this document came out of thin air. This is a real document that you people are going to consider. It's not a trial balloon.

What's revealing is not the cuts, because I know the cuts were coming to elementary, secondary and post-secondary education. What is particularly perverse, Deputy and Minister of Education and Premier, is the fact that you folks, you people were going to do this surreptitiously. That's the modus operandi of this government.

To avoid political flak, the document recommends that the government simply make some cuts without announcing them publicly. That is what is contemptible about this government, odious and perverse. You are about to renege on a promise you made. You are about to unleash yet another crisis.

The question to you, Deputy, is this: Are you going to have the fortitude and the courage to be able to detail these cuts when they will be announced, or are you going to do them surreptitiously, as the document suggests you were going to do?

Hon Mr Eves: First of all, it is not a government document. Second of all, we will live up to the commitment that the Premier made during the course of the election campaign, in the Blueprint document, and reiterated on CFRB on Monday.

The Speaker: New question; the leader of the third party.

Mr Hampton: My second question is to the Deputy Premier as well. We have seen your track record over the last four years. Money was taken from education. Money was taken from elementary schools, secondary schools, colleges and universities in order to finance a tax cut that benefits the most well-off in the province, and you promised more tax cuts to the well-off again.

I want you to stand here and categorically say that not under this proposal, not under any proposal, will more money be taken from our boards of education, from our

schools, not in Toronto, not in Ottawa, not in Thunder Bay, not in Algoma, nowhere in the province. Will you stand here and make that categorical commitment now?

Hon Mr Eves: There may have been money that was taken out of the administration part of education and put in the classroom, where it belongs, during the last four and a half years.

The Speaker: Supplementary.

Mr Tony Martin (Sault Ste Marie): Let me tell you what's going on out there, ever before these cuts even take place. In the Algoma District School Board, for example, community leaders are up in arms, the school board is up in arms, parents are beside themselves. The ministry has forced Algoma into a category that doesn't fit and it's thereby starved of the necessary funds. This will force school closures in remote communities, will force students to travel long distances in the winter on roads that close with every snowstorm. This is dangerous and unfair. It will rip the heart out of small communities where schools are also the community centres.

Will you ask your Minister of Education to come to Algoma to see for herself the urgent need to revise the school board designations and to provide interim funding?

The Sault Star last week said:

"A meeting with Ecker could bring a more rapid solution, particularly if it were to be held aboard a school bus on the road between the Soo and Wawa or Hearst or Blind River. That would vividly illustrate the challenging distances faced by this board."

Will you ask the minister to go north and meet with the board—

The Speaker: The member's time.

Hon Mr Eves: I'll let the Minister of Education answer for herself.

Hon Janet Ecker (Minister of Education): I quite understand that boards in the north, boards in rural areas, francophone boards, for example, have very significant challenges in terms of just the simple geography that they have to cover, and many have them have been doing an extremely good job of providing good quality education and directing as much money as they can into the classroom.

We recognize that uniqueness, the fact that they do need additional supports, by the way we fund them. There are additional monies for transportation, for example. That is one of the areas we are looking at as we look at how we can improve the funding arrangements, what we can do for rural boards and northern boards in terms of transportation or other ways to help them meet the challenge of giving the best education that they can for their children, because those children certainly deserve it.

1440

The Speaker: New question.

Mr Gerard Kennedy (Parkdale-High Park): My question is to the Minister of Education. Over the last few weeks, you've been asked to come to account for your ministry and your government's harmful effects on school kids all across the province. Every time you've

been shrugging, and now we know why. It's worse than shrugging, Minister. You have a secret proposal you put forward to cut education further.

You were in no position to respond to the parents of special education kids you were keeping out of school in Hamilton. You could not respond to the students of the W.D. Lowe school in Windsor that you want to close, because you had already offered to cut even more money out of your own budget. Half of the money, half of the \$500 million, is supposed to come from your budget, and you offered it and you authorized it.

On behalf of those students I want to ask you: Now that you've been exposed, now that it's clear that this is your agenda, will you today cancel these cuts that are treacherous to the future of public education?

Hon Mrs Ecker: I will repeat it again for the honourable member, because he clearly was not listening when I said it the first time. A Toronto Star article is not the government's plan. We have been very clear on what our commitment is, to have more money in the classroom. We have indeed done that. We are prepared to do it even again.

I have clearly said to the honourable member across the way that special education funding needs to be changed in this province. Despite the fact that there is more money in special ed than there has ever been before, despite the fact that the policy that is being implemented is the policy that the boards and the experts in this area and the parents say is the right policy, we know that changes need to be made to do an even better job for special-ed students. That hasn't changed.

There is no secret proposal that will undermine that. There is no proposal. There is nothing that is undermining the commitment of the Premier that he stated in 1995, in 1999, last week on the radio, this morning in the scrum. I stand by the Premier's word.

Mr Kennedy: Minister, what you've said in this House before is that you would work with boards to improve funding, and yet, at the same time you did that, you had already agreed to make cuts, in a cabinet document.

Your government has already cut \$1 billion to education. These cuts speak of another \$550 million. This is not a new direction in education that you as the minister are bringing; it's just a new deception. Why should anyone connected with education believe anything you have to say?

The parents forced your Premier to put in mitigation funds, and now apparently those extra two years are going to be cancelled. You said there would be extra money for things, special education and so on. How can you do that if you're cutting \$550 million? On page 25 of the 1998 budget, your colleague the Minister of Finance promised \$130 million for computers that you apparently are willing to give up and sacrifice to the tax cut. Minister, will you get up today and will you apologize to the school kids of this province that you are letting down and will—

The Speaker: The member's time.

Hon Mrs Ecker: The Toronto Star article is not our government's plan. I have authorized no such plan. I have authorized no such cuts.

NORTHERN HEALTH SERVICES

Mr Marcel Beaubien (Lambton-Kent-Middlesex): My question is for the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. In rural Ontario, and I'm sure the same applies to my colleagues from northern Ontario, we continue to experience the lack of medical practitioners.

Interjection.

Mr Beaubien: If you'll listen for a minute, let me ask my question, please. OK? Thank you.

In rural Ontario, constituents are asking for accessible quality primary health care, and at times it is very, very difficult to provide. I am sure that if we used the expanded role of the nurse practitioner it could help us to resolve some of the problems.

We keep hearing about the role of the nurse practitioner in the province of Ontario, but my constituents in Lambton-Kent-Middlesex still have difficulties with regard to accessing quality primary health care. Minister, can you give us an update as to how your ministry is progressing with this particular problem?

Hon Elizabeth Witmer (Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): I would indicate that since we passed the legislation that enabled nurse practitioners to practise in Ontario last year, we have been able to ensure that \$5 million has been made available. We have 120 nurse practitioners who are providing expanded health services in about 80 agencies.

We have also recently issued a request for proposal in order to hire 80 additional nurse practitioners who can serve in the underserved areas, the areas that you are concerned about. Those proposals are now being evaluated, and we expect to announce the awards very soon for those underserved areas.

We're also going to be making an additional 20 nurse practitioners available for long-term-care facilities and we will be announcing that pilot project very soon.

Mr Beaubien: Thank you, Minister, for the answer; however, what is your ministry doing in order to try to alleviate or prevent the problem on a long-term basis?

Hon Mrs Witmer: As the member is well aware, the issue of accessibility to primary health services is not unique to this province; it's one shared by our colleagues' provinces and territories. We, however, are working with the medical community. Certainly we have plans. We're working with Dr McKendry. We'll have an expert panel.

In the very near future—as I say, we do have this RFP—we will be announcing and providing funding for an additional 106 nurse practitioners very soon. We hope to be able to announce that then.

EDUCATION FUNDING

Mrs Marie Bountrogianni (Hamilton Mountain): My question is for the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities regarding the recommended cuts of close to \$300 million from colleges and universities. At last I hope the people of this province can see the hypocrisy of this government.

This government promised—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon Gary Carr): I would ask the member to withdraw the word "hypocrisy" please.

Mrs Bountrogianni: I withdraw the comment.

This government promised a quality post-secondary education experience for every qualified and motivated student. What a hollow piece of rhetoric. With 30,000 more college students and 80,000 more university students coming to our institutions, with students already mortgaging their futures with soaring debt, with tuition the second highest in the country and with a need to replace thousands of retiring faculty, with the recommendation to establish private universities, to cut grants and to trim scholarships, it is obvious that only independently wealthy students would have a positive experience.

Minister, you said you were considering all the options. Will you today publicly deny that private American—

The Speaker: Order. The member's time has expired.

Hon Dianne Cunningham (Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities): We're always looking for better ways to improve our college and university system. We're looking at a number of options. I would like to read to the member that the Smith Advisory Panel on Future Directions for Postsecondary Education recommended that the government should permit privately financed not-for-profit universities, subject to strict conditions on quality, financial responsibility and protection for students in the event of financial failure.

The opposition have asked us over the years whether we are taking the advice of the Smith Advisory Panel on Future Directions for Postsecondary Education. We're looking at all options. We're looking for your best advice. We are talking and asking for input from our stakeholders and the public. It is under consideration.

Mrs Bountrogianni: Our best advice is, no, don't do it; we don't want American-style universities. Let's look at this announcement of proposed cuts from the perspective of trust. How can anyone trust a government which is now ready to break its promises to the youth of this province? It promised to reinvest the savings from the Millennium Scholarship, over \$100 million. It's breaking that promise. It promised to support our bright but needy high school students with Aiming for the Top scholarships. It hasn't even begun yet and they've already proposed to trim and therefore break that promise. It promised to begin implementation of the transition to a baccalaureate requirement for new registered nurses in 2001. It's breaking that promise. How can

the nurses in Hamilton trust this government? How can the students at Mohawk College and McMaster University in my region trust this government?

Again, Minister, I ask you, will you consider renegeing on the article in the paper today?

1450

Hon Mrs Cunningham: Just to put the member at ease with regard to her question, the article in the paper today was a leaked document. It is not the policy of the government.

Two issues that the member spoke about: On the Aiming for the Top scholarship, we in fact are—

Interjections.

The Speaker: Order, member for Sudbury.

Hon Mrs Cunningham: To the member with regard to her question, we have committed \$35 million to the Aiming for the Top tuition scholarship for the top 10,000 students, to be implemented by September 2000, and these are students in financial need. We intend to keep that promise.

With regard to the nursing question that the member asked, where the nurses in Hamilton are concerned, I can only advise the member today that we are moving forward as quickly as possible and we intend to keep that promise.

With regard to reports and options that are brought forward to ministries over periods of time when they're in government, as they did the Liberals and the NDP, we do take a look at options that are available to us. Sometimes we take their advice, sometimes we do not. I am not speaking to specifics of any of these issues. We're intending to provide the best quality of education for all of those students who intend to apply to our universities, are qualified and motivated to do so.

Mr Howard Hampton (Kenora-Rainy River): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: The Minister of Colleges and Universities just made reference to a leaked document and I believe it is in the rules of the House that if you're going to quote from a document you must table it. I'm asking that the document that the minister has referred to be tabled.

The Speaker: The member will know that the standing orders are for if the minister quotes at length. I believe she did not.

UNIFIED FAMILY COURT

Mr Doug Galt (Northumberland): My question is addressed to the Attorney General. I'm sure the House is very aware of the difficulties that go with family law matters, the emotion that happens with separation on the part of all parties, but in particular that of the children. This issue is frequently raised in my riding and there is a lot of concern about it. Fortunately, yesterday a Unified Family Court was opened in my riding of Northumberland, in the town of Cobourg.

Could you tell us what the change is, how this change will help families using the court system and how they will receive better services?

Hon Jim Flaherty (Attorney General, minister responsible for native affairs): I thank the member for Northumberland for the question. On November 15, 1999, I announced the opening of 12 new Unified Family Court locations in Ontario. This expansion further strengthens the Ontario government's commitment to families.

The family court is really important for three reasons, at least. First is the single-window approach that it provides for persons who are in need of family court services, second are the family mediation services that are available in family court, and third are the family law information centres, which are available to people who need the services so that they can better understand the system.

The new family law rules that are also introduced help family members understand the way the system works and help them make the important decisions they need to make during the process, particularly with respect to children.

Mr Galt: Certainly that is very encouraging and very good news for the people in my riding and for several other ridings here in the province of Ontario.

The Attorney General referred in his remarks to the single-window service and also the mediation services that are now going to be available with the Unified Family Court. He also made reference to the new family law rules. I would ask the Attorney General to explain to this House just how these changes, along with the Unified Family Courts, will benefit the people in my riding.

Hon Mr Flaherty: As you know, we hear often about our court system being too costly and too slow. The expansion of the family court means that more people in Ontario, approximately 40% of our population, will be served by a less costly and a much faster system in the resolution of family law disputes.

The number of Unified Family Courts in Ontario has tripled since 1995, since our government was elected, which puts the interests of children first in resolving family disputes. The best interests of children are, of course, fundamental to the family law system. At the same time, we have expanded the supervised access centres to every location in Ontario that has a Unified Family Court. There are 17 new locations: in my colleague the member for Northumberland's riding, in Cobourg; in Durham region, serving of course Whitby and Ajax among the other parts of Durham region; St Catharines; Bracebridge; Newmarket; Peterborough; Lindsay; Ottawa; Perth; Brockville; and L'Orignal.

ROBERTA BONDAR BUILDING

Mr Tony Martin (Sault Ste Marie): My question is for the Chair of Management Board. Roberta Bondar is a true Canadian hero. All Ontarians, especially residents of Sault Ste Marie, are shocked to learn that the Roberta Bondar Building is on the list of properties sent to the Ontario Realty Corp to prepare for sale.

We are hurt and insulted that the building named for Canada's first woman astronaut and a great source of pride to the Sault is to be sold in your mad dash for cash to cover your tax cuts. Minister, the Bondar building is named in an order in council identifying properties that you "propose to sell, lease or otherwise dispose of." Will you table in this House today the impact study you relied upon when you chose to insult Ontarians and a true Canadian hero by putting the Bondar building on this list?

Hon Chris Hodgson (Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet): To those who aren't aware, what the member across the aisle refers to is a list of properties the ORC is looking at to determine whether the government needs those assets to deliver programs. I will pass on the concern. I think it's a good suggestion that whatever happens to the building, we keep the name on the building.

Mr Martin: That's just not good enough. I have it on good authority that Roberta Bondar herself is concerned about this move. It's in the order in council, so it's not just some airy-fairy sort of mention out there; it's real. Minister, will you do the right thing and tell Roberta Bondar, the people of Sault Ste Marie and all Ontarians that you were wrong? Will you today instruct the Ontario Realty Corp to remove the Bondar building from your sell-off list?

Hon Mr Hodgson: As I've already told the member, I agree that the Roberta Bondar name has special significance to the people of Sault Ste Marie and indeed all Canadians. I will pass on to the Ontario Realty Corp board of directors that they keep the name on the building.

1500

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

Mrs Sandra Pupatello (Windsor West): My question is for the acting Premier. Several weeks ago, we became aware of an OPP investigation of your then Minister of Municipal Affairs. The Premier, at the time that it became public, didn't think that the minister should step aside because of the OPP investigation, even when we learned that the allegation was concerning ransacking the pockets of developers to the tune of \$25,000 each in order to bend the ear of the minister through his personal lawyer, friend and Tory fundraiser.

My question for the acting Premier is this: Is it just a coincidence that the mayor of the city of Windsor was also told by this same minister to use this same personal friend, lawyer and Tory fundraiser, to appoint the same fellow as mediator in amalgamation with Essex county? Is it just a coincidence or is this, in fact, how your government does business? Is it policy for sale in the government of Ontario? Is this just a coincidence or is this how you do business now?

Hon Ernie L. Eves (Deputy Premier, Minister of Finance): I would caution all members of the House against making unsubstantiated statements. She's well aware of the fact that the very matter and the minister to

whom she refers are currently under investigation by the OPP, and I would suggest to her that we await the results of that investigation.

Mrs Pupatello: We would like to know who is defending the public interest in all this. What we realize is that there's a pattern here. There is a connection between money that goes into the Tory Party and policy that comes out. That is the pattern that we are now finding with your government. What we want to know is—

Mr Brad Clark (Stoney Creek): On a point of order, Speaker: This is continuing. These imputations of malice are against the entire government when they state that there's policy for sale in the province of Ontario. I ask the member to withdraw—

The Speaker (Hon Gary Carr): Will the member take his seat. It is not a point of order. Today has been a rather heated day, but I would caution all members to try and maintain so that we can answer some questions without disruption. I know all members want to continue with the tradition we have in this House of being able to co-operate and get questions on.

Final supplementary.

Mrs Pupatello: Acting Premier, our mayor said no. Our mayor said it was inappropriate that this minister would recommend that same personal lawyer to act as mediator in amalgamation talks. My question to you is this: Is it a coincidence that the same minister under the first allegation regarding developers is now using the same lawyer in a different set of policy discussions regarding amalgamation with the city of Windsor and Essex county? Is it a coincidence that this is now part of the OPP investigation or is this how you do business? Do cabinet ministers go through their personal friends for money? Is that how Ontario government sets policy today? That is—

The Speaker: Member's time. Deputy Premier.

Hon Mr Eves: I have no personal knowledge of the statements to which the honourable member refers. I can tell her that when this new information came to the attention of the Premier's staff late yesterday, the matter was referred to the Deputy Attorney General and the information has been referred to the OPP and is now part of the OPP's investigation.

SALE OF GOLD RESERVES

Mr Bart Maves (Niagara Falls): My question is for the Minister of Northern Development and Mines. A few weeks ago, the European Central Bank and national central banks in Europe agreed to limit their sales of gold reserves over the next five years. As a result, the price of gold climbed by more than 10%. The United States, which holds the largest gold reserves, also is not selling gold bullion from its central bank. In contrast, however, the federal government in Canada seems to support the sale of gold reserves.

My concern, of course, is that Ottawa is sending the wrong message to the international market and in so doing is hurting an important industry in our province.

Minister, are you aware of this problem, and if so, what is your position on the sale of gold bullion?

Hon Tim Hudak (Minister of Northern Development and Mines): I thank the member from Niagara Falls for the question. I'm very well aware of this problem because it is a very serious issue for communities in northern Ontario.

In fact, Canada is the fourth-largest gold producer internationally, and Ontario produces approximately half of Canada's gold. Many communities have been built and continue to thrive on mining and gold mining across northern Ontario: Red Lake, Timmins, Hemlo, to name a few. But the federal government persists in a policy of allowing the Bank of Canada to sell off gold reserves. This has put downward pressure on the price of gold, which has a direct economic impact on communities in northern Ontario.

When I had the pleasure of representing the province of Ontario at the Charlottetown mines ministers' conference in the fall, I called upon the federal government to re-examine their policy on gold sales, and I was pleased to be supported by the provinces of Quebec and British Columbia. I will continue to press and have written to Minister Goodale to reconsider this policy that's damaging to northern communities.

Mr Maves: As you alluded to, mining, especially gold and nickel, are vital industries in Ontario; in fact, Ontario's mineral production is about \$5.5 billion a year. However, Ottawa seems to be doing little to support our mining industry and the continuation by the Liberals of their policy of selling gold reserves is damaging the northern Ontario economy. What commitment has Ottawa made in response to the letter you've written them about the sale of gold reserves?

Hon Mr Hudak: As I mentioned, I had written Minister Goodale asking the federal government to reconsider the policy of allowing the Bank of Canada to sell off gold reserves. It puts downward pressure on the price of gold. Although we've seen leadership from Europe and the United States on this matter, I think it's only fair that Canada, as a leading producer of gold internationally, should take action and examine this issue.

I'm disappointed that in the past six weeks I have not had a response from the federal government. I know that the Mining Association of Canada and the Ontario Mining Association as well are calling for changes in this policy. I will continue to fight on behalf of Ontario's gold mine communities. I urge Ottawa to send an important message not only to the communities in northern Ontario and across Canada but, importantly, internationally that Canada is on the side of gold mining communities and will take up policies that support gold mining in the province of Ontario and not go against them.

ASSISTANCE TO FARMERS

The Speaker (Hon Gary Carr): New question; the member for Middlesex-London.

Mr Steve Peters (Elgin-Middlesex-London): And Elgin, Mr Speaker; we've got to remember the Elgin.

My question is for the Minister of Agriculture. Two weeks ago, the government of Canada committed to covering farmers' eligible negative margins for both 1998 and 1999 under the income disaster program. This means an additional \$20 million to \$30 million in federal funds in the hands of Ontario families whose farms are in jeopardy. Unfortunately, Mr Minister, you appear to be talking out of both sides of your mouth. I've been talking to representatives of the OFA, the CFA and the Ontario pork producers, even your neighbour the president of the Oxford county pork producers. These good farmers want and deserve an answer.

The federal government is committed to helping Ontario farmers through bad times. They're putting up to 60% of the money required. Will commit today to join the cost-sharing arrangement with the federal government?

Hon Ernie Hardeman (Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs): I can assure you that the federal government did make a commitment, and made an announcement in fact, that they were going to put \$170 million more into the farm safety net program for the farmers who are suffering through some very low commodity prices and some downturn in farm commodity prices.

Included in that, they suggested that the programs will and must be funded 60-40 by the provinces, and the Ontario government is committed to doing that. One of the other issues they have included is that we must look at the program as it exists, including negative margins and a number of other issues. We very much want to do that, save and except that the negative margins are not supported, as the member would suggest, by our stakeholders. In fact, all but one or two are opposed to funding negative margins. They feel that there are many other opportunities to which we could apply to this program—

The Speaker: Will the minister take his seat. I'm sorry, it's time.

1510

Mr Peters: Minister, my office has spoken to Ed Segsworth, the president of the Ontario Federation of Agriculture, and they are more than willing to sit down with you and work out how to cover negative margins without compromising market revenue and crop insurance.

You still haven't answered the question. Millions of dollars are waiting in Ottawa to be distributed to Ontario farmers. This money will keep family farms in the black. You have a contract to administer these funds. They're there for you to deliver, whether Ontario is in the program or not. Peter Dekraker, a constituent of mine, called your assistant deputy minister yesterday and he was told that they're still waiting for details from Ottawa. Well, our office called Ottawa yesterday and the money is ready to go. You've had two weeks to pick up the phone and get it to the farmers. It is outrageous that you haven't. Why have you been so heartless and waited to provide the funds that are desperately needed by so many farmers in my constituency and this province? Why have

you sat on your duff while debt piles up on Ontario farmers? Why have you not delivered the cheques that Ottawa has committed to them?

Hon Mr Hardeman: I want to commend the member opposite that he got the federal government to suggest that they are committed to sending the money. I would like to ask him if maybe he would consider also asking them to send the money for the program that was approved previously, which the province is presently funding for our farmers, the 1999 whole farm relief program, for which the federal government has not yet sent any money to the province of Ontario. I would ask if maybe he could request that.

I would also suggest, on the issue of speaking to the federation of agriculture, that as I mentioned, the majority of our stakeholders are opposed to the funding of negative margins. The only organization that is not, that has come out publicly supporting that, is Ed Segsworth and the federation of agriculture, but not the commodity groups which he represents. In fact, I've had correspondence from almost all our commodity groups, who suggest that we should be looking at other ways of making sure that the farmers get their fair share of the money—

The Speaker: Will the member take his seat.

ELDER ABUSE

Mr R. Gary Stewart (Peterborough): My question is for the minister responsible for seniors' issues. Elder abuse has been recognized as a problem in Ontario and indeed it is climbing. The province has funded various projects that address elder abuse in several communities across the province. Local groups have undertaken many worthwhile initiatives to help seniors who are victimized, and I commend them for that.

The work of Dr Elizabeth Podnieks, chair of the Ontario Network for the Prevention of Elder Abuse, and others has focused more attention on the issue. Despite the many worthwhile programs that have been developed in the province, there is currently no overall strategy to ensure that efforts are coordinated and complementary.

What types of strategies is this government proposing to develop, and what role will the elder abuse round table play in the development of these strategies?

Hon Helen Johns (Minister of Citizenship, Culture and Recreation, minister responsible for seniors and women): I'd like to thank the member for the question. I'd like to say that I was pleased yesterday to join with Dr Elizabeth Podnieks and announce the members of the round table, along with a couple of other initiatives we've entered into. The round table has been prepared to allow us to identify the needs we have of seniors, so we can map out our next steps, can move forward to ensure that seniors are safe in their communities and in their homes.

Yesterday, we also announced that we should work towards making sure that people who deal with seniors on a regular basis, the CCAC members, have the proper

training to identify elder abuse in our communities. So we're working with respect to that.

Another thing we're doing is moving into two pilot programs to ensure that we can find the best way to identify elder abuse and to make sure that we progress with it and make sure people are safe.

Mr Stewart: I understand that the round table will comprise influential, high-profile, very knowledgeable seniors and opinion leaders representing many sectors where elder abuse can occur. Minister, I also understand that you will be co-chairing the round table, along with Dr Podnieks. Can you enlighten us on who some of the individuals will be who will make up the elder abuse round table, and some of the organizations that will be influential in the development of this comprehensive provincial strategy to prevent elder abuse?

Hon Mrs Johns: First of all I'd like to say that I was pleased, thrilled that Dr Elizabeth Podnieks agreed to co-chair this committee with me. She has received an Order of Canada for her work in elder abuse. She's a leading researcher in this problem and I think that we have someone who can help all the senior citizens of Ontario.

We also took 20 influential seniors and opinion leaders to help us with this year of work that we intend to enter into. We wanted to raise awareness within the community and we wanted to make sure there were a number of sectors that were represented at the table.

We went so far as to look at people who would be involved with seniors on a day-to-day basis. We have people from the Ontario police association; we have people from the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario, the Law Society of Upper Canada, the Ontario Residential Care Association. We have seniors and registered nurses, along with the CEO from one of the hospitals. We've worked hard to make sure we have—

The Speaker (Hon Gary Carr): Minister's time. New question.

DRUG AWARENESS WEEK

Ms Frances Lankin (Beaches-East York): My question is to the Minister of Health. As you know, this is Drug Awareness Week and the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health has released a study showing that drug use among teens is rising at a very alarming rate—binge drinking, cocaine, Ecstasy. It has risen by almost one third in the last six years. Those are both sad and shocking statistics.

Your government is fond of using language about cracking down on things, whether it's squeegee kids or police chases that drivers invoke. I wish I could see some evidence that you're willing to crack down on addictions, that you're willing to take the steps to bring back to this province a substance abuse strategy.

Yesterday in the Provincial Auditor's report, his comments were a damning indictment. He said that you have no system in place to monitor waiting lists. Some patients are waiting up to 76 days to get into recovery homes. He said you're not addressing the special needs

of youth, people who desperately need addiction treatment to get their lives back on track. He says you don't even have any more an overall strategy for addiction prevention.

Will you stand up against your government's obsession with squeegee kids and do something to really help kids: Bring in a substance abuse strategy for children and youth in this province.

Hon Elizabeth Witmer (Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): The member obviously hasn't been listening to some of the speeches I have been making. I have repeatedly been expressing the concern of our government when we have seen the increased use of tobacco and drugs in Ontario. As we have said on many occasions, we are shifting the focus from illness to wellness to prevention programs. We are continuing to introduce initiatives such as our tobacco strategy, where we have actually doubled the amount of money that is available to deal with the whole issue of ensuring that young people don't start to smoke and that those who are smoking quit. In fact, we've increased it from \$9 million to \$19 million. We are moving forward with our drug prevention programs as well.

Ms Lankin: Your speeches are one thing, but let's look at the reality of what has happened. In the period of 1990-95, let me just highlight some of the things that happened during that government. An interministerial committee on substance abuse was formed in 1992. Your government trashed that, Minister. In 1993 the Ontario substance abuse strategy was launched. The auditor says you no longer have a provincial strategy. In 1994 we appointed the provincial advisory committee on substance abuse. In 1995 we put drug prevention education into the Common Curriculum. What have you done? You cut \$5 million from the Addiction Research Foundation over the period of time from 1995, when you were elected, to now.

Minister, we're talking about kids whom, if they become addicted, it affects the rest of their lives. What I'm asking you to do is not give speeches but to put in place a real strategy to prevent addictions, and support the important work of the Addiction Research Foundation by restoring the funding to them. Will you take a look at the auditor's criticism and—

The Speaker: Member's time.

1520

Hon Mrs Witmer: Again I would indicate what I indicated yesterday, that the auditor's report was based on information that certainly was prior to the time that is today. Much of the information was gathered in 1998 and early 1999.

The member knows that at the present time we are taking steps to ensure that the children who need addiction treatment services have access to them. As the member knows, we are undertaking a rationalization of addiction services and we are creating a far more responsive and integrated system than we have ever had before.

PETITIONS

SCHOOL CLOSURES

Mr Tony Ruprecht (Davenport): I keep receiving petitions from residents of the west end of Toronto about the closure of public schools. This petition is addressed to the Assembly of Ontario and it reads as follows:

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

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

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

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

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

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

Since I agree with this petition I'm signing it now.

HIGHWAY SAFETY

Mr Marcel Beaubien (Lambton-Kent-Middlesex): I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario and it reads as follows:

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

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

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

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

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

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

lane highway with full paved shoulders and rumble strips; and

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

DUMP EXPANSION

Mr Ernie Parsons (Prince Edward-Hastings): I have a petition from the Mohawk people of Tyendinaga and I will read it.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the Mohawk people of Tyendinaga are opposed to the Canadian Waste Services Inc’s expansion of Richmond township; and

“Whereas the Mohawk people of Tyendinaga are very concerned over US waste coming to our area for disposal;

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

“The Mohawk people of Tyendinaga do not support any expansion plans presented by Canadian Waste Services Inc. We do not want a legacy of pollution to flow through our rivers and creeks for many decades to come as a result of the Canadian Waste Services Inc landfill disposal operations in Richmond township. Please stop the dump expansion in Richmond township.”

Being in total support, I am pleased to add my signature to this petition.

MARRIAGE

Mr Ted Arnott (Waterloo-Wellington): I have a petition to the Legislature of Ontario and it reads as follows:

“Whereas the majority of Canadians believe that fundamental matters of social policy should be decided by elected members of Parliament and the legislatures, and not the unelected judiciary;

“Whereas the Supreme Court of Canada in the M. and H. case has rejected biology, tradition and societal norms to redefine the term ‘spouse’ to include the non-procreative partnerships of homosexual couples, and has effectively granted these relationships ‘equivalent-to-married’ status;

“Whereas the court’s decision will devalue the institution of marriage, and it is the duty of the Legislature to ensure that marriage, as it has always been known and understood, be preserved and protected;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislature to use all possible legislative and administrative measures, including invoking section 33 of the charter (the ‘notwithstanding clause’), to preserve and protect the commonly understood, exclusive definitions of ‘spouse,’ ‘marriage’ and ‘family’ in all areas of provincial law.”

HOSPITAL RESTRUCTURING

Mr John Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands): I have a petition here which is directed to the Health Services Restructuring Commission, the Ontario Ministry of Health and the Legislative Assembly of Ontario. It’s called “Save the Dieu!”

“The Health Services Restructuring Commission (HSRC) has given notice that it intends to direct the Hotel Dieu Hospital to close and to require that the sisters (Religious Hospitallers of St Joseph’s) cease to govern. If the proposed direction is made and implemented, then the access to high quality health care will be seriously undermined in Kingston and region;

“The sisters are recognized for their leadership in the health care community. They have developed the plan for, and operated, an efficient outpatient teaching hospital and have provided a high quality of patient care for 153 years from the same location. Their distinct values and philosophy, coupled with the sisters’ tradition of compassionate care, must not disappear;

“The HSRC proposed directions call for the dismissal of the sisters from their role in the governance of the outpatient health care at Hotel Dieu Hospital. This is not in the best interests of the patients and families in this city and region;

“The people of Kingston deserve to have access to the kind of quality health care for which the sisters are well recognized;

“Those who must use public transportation to get to outpatient clinics will be seriously affected. The taxpayers should not have to shoulder any extra burden in paying for a new outpatient facility when the Hotel Dieu site can accommodate the needs of the people of Kingston. Many downtown businesses will suffer greatly should the site be closed.

“The sisters of the Hotel Dieu Hospital are therefore asking you to help them in their response to the commission by signing this petition.”

Therefore, they have signed this petition which is to help save the Hotel Dieu Hospital. I’ve attached my signature to it as well.

IPPERWASH

Mr Gerry Phillips (Scarborough-Agincourt): My petition is to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas early in September of 1995 there occurred a series of events involving the Premier of Ontario and members of his government, the Ontario Provincial Police and demonstrators representing members of the First Nations at Ipperwash Provincial Park;

“Whereas the events led to the death of Dudley George, one of the First Nations demonstrators;

“Whereas these events have raised concern among all parties in the Legislature and many Ontarians; and

“Whereas there has been introduced in the House a piece of legislation known as ‘The Truth About Ipperwash Act’;

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

"In order that there is an answer to concerns of the Legislature and Ontarians regarding the events at Ipperwash, the members of the Legislative Assembly vote in favour of 'The Truth About Ipperwash Act.'"

I sign my name to that petition.

HEALTH CARE

Mr Mario Sergio (York West): I have a petition addressed to the Legislative Assembly which reads as follows:

"Say no to the privatization of health care.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

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

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

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

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

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

"Do not privatize our health care services."

I do concur with the petitioners and I will affix my signature to it.

1530

CHILD POVERTY

Mr John Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands): I have here a petition signed by St Margaret's United Church. It's addressed to the Legislative Assembly and to the Minister of Community and Social Services, the Minister of Health and the Acting Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. It reads as follows:

"Whereas the God recorded in the Scriptures is concerned with the well-being of children; and

"Whereas the Scriptures consider it is the responsibility of government and society to protect the well-being of children; and

"Whereas the children of Canada, including Ontario, although voiceless and voteless, are entitled to the same consideration as any other citizens or landed immigrants; and

"Whereas the Canadian Parliament in 1989 committed itself unanimously to eliminate child poverty by the year 2008 but in fact child poverty has increased in the province of Ontario since 1989 by 116%; and

"Whereas of the number of persons in receipt of Ontario Works financial assistance, or family benefits, over 50% are children; and

"Whereas food banks indicate that 50% of persons assisted each month are under 18 years of age; and

"Whereas children in poverty are twice as likely to have physical and mental health problems, twice as likely to have social integration problems, twice as likely not to

finish high school, three times more likely to become involved in crime; and

"Whereas by ignoring the problem of child poverty the long-term cost to our society will be extreme;

"Therefore, St Margaret's United Church, Kingston, calls upon the government of the province of Ontario and the federal government to acknowledge and address the problems of child poverty more vigorously and comprehensively than heretofore, and by working in partnership with the municipalities and other agencies, to identify the causes of child poverty, develop solutions to address these causes and to implement those solutions quickly."

It's signed by Marilyn Norman, the chair of the official board and Jack Linscott, the chair of the outreach committee. I affix my signature to it as well, as I'm in total agreement with it.

EDUCATION FUNDING

Mr Mario Sergio (York West): I have the pleasure of reading another petition I have received addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas Mike Harris is cutting the heart out of many communities by closing hundreds of neighbourhood and community schools across Ontario; and

"Whereas this massive number of school closings 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 from our schools and is now closing many classrooms completely; and

"Whereas Mike Harris is pitting parent against parent and community against community in the fight to save local schools; and

"Whereas parents and students in the city of Toronto and many other communities across Ontario are calling on the government to stop closing so many of their schools;

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

"Demand that Mike Harris stop closing local schools."

I do concur with the petitioners and again I will affix my signature to it.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

TIME ALLOCATION

Hon Frank Klees (Minister without Portfolio): I move that pursuant to standing order 46 and notwithstanding any other standing order or special order of the House relating to 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, when

Bill 7 is next called as a government order, the Speaker shall put every question necessary to dispose of the second reading stage of the bill without further debate or amendment, and at such time the bill shall be ordered for third reading;

That no deferral of the second reading vote pursuant to standing order 28(h) shall be permitted; and

That the order for third reading of the bill shall then immediately be called and the remainder of the sessional day shall be allotted to the third reading stage of the bill;

At 5:55 pm or 9:25 pm, as the case may be on such day, the Speaker shall interrupt the proceedings and shall put every question necessary to dispose of this stage of the bill without further debate or amendment;

That the vote on third reading may, pursuant to standing order 28(h), be deferred until the next sessional day during the routine proceeding "Deferred Votes"; and

That, in the case of any division relating to any proceedings on the bill, the divisional bell shall be limited to five minutes.

I would just like to indicate that I will be turning over the floor to the member from Scarborough Southwest when the government's time on this resumes.

The bill before us is a very important piece of legislation to the people of Ontario. It's been very clear over the last number of years that the policy of this government to continue to reduce the tax burden to the taxpayers of Ontario has benefited people throughout this province in all walks of life and in all income brackets.

It has been suggested by the opposition that tax cuts benefit only the rich. The truth of the matter is that it is all of our experience that because of the nature of the policies of this government that provide for tax cuts for all income earners in the province, everyone benefits. In fact, the poor benefit more than anyone else because it's only as a result of this fiscal policy of our government that we can boast of some 610,000 net new jobs having been created in this province over the last four years. Jobs are what people in this province who are today dependent on social services need. There is nothing that Ontarians want and deserve more than the right to earn an income, than the right to self-sufficiency, and that is what this policy that is represented in this piece of legislation before the House today underpins and underscores.

We look forward as a government to continuing to debate this piece of legislation which will entrench tax reduction and will ensure that this government and future governments will do the right thing, will be fiscally responsible, will no longer run deficits and will no longer spend more than is in fact available.

I believe that we owe this not only to people present, but for generations to come. We look forward to this piece of legislation being enacted to provide for the future prosperity and security of the people in our province.

Mr Gerry Phillips (Scarborough-Agincourt): I am pleased to join the debate. Just for clarification, Mr Speaker, I understand that we're rotating and using our time and I guess each party has roughly 45 minutes.

I want to begin the debate on closure on this important bill. The debate effectively is ending today on the bill and the bill will be passed Monday at the latest, perhaps as early as tomorrow.

This is an important piece of legislation. I want to raise several concerns about the implementation of the bill, to get these on the record. The first is that yesterday the government introduced a new piece of legislation that changes the way we record the sale of assets in the province of Ontario. The public may recall that at one time the Harris government said, on the sale of assets, that when something like the 407 was sold, or any one of the province's assets: "The money we make from such asset sales will not go into the government accounts. Every penny will go directly to pay down the ... provincial debt." Yesterday, we had a piece of legislation introduced that will wipe that out, that will allow the government to use the sale of assets for essentially anything they deem appropriate.

So we find now that rather than selling off assets—perhaps many unnecessary assets—and using that to reduce the debt, we're essentially going to use it, in household terms, to pay for the groceries and not to pay down our mortgage. The problem with that is that most of our day-to-day expenses here in government occur by definition each and every year, but the government now has decided, I think mistakenly, to allow itself to use the sale of assets to pay for ongoing operations. This is spreading, I might add. The city of Toronto, I see today, is looking at selling off its hydroelectric system and using the proceeds from that to pay for its ongoing operations.

1540

That is the first issue I wanted to raise about the implications of this bill and what I think are some of the growing problems with the books of the province of Ontario—the giving itself the right, instead of using the sale of assets to pay down debt, to pay for the day-to-day operations.

The second concern I've got is somewhat related, and that is, the province has told us that they plan to have capital expenditures of roughly \$20 billion over the next five years, roughly \$4 billion per year. That, I might add, is probably a minimum necessary to maintain the infrastructure of Ontario. Historically, if you look back over the last decade, it's been averaging probably around \$4 billion a year. That's for our roads and our hospitals and our schools and our colleges and universities—the infrastructure.

The province has said they are planning to expend roughly \$4 billion each year for the next five years. The challenge comes, though: They say that half of that will be funded by the taxpayer, the other half by the private sector. So we're relying on the private sector to fund half of our capital infrastructure over the next five years. I say if that were possible, great, but we all understand the business world.

The business world is in the business of making profit, and so they should be, and so they have to be. They're out of business if they don't. The private sector cannot,

would not and will not build infrastructure for the province of Ontario without a significant return on that investment, so I can guarantee us that what will happen is that we can get the private sector to build the infrastructure but only by guaranteeing that they will make a profit on it. We're not going to find an extra \$10 billion of infrastructure spending from the private sector; we're simply going to have the private sector perhaps expend \$10 billion but expect payment and profit on that \$10-billion expenditure.

The classic case, to me, is Highway 407. The government holds that up as a terrific example of private sector involvement in infrastructure. I say, and I think time will prove us right on this, that the users of the 407 have been terribly shafted.

What the government did there was they had the road built for a roughly \$1.6-billion cost and then they put it out to tender to sell it. And they were able to sell it for \$3.2 billion. They made a \$1.6-billion profit. But how did they do that? They did it by selling it for 99 years, guaranteeing the purchaser that they can take the tolls up each and every year for the next 15 years at inflation plus 2%. And they did it by saying, "We will guarantee that you can collect the tolls" because your driver's licence can't be renewed if you haven't paid the tolls.

The private sector loved the 407 deal. This is a money-maker of the first order, probably one of the biggest money-makers in the province, clearly in the next couple of decades. That road is going to be jammed. I have mentioned this before: I periodically use it if I'm in a hurry and I'm prepared to lay out \$6 or \$7 to save myself a few minutes. I'll do that. But the day-to-day users of that are paying at least \$120 million a year in extra tolls to cover the difference between what it cost to build that and what the government sold it at.

So I say the purchasers love it. For 99 years they're going to own that. For all of us who know that 407, it runs across the north of the GTA. It's already crowded. It's guaranteed to get more crowded. It will be a huge money-maker.

The government, in its pre-election run-up, was able to put \$1.6 billion more into its revenue but the users of the 407, for ever and a day, are going to be paying for that.

The reason I continually raise that is because the government has told us that over the next five years they are going to do similar projects, and half of our infrastructure is going to be built with those sorts of projects. Believe me, I have no difficulty with the private sector doing these things, but to expect that somehow or other this is found money is naive. What will happen is the government will sell off to the private sector—in the financial community the jargon is, "We'll sell a stream of revenue." For the 407 the stream of revenue is the tolls. They will sell off schools and the stream of revenue will be the annual payment by the school board. But it is still debt under any definition. I raise that because as we look down the road at the books of the province, that is a growing concern.

The third concern I've got is that we still have, frankly, two sets of books in the province, and the auditor pointed that out. We still find with the public accounts that we have two sets of numbers. We have the number that is reported by the government in its estimates and the number that's reported by the government in its financial statements.

As a matter of fact, for those who are interested in it, the public accounts which came out a few weeks ago show that in terms of real cash expenditures, money laid out by the province, money actually expended, the expenditures were \$60.3 billion. The financial statements show a number of \$57.8 billion, roughly a \$2.3-billion difference between what was actually laid out in cash and what's reported in the books. The reason for that is that, among other things, the government actually spends about \$1.2 billion on pensions. That's how much money the province has to spend on pensions. That's how much money it actually lays out in cash. But if you can believe this, in the books, in the budget, the government shows not an expense on pensions, but essentially a profit of \$300 million. So the cash out is roughly \$1.2 billion, and if you take the time to look in the budget, they show a positive cash flow from the pensions of \$300 million.

How could that possibly be? The way the budgets report it is they take what actually was spent by the pension fund, compare it to what the pension fund's increase in assets was, and that's the number that goes in the budget. But the actual cash payment by the province, as I say, is \$1.2 billion.

I raise these issues because if we here in the Legislature don't have a clear view of the true state of the finances of the province as we head towards the year of the implementation of this plan and understand what our real finances are, we're not dealing with reality.

I wanted to talk a little bit about Hydro as well. The reason I raise Hydro is that certainly all the people in the Legislature know, but I think most of the public also knows, there's been a very substantial change in the way that Ontario Hydro is structured. It has now been divided into several different companies: essentially, a generating company that has all of the generating plants; a service company that has the lines; and many people in Ontario actually get their electricity directly from Ontario Hydro—that's the service company.

1550

By the way, the debt of Ontario Hydro has always been guaranteed by the province of Ontario. Ontario Hydro pays the provincial government a couple of hundred million dollars to guarantee the debt, but now the debt is right on the books of the province of Ontario for the first time, and that is why those who follow the finances of the province would see that the debt of the province went from \$109 billion in 1998-99, the fiscal year that ended a few months ago, to \$121 billion. That was heavily because of Ontario Hydro.

But the auditor points out that—and he pointed this out in last year's report—Ontario Hydro did not use generally accepted accounting procedures when they

reported their financial statements last year. In our Provincial Auditor's opinion, they substantially overstated future net income estimates by essentially taking many expenses that were due in 1999, 2000 and 2001, moving them forward and writing them off against an old financial statement. The auditor said that was incorrect.

Hydro used a unique authority they have, called the rate-setting authority, to essentially, in my opinion, cook the books. That's strong language, but in my opinion they cooked the books. What the auditor said was that they essentially, now that they are going to market, have either been—"caught" may be too strong a word, but they have been forced to restate the finances. This is the Provincial Auditor in his report from yesterday.

We understand that Ontario Hydro Services Co, one of the successor companies to Ontario Hydro, has determined with its external auditors that it would be appropriate to restate certain of its financial statements along the lines that we have suggested for Ontario Hydro, that is, expenses are included in the operating results in the year in which those expenses occurred.

"In our view"—this is the auditor's speaking—"the ability of Ontario Hydro's successor companies to raise funds through public issues is essential to containing the risk to the government of Ontario under guarantees provided on existing Ontario Hydro debt."

The reason this is extremely important is that the taxpayers are now on the hook. These successor companies, when they go to the market and are forced to report their true earnings, could have difficulty in raising the money, and it will come back on to the province.

I spend the time on it because now a substantial part of our debt is as a result of what's called the stranded debt of Ontario Hydro. Ontario Hydro, at the very least, did not use generally accepted accounting principles when they stated their financial health. Now, as they go to market, one of those companies has been forced to restate the numbers; others will be forced to restate the numbers. It proves that the auditor was right, Hydro was wrong, and we've been dealing with an inappropriate set of finances from Ontario Hydro.

I also want to talk a little bit about a couple of other aspects of the auditor's report, because it impacts on how the finances of the province are reported and how much confidence we can have in those statements. I don't think any objective look at the report would conclude anything other than this fact: This is the most damning report by a Provincial Auditor of the Harris government in four years.

Mr Bart Maves (Niagara Falls): You say that every year.

Mr Phillips: I'm glad Mr Maves is now in. Now that you've got me going, Mr Maves, here's what the auditor said.

This is a government that said they were going to out-source—this is the big government that knows how to manage things. "We're going to contract out highway maintenance." What happened? The auditor looked at it. You don't save money; it's costing you money. The

bright lights in the highways operation have got it all wrong. They've contracted this thing out and it's costing the taxpayer money—it was dumb. But Mr Maves seems to like that. Not only is it costing more money; you know what they're going to do? They've already done it for a third of the highways; they are going to do it for all the highways. But Mr Maves thinks that is a good idea.

Then Mike Harris took over the Family Responsibility Office and he was going to fix the Family Responsibility Office. You know what the auditor said there. Maybe Mr Maves thinks this is a good idea, but I certainly don't think it's a good idea. The auditor went through the Family Responsibility Office, and he was shocked at what happened. Here's what happened: Since Mike Harris and the bright lights took over—Mr Maves thinks this is good—the arrears have gone from \$700 million to \$1.2 billion. The cases that the auditor says are in arrears have gone from 96,000 when Mike Harris and Bart Maves took over—it's now 128,000.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Bert Johnson): I wanted to just remind you that it's improper to make interjections and that we traditionally refer to other members as their riding.

Mr Maves: On a point of order, Mr Speaker: Not only is it inappropriate to refer to a member by his name rather than his riding, I think it's also inappropriate for the member to be trying to interpret what I'm thinking and what my opinions on certain issues are. He's continually doing that and I would ask him to stop that.

The Deputy Speaker: That's not a point of order.

Mr Phillips: That was Mr Maves from Niagara Falls. I just point out—

Interjection.

Mr Phillips: I'll go through more if you want me to go through more.

The Attorney General is here now. This is good. This is the person responsible for this mess at the Family Responsibility Office: the Attorney General. I'm glad he's here.

This is a disgrace. The arrears have gone to \$1.2 billion from \$700 million. The number of cases in arrears have gone from 96,000 to 128,000. As my leader, Dalton McGuinty, said yesterday, the Attorney General is Mr Tough Guy on those 200 squeegee kids who are out there, but when it comes to 200,000 children who are being left because deadbeat dads aren't paying, he's spending all his time going after those squeegee kids. Surely the Family Responsibility Office has an equal if not a higher priority by far than the squeegee kids.

I might also add that the auditor went through the fact that in the health area—the member for Niagara Falls has got me going on this now; I hadn't planned to spend this amount of time on the auditor's report—in the cancer area, after four years of Mike Harris, only one third, in fact fewer than a third, of the people who need treatment for cancer are getting treatment in the appropriate time—fewer than a third.

Premier Harris has said that the hospital restructuring will cost a certain amount of money. The auditor is

saying it's going to cost twice that amount of money. The reason I raise this is because many of my friends think the Conservatives know how to manage things, and I send them this report and I say, "Take a look at the areas that the auditor looked at, whether it be the outsourcing, where it looks like it's going to cost us more money—we're not going to save money; the Family Responsibility Office, where the problems are growing, not shrinking; the cancer area, where fully over two thirds of the people aren't getting serviced in the time that the government set for itself." The reason I raise these things is because as we look ahead at the ability of the government to manage its finances, we have now the report card. This is the report card on the first four years of the Harris government, and I would encourage the public to get a copy of it and to read through it.

One area that the auditor was not particularly harsh on was the Liquor Control Board of Ontario stores. One reporter had an interesting observation. The reporter said, "Is it not ironic that the stores that sell the alcohol are running efficiently but the alcohol abuse programs seem to be running extremely badly?" Haven't you got your priorities a little wrong there? Shouldn't you have the alcohol abuse programs running as well as the stores are running? I would encourage the public to go through this, because it has an impact very much on the finances and the books of the province as we look ahead.

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I want to make one final point because my colleagues want to have an opportunity to speak as well. I think it's important to continue to remind ourselves of what is driving the Ontario economy. The government, any government of the day, would like to take credit. However, in the 1999 budget one of the most important pages for me was page 13. That points out that what clearly is driving the Ontario economy is exports. This is what it says here: In 1989, 27.5% of Ontario's gross domestic product was exports; in 1998 it was 49%. It's probably over 50% now. It is over 90% to the US and, as we all know, heavily auto.

I commend our business sector for being able to compete aggressively, particularly in the US. I'm very pleased that we've shown we can compete very successfully down there. It indicates a lot of things we've got to make sure we do well in the future to continue to compete down there. But I think we also need to remind ourselves of why we have been successful in doing that. I use the government's own—

Mr John Hastings (Etobicoke North): Do you have any ideas?

Mr Phillips: There's Mr Hastings barracking again. One idea I've got is, start to manage the finances again. There's an idea. I think people would feel a little more confident if you managed the province properly.

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (Mr Michael A. Brown): Order. The member for Etobicoke North will come to order.

Mr Phillips: I've finally woken the dog up there. My apologies.

Yes, I have lots of ideas. One idea I'll give you is, stop cutting colleges and universities. The single most important reason why people invest here and grow here is the quality of the workforce, and you're cutting that.

The second thing I'd say to you is, start investing in our roads. The 401 is a massive problem, particularly as we head down to Windsor, where the bulk of our auto parts are heading. It's an acknowledged huge problem. But no, you're cutting Hydro expenses.

The third suggestion I have for you is the quality of our health care system. Why do auto plants want to locate here heavily? Because of the quality of our health care system and the fact that it is about half as expensive per employee for health care. That's another suggestion for you.

I don't know whether you want to hear those suggestions, but those are all good suggestions that you may want to take back with you and think about and do something about.

Hon Jim Flaherty (Attorney General, minister responsible for native affairs): Why didn't your government do anything?

Mr Phillips: The Attorney General, who screwed up the Family Responsibility Office, is now sitting in cabinet where they're considering more cuts to education. We heard today a proposal from the government for as much as \$800 million. The Attorney General, who sits at the cabinet table, wants to cut further. I say it's time to invest in Ontario, not to be cutting Ontario. I can understand the Attorney General's sensitivities when the Provincial Auditor gave him such a scathing report indicating that he's making the Family Responsibility Office worse.

I'm pleased to have a chance to give some advice to the government: Stop cutting education—that's the cornerstone of our workforce; fix our infrastructure; stop selling the 407 users down the road; say no at the cabinet table to these proposals coming in education; and continue to support our health care system

Mr Hastings: Did you ever say no at the cabinet table? No.

Mr Phillips: Mr Hastings may not want to hear these things, but those are positive, important suggestions. Recognizing that the reason Ontario's economy has been working so well has nothing to do with Mike Harris. It has mostly to do with our fine business sector that is able to compete successfully in the US market.

The Acting Speaker: The member for Sault Ste Marie.

Mr Tony Martin (Sault Ste Marie): I appreciate the opportunity this afternoon to—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker: Order.

Mr Martin: It's interesting that the Attorney General and the member from Etobicoke North seem to have a lot to say here this afternoon when they're not on their feet. I hope they will take advantage of the opportunity later to

get up and say something concrete, put it on the table about this closure motion and the balanced budget legislation that they're trying to ram through here.

They're over there laughing and chuckling as if they've just bought the candy store and they're going to do with it what they will; distribute the goodies to all of their friends and benefactors and to hell with everybody else, to hell with the education system, to heck with the health care system and to heck with social services and poor people in this province. "As long as our friends and benefactors, as long as the people we go golfing with and have our big parties with are doing well, it doesn't matter about anybody else because, after all, we believe in trickle-down."

The people of Ontario are getting sick and tired of being trickled on and are going to rise at some point in the middle of all of this and give you guys the message you deserve, which is to get out of here. If you don't want to be the government—this is what you keep telling us: "You know, we're not the government. We're here to fix it; we don't want to be the government"—then give the government over to somebody who wants to be the government, who wants to do the work that's required, who wants to get into the trenches, roll up their sleeves and work hard on behalf of the people of this province and bring in an economic development plan that is a bit more sophisticated than simply handing out tax breaks. Then we might have something going here, something people could buy into, something people could be proud of, something people could see some future in.

But no, all you guys can do is show up here on the odd afternoon and chatter, chatter, chatter, talk away, say nothing—a lot of hot air. I've never seen so much hot air in my whole life before as I see when I come in here and I listen to the Attorney General and the member from Etobicoke North. They're nothing but big bags of wind that blow in here and have nothing to offer, nothing to say. Leave it to the whiz kids in Mike's office. They know what they're doing. They're taking us down a road that's going to be good for everybody and who cares what's going on right now? "That's the price you have to pay. There's a bit of sacrifice. Somebody has to hurt and it's great that it's somebody else and not us, and who cares?"

Here we are again today, after four years going on five years of government by these guys—I guess government by default because they don't want to be government—debating a closure motion, debating again a motion to stop debate on a really important issue before the people of this province, to be debated by all of us here who have been elected by people from our constituencies to carry their voice, to challenge, to ask questions, to raise issues, and we're being told that's going to be shut off, that we're going to be closed down. "We don't want to hear any more. We've heard enough. There was too much, to begin with, being put forward and we're going to put an end to it," just like they're putting an end to democracy in this province in so many significant and important ways.

Ever since they got to power, it's been nothing but one takeaway after another from democracy: reducing the number of MPPs, reducing the number of school boards, reducing the number of trustees, reducing the number of municipalities, reducing the number of councillors who serve in municipalities. Sooner or later we'll get to the point where there won't be anybody left. I guess that'll make you guys happy because then you won't even have to deal with the little bit of resistance, the little bit of opposition that we're allowed to participate in here in this House that is left.

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You've changed the rules maybe a half-dozen times over the last four years, and each time you've made it more and more difficult for those of us in opposition who have been duly elected by the constituents of the areas we represent to speak our piece, to bring their voice here, to challenge, to bring a different perspective, to shed some light on some things. Each time we change the rules, our ability to do that is diminished, is shut down, is cut back. I think at the end of the day the people who lose out the most are the folks out there in Ontario who had developed over a number of years, through various and different governments—Conservative governments, Liberal governments, New Democratic governments—a system where everybody had a say. Everybody thought that if they had a concern and it was real and genuine and they were sincere about it, and they had an opportunity to bring it to the table, it would be heard by people who cared, who were willing to listen, who wanted to be government, who wanted to roll up their sleeves and do that difficult work that's required of government. But alas, that is disappearing.

Yet again we have today a closure motion in front of us that should be a wake-up call to everybody. The light should go on. A bell should ring. A flag should go up that democracy is again being shut down. The ability of the opposition to participate in debate and speak on a subject as important as balanced budget legislation is being limited. We'll just get on with it, turn government over to the whiz kids and to the Premier's office, and really, who cares?

One of the most obnoxious pieces of that red tape bill that came in here the other day is the diminishing of the role of the P and P committee of cabinet, the priorities and planning committee of cabinet, which used to be that last vestige, that place you could go before a bill actually got the wheels on it and hit the road, to make some change, to bring some reason and rationale to important pieces of public policy. That's going to be virtually wiped out and everything's going to be turned over now to the whiz kids in the Premier's office and they'll do it all.

They won't say it on the public record and they won't say it here in the House, but I know that behind the scenes there are lots of backbenchers over there—and there are a lot of you—who are concerned about that, who don't see that wonderful opportunity that you thought you were going to have when you first got

elected, that I thought I was going to have when I first got elected, to actually make some change, to actually make a difference. That's been taken away from you. There are a lot of you disillusioned; I know that. I wasn't surprised that a whole whack of you decided not run again, but I was even more surprised that some of you actually chose to, given the experience that you must have had: having no input, no ability to participate and being shut out of the equation all the time.

You can imagine how we feel. You who are on the government side, who have some access, who go to caucus meetings, who have an opportunity to speak to cabinet ministers at your wine and cheese parties and your cigar-smoking sessions at some of the elite clubs in this community, you must wonder about how we feel when we come to this place all geared up, ready to debate, to discuss, ready to be government, to do government, to participate in government, and you say: "No, sorry, it's all over. Your time's up. You've had your 20 minutes. You've had your 10 minutes and now it's over. We want to get this through. Christmas is coming. We've got to get out there and organize the parties and plan our trips and get away from here, get out of the bad weather and down to Florida," or over to Europe or wherever it is that you go on your Christmas vacations.

"Get the business of the public domain, get the policy stuff that we need to do here, get the business of government over with so we can get on with that really important stuff, which is to rub shoulders with our friends and benefactors, have them pat us on the back and tell us how wonderful we are for having made the tax cuts and taken money out of education and taken money out of health care, taken money away from those who are poorest and most marginalized in our communities, kick some butt in the welfare line and all those kinds of things," pat you on the back—

Mr Doug Galt (Northumberland): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: I am sitting here listening very attentively to the presentation. I'm trying to figure out what the topic is, what bill we're debating. I haven't heard any reference to the one I think he should be on topic with. Maybe you could have him get on topic and speak to the bill at hand.

The Deputy Speaker: That is a point of order and he's coming to that. I'm encouraged by what I expect to hear.

Mr Martin: He's encouraged by what he's hearing because finally there's somebody standing in this House telling it like it is, telling the truth. If you guys over there would wake up and listen once in a while—

Mr Toni Skarica (Wentworth-Burlington): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: I'd like to refer you to subsection 23(i) in the rules of debate which indicates that the member shall not impute "false or unavowed motives to another member." Basically, the member has been saying that the reason that the government wants to bring this motion is because we want to plan parties and get away for Christmas and so on and so forth. There's no evidence of that at all. That to me is a false and un-

avowed motive, and not a proper subject to debate. I ask the member to withdraw that.

The Deputy Speaker: That is a point of order, but it's—that is, when it is impugned on a member. Therefore, I find that the member's remarks are within the standing rules, and I'd like to recognize the member from Sault Ste Marie.

Mrs Lyn McLeod (Thunder Bay-Atikokan): You are free to impugne the government all you want.

Mr Martin: Thank you very much. The member from Thunder Bay-Atikokan says I'm free to impugn the government all I want. Goodness gracious, does that ever feel good. Finally, a little relief here. We can say it the way we feel it. We can tell the truth here. We can't be shut down by members over there who feel personally offended when we talk about why they really want to do these things and the actual rational behind what this government is doing.

I know the truth hurts. I know it pinches, but if the shoe fits, you've got to wear it. There's a lot of squealing from that side here this afternoon. We're obviously touching a raw nerve, and they don't like it at all. They never do.

Whenever I get up in this House and I tell the truth and I speak of behalf of my constituents and I call them to task and I put the stuff on the table, you get nothing but verbal garbage coming back: squealing and complaining, points of order, points of personal privilege, another way for them to try to intimidate the opposition, to close us down, to shut us off so that we don't get a chance to speak on behalf of those others out there who would like to have some access to government. But of course these guys don't think they're government, and if you don't think you're government, then access obviously isn't a big deal.

As I was saying before I was so rudely shut down by a couple of the members over there who raised points of order—

The Deputy Speaker: Order. I think I would rather not get into the back-and-forth. The members on this side have ridings and they're not "these guys," nor are the ones to my left. It's better if you would make your remarks through the Speaker, to the point and on the bill, and we'll keep things on a level keel that way.

Mr Martin: That's fine. Through you to the chamber, I'd like to go back to where I was when I was cut off. I was saying that the reason the government has a time allocation motion, which is the motion that we're debating here today by the way, member from—Galt, is it, or Mr Galt, the member for—

Mr Galt: Northumberland.

Mr Martin: Northumberland; that's it. I should remember that. A wonderful part of the province. We're debating a time allocation motion, just in case you didn't know. It's a time allocation motion because this government is in a big hurry to get the little bit of business that it has on the agenda done so it can get out of here and begin to party and get together with its friends and benefactors so that they can pat them on the back and

give them all kinds of accolades and say thanks for all the things they have done for them: giving them the big tax breaks, because we know that the tax break that this government has delivered was proportionately and exorbitantly in favour of the well-off as opposed to the middle class and the poor, creating, by the way, a growing gap between the rich and the poor in this province and contributing to the same gap that's growing in this wonderful country that we call Canada.

They gave their friends and benefactors, those people who contributed to their election campaigns, who actually come from the world that these guys came from, who benefit from reduced money spent by government on programs like education and health care—God forbid that we would give any money at all to people who find themselves in some difficulty, in between jobs, by way of social assistance of some sort.

I notice in reports that we hear and from comments made by the Minister of Community and Social Services, who has deemed it fit to grace us here this afternoon, that they're now going to go after welfare people who should happen to have, God forbid, a cottage.

Hon John R. Baird (Minister of Community and Social Services, minister responsible for francophone affairs): Do you think that's wrong?

Mr Martin: Yes, I do. Absolutely. I go on record as saying that. It's absolutely dead wrong. What you're doing is taking people who are already in difficulty because they are for the most part between jobs and you're saying that before you'll give them a penny to help them through that choppy water, they've got to become completely and totally destitute. They're in poverty already; you're going to drive them further into poverty. They will have not a thing to stand on. This reminds me—

Hon Mr Baird: Point of order.

Mr Martin: The minister has been offended.

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Hon Mr Baird: On a point of order, Mr Speaker: I do support welfare recipients not being allowed to own cottages.

The Deputy Speaker: That is not a point of order.

Mr Martin: As if we didn't know that, as if we didn't know that this present minister, even when he was simply a backbencher and a member of the government, didn't promote the most right-wing of policies that this government had to offer while he was operating as a member like myself here. Now they've given him the portfolio that allows him to take direct attack at those people who they seem to feel—

Mr Galt: On a point of order, Speaker: I notice in this presentation he's talking about cottages. I'm wondering if he's referring to a second residence and if he supports that those on welfare should have a second residence, if that's what he's referring to.

Interjection: That's a good question.

The Deputy Speaker: It may be a good question; it's not a point of order.

I recognize the member for Sault Ste Marie.

Mr Martin: It's not a point of order, and there seems to be some irritation and anxiety over on that side about what I'm speaking of here.

I'm telling you that I don't think it's right to drive anybody who is in a position of some difficulty financially, perhaps between jobs, perhaps because there was some sickness in the family to themselves or some members of their family, the myriad of reasons, as the member for Niagara Centre said last night, that we might find ourselves in a position of needing some assistance from government, for them to be driven further into poverty by the policies of this government, which would deem it necessary before you could qualify for even an iota of help from a pool of money that you've already contributed to yourself for most of your life by way of your taxes—that you would be driven, totally and completely, into destitution: that you could not own a car, not own a cottage, not own a second dwelling, that you should somehow liquidate that and thereby erode some of what you've built up by way of future investment so that you might have something when you retire by way of a pension.

You're going to put a group of people in this province, you're going to put more and more people in this province, actually, who are finding themselves having a hard time with the economy that you're supporting—because it's all part-time, it's all contract, it's all very competitive now compared to what it was before. People can't get enough jobs to put together to maintain the standard of living that they had before, and they find themselves in difficulty, struggling, trying to make the adjustment. These guys are even going to take away that which they have built up by way of investment over a number of years and completely drive them into the poorhouse and into poverty.

It reminds me so much of some of the reading I've done over the years about other countries which took such a tack in times of difficulty against the poorest of their citizens; who deemed, for example, in Ireland, the country that I came from, that nobody could own anything worth more than £35. The landlord could walk in and offer them £36 for something they had, and they couldn't say a thing about it; they had to sell it, they had to get rid of it. They could walk in when they were having dinner and determine that a piece of furniture that they were sitting on was worth more than whatever it was they were supposed to be allowed to have and could just walk away with it. I'll tell you, we're not far from that in this province today as we see more and more of these kinds of very punitive and destructive and personally repugnant attacks on the most vulnerable and the poor in our communities.

The point I'm making here is that these folks don't want to hold those initiatives, that kind of policy, that approach, what they're doing to this province, up to the light of scrutiny that's supposed to happen here at Queen's Park, in this place, and so they change the rules. Then, even with the change in the rules, they want to cut off debate prematurely, as we're doing here this after-

noon, so that we can't, we can't bring other alternatives to the table. They don't have to answer to anybody except their friends and benefactors, whom they're in a big hurry to get out of here to meet with so that they can laugh and guffaw and point fingers at all those whom they're damaging, all those whom they're destroying, whose lives they're throwing on the scrap heap and who will over time become a larger and larger group.

The gap that's growing in this province between the rich and the poor is becoming dangerously wide. The middle class used to be the bread and butter of all of our communities. They used to be the people who got up in the morning and went to work and felt that it was worth something to do that and that they would have that job until they retired, and that on retirement perhaps, if they were lucky enough to belong to a union that negotiated a good pension package, they would actually have a pension and be able to take care of their families, send them to higher education, not have to worry about health care because it was there for them, because we, as a civilized community of people with the best health care system in the world, had put that in place so that they and their children and their parents could access it; an education system, a series of social programs, communities with libraries and pools and recreation programs that they could all participate in.

The middle class believed that was sacrosanct, that nobody would ever have the nerve to diminish that, to take away from that, to challenge that, to reduce that. They thought that all the work that they'd done, the times that they went out on strike, the negotiations that they participated in on behalf of their fellow workers with their unions, with their bosses, they thought that was all cast in stone and that Ontario was simply going to build on that, have that evolve, make it better, improve it, as other governments did—Liberal and Conservative and New Democratic governments. But not this government.

This government has for the first time in a long, long time shaken to the core the confidence of the middle class. They're not sure any more—the old saying is there but for the grace of God go I—that tomorrow it won't be their turn to have to go to a government office with their hand out to say, "Please, could you give me a few bucks so that I could feed my family, pay the rent, buy the clothes that I need to make sure that my kids are warm in the wintertime?" They have to go to the YMCA and say: "Listen, could I have, just for a time, because I'm in between jobs here, a reduced membership so that my kids can still come and swim at the pool. They love it so much and they've gotten used to it and it would be so terrible, because I don't have a job and the government now has made it really difficult for me to apply for any funding, if my kids have to suffer because of that."

But as I said a few minutes ago, not only is this government going to make it hard for those middle-class people who are being shifted around, who are being restructured, who are losing their jobs, to get the little bit of money that we used to dole out that would take them from here to there; they're being told now that they don't

qualify unless they're absolutely destitute, unless they don't have another thing to sell at the pawnshop, unless they're willing to go out and sell the little cottage. They put in the little extra bit of money, they cashed in the bottles and the kids went out to work, and they took part of that money and the family pooled it and they bought a little cottage so that they could recreate in the summertime like so many of the others do at the lake. Now they find themselves in a squeeze, in a position where they've lost their job, and in this day and age it's not a stretch to say that they lost their job because of the restructuring this government has done. In Sault Ste Marie over the last four years we've lost some 1,500 to 2,000 good-paying jobs, jobs that people aspire to, jobs that the young people of Sault Ste Marie used to come home to work at. They're gone now.

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A lot of those people are finding themselves, primarily because they're older—they're in that 45 to 55 category. It's been a long time since they've been in school. They've not developed a whole lot of other skills, particularly skills that are marketable in the new economy that's out there, and they're finding themselves having a difficult time getting another job, particularly a job that would pay the kind of money that they were getting before, that was maintaining a home. And in my neck of the woods it was not unlikely that a person would have a home, would have a little cottage, a car, a truck, would go fishing and hunting and that kind of thing. That became sort of a benchmark in northern Ontario, having made it to some degree as a middle class, working class citizen in this province.

Now, because they've lost their job and in many instances they are too old to just jump immediately into another job, they need some retraining or skills or whatever. But before they qualify for Ontario Works or for assistance of any kind, this government is asking them to go to the pawnshop and get what they can for everything that they own and spend that, get rid of that. "When you're destitute and you're down on your knees and you've nothing left and you've lost your pride, then come to us and we'll in a very magnanimous way, in a big way as government, give you a little bit to feed your children, to pay the rent if you have a house left at all and to clothe your children." That's what you're doing to the citizens of my community, that's what you're doing to the middle class across this province from town to town, and sooner or later that ghost will visit each and every home in this province. They'll be touched.

Right now they're feeling anxious. There aren't a whole lot of people right now who are feeling confident that what they have now they will have in two years or five years. They don't know, because if they do at this point in time it's probably contract, short-term and with no real confidence that it will be there in the long haul. So they're anxious, they're not sure. They see what you're doing to some of these other folk, they see what you're doing to the welfare people and some of them are saying, "They had it too good for too long." A lot of

those people were never there, but they'll be there soon, or there is the chance that they may be there soon and they're beginning to look at it twice.

I came here in 1990 thinking that I was going to change the world, thinking that I was going to make a difference, and I wasn't here long before I began to realize that yes, it was important that I had personal aspirations for myself and my community and the people I represented, but that there were a whole lot of other people here with the same motivations, with the same very real and sincere desire to make improvements, to change the system, and that I had to work with them, work within the system, take advantage of the opportunities that were there to participate in debate, to work on committee, to sit down behind the scenes with my own colleagues and members of the government and the opposition and find ways together to move forward the agenda that was building on something that was there already, not destroy, not tear down, not belittle and most of all not to attack the most vulnerable out there.

I enjoyed the five years that I had as a backbencher in government working with people, working with the government, working with the opposition, but I have to tell you in the last four years it has been a frustrating, difficult and oftentimes depressing exercise to try to do government with a group who doesn't believe that they are government. I suggest to you that what we have here tonight, what we're debating tonight is another example of those roadblocks, of that frustration, of this government that doesn't want to be government attempting to stifle the democratic process in this province.

Mr Dan Newman (Scarborough Southwest): Today I rise as the MPP for Scarborough Southwest to support the government's Taxpayer Protection and Balanced Budget Act and the need for its quick passage. Before I go into my speech on that, I just want to comment on a couple of things that the member for Sault Ste Marie indicated. First off he talked about the rule changes. The fact of the matter is that if the rules hadn't been changed he wouldn't have had the opportunity to speak today, because in the last election the NDP went from 17 seats down to nine. They lost official party status. If the rules hadn't been changed he wouldn't have had an opportunity to speak today, and I think he should have recognized that fact.

He also mentioned that in 1990 he came to Queen's Park hoping to change the world and he said he didn't change the world. What he did is that he changed the province: 32 more tax hikes in this province, \$50 billion added to the debt. That's the very reason we need a bill like the Taxpayer Protection and Balanced Budget Act passed here in Ontario.

This is truly landmark legislation that will protect Ontario taxpayers and families from irresponsible government spending. In other words, it will protect people from governments like the NDP from 1990 to 1995, and the Liberals from 1985 to 1990. It will prohibit Ontario governments from spending more money than they have or from arbitrarily increasing or introducing new taxes to

help make up deficit spending, without prior approval from the electorate. This is very important not only in Scarborough Southwest but in Perth-Middlesex.

I think it's important that we look back at history, the history of our province. In the past 35 years, Ontario has had balanced budgets or surpluses only four times. Under Progressive Conservative governments, balanced budgets or surpluses were achieved in 1965-66, 1966-67 and 1969-70.

In 1989-90, under the Peterson Liberals, the government took credit for balancing the budget. We all remember that moment in history, and it was just that: a moment in history; it was very briefly balanced. In 1990, when the NDP were elected by the people of Ontario, the finance minister, Floyd Laughren, could not find the money. Where it went, who knows?

What's important is that this bill contains provisions similar to Manitoba's breakthrough legislation on balanced budgets. One of the provisions of that bill was to encourage governments to run surpluses in good years. In this way, an accumulated net surplus could be taken into account to offset amounts by which expenditures exceed revenues in later, less buoyant fiscal times. This is no different from what individuals, families and businesses must do to manage their finances in Scarborough Southwest or in Perth-Middlesex. The old adage of saving for a rainy day is time-tested and true.

After the first year of a prohibited deficit, the Premier and the members of cabinet would be docked 25% of the stipend they receive for their work as cabinet members. This penalty would increase to 50% after a second consecutive deficit, and after each consecutive deficit thereafter. This makes the commitment to balanced budgets very compelling indeed.

While governments would be expected to maintain balanced budgets, this bill would give cabinet the opportunity to fix a very small deficit, of less than 1% of revenue, by running an equal or greater surplus the following year. In this situation, cabinet salaries would not be docked unless the government fails to run the offsetting surplus the following year. If the government runs a deficit greater than 1% of revenue, the penalties would apply immediately after the tabling of public accounts.

This bill would require the government to get the approval of voters before it could introduce a new tax or raise the rates of a wide range of taxes. If the government wants to seek voter approval through a referendum to authorize a tax rate increase or a new tax, this bill would require a clear, concise and impartially worded question capable of a yes or no answer. It would also require an estimate of the revenue impact of the proposed increase or new tax.

Alternatively, parties could seek voter approval through a general election by filing an official notice of their intent to raise tax rates or to impose new taxes, if elected. Once again, the statement of intent to increase tax rates or impose new taxes must be clear and concise

so that the voters know exactly what they're being asked to approve.

This legislation would play a major role in keeping the provincial budget balanced in our province of Ontario. This is what the people of Scarborough Southwest want; this is what the people all across Ontario want. They want to see a budget balanced and they want to see that budget continue to be balanced or be in a surplus position.

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You should note that Ontario currently spends more than \$18,000 per minute just to service its debt. That's \$300 per second to service the debt in this province. That's outrageous. Public debt interest of \$9.8 billion during the year 1999-2000 is almost half of what the province will spend on important services such as health care, which will be over \$20.2 billion during this same fiscal year.

By the end of March 1999, our debt had reached \$109 billion; that's more than 50 times greater than our debt in 1964, eating up crucial revenues that could have been used to pay for services for Ontarians.

During the lost decade from 1985 to 1995, consecutive Liberal and NDP governments in Ontario levied 65 separate tax increases on the victimized and demoralized taxpayers of our province, including an unprecedented 11 increases to personal income tax.

During the course of debate on this bill, many of my colleagues have done an admirable job of reviewing the infamous roll call of Liberal and NDP tax hikes, but I only have 15 minutes and I couldn't possibly go through each of those 65 tax hikes, so I'm not even about to do that.

It seems that nothing escaped their spend-and-grab approach of governing. We saw increases in everything from personal income tax rates to income tax surcharges, to gasoline and fuel taxes, to the employer health tax, to the commercial concentration taxes and on and on and on it went. During this journey into the black hole, we experienced an unprecedented barrage of increased and new taxes. Despite the fact that these governments shamelessly piled more and more financial burden on to the backs of our citizens, they continued on a near-drunken orgy of wasteful and frivolous spending, going back to the well for more and more whenever they wanted. The result was the highest tax levels in our history, but also an equally disgraceful deficit of \$11.3 billion.

At a time when our economy was in trouble, growth and investment were becoming distant memories and consumer confidence and spending were down, what did our provincial leaders do to inspire confidence and return Ontario to prosperity?

Interjection: Taxes.

Mr Newman: That's right, they increased taxes in our province. And what was the effect? The effect was to drive the province into deeper despair. We in Ontario had become one of the highest-taxed jurisdictions in all of North America. Both individuals and companies were

finding it increasingly difficult to keep their heads above water. Is it any wonder that businesses were looking elsewhere to invest and unemployment was at the highest levels in decades?

Ontario, long regarded as the economic engine of Canada, the province of opportunity, was sputtering and gasping, desperately in need of a major tune-up and engine overhaul. In 1995, the people of Ontario and the people of Scarborough said: "Enough is enough. If we as individual taxpayers have to tighten our belts and live within our means, then why should government behave differently?" They were right in 1995 and they were right again in 1999.

If government was spending more than it was bringing in, the answer wasn't to simply raise taxes yet again, but rather to get spending under control and to look for ways of reducing the burden on our citizens, not adding to it.

As Premier Harris said in the Common Sense Revolution, it was the time for government to take the same types of changes that all of us had to make in our families and in our jobs. He went on to say that it was time to take a fresh look at government, to reinvent the way it works, to make it work for people, to bring common sense to how government operates.

The confidence placed in this government by the people of Ontario was not taken lightly in 1995 and was not taken lightly again in 1999.

Subsequent to taking office, the Mike Harris government has introduced 99 tax cuts since the throne speech in 1995. In fact, during the first three years of the mandate, the provincial income tax rate dropped by 30%, as promised, with half the cut coming in the first year. These reductions in the tax rate gave Ontarians the lowest income tax rate in Canada, resetting our income tax rate back to 1976 levels.

Ontario's 30% personal income tax cut is putting more money in the pockets of hard-working families. In fact, what it's doing is letting those hard-working families keep more of what they earned in the first place. But more needs to be done to improve these families' take-home pay. The taxpayer protection legislation is intended to make sure that no provincial government can, in the future, turn around and hike tax rates or create new taxes without the people's permission.

During the recent campaign, our Blueprint commitment outlined an additional reduction of 20% in the personal provincial income tax rate and a 20% cut in the provincial share of residential property taxes, the latter of which will return approximately \$500 million to the taxpayers of Ontario. Despite the significant reductions in taxes which our people must pay, the sound financial management exhibited by this government has resulted in a plummeting deficit and greater consumer and investor confidence in Ontario as a place to live and do business.

How many jobs have been created in that time? Over 614,000 net new jobs since the throne speech of 1995. I think it's important to note that in this past month, October 1999, some 36,400 net new jobs were created in our province. In September of this year, 28,800 net new

jobs were created in our province. That is proving that tax cuts do indeed create jobs.

However, the greatest single achievement of the Mike Harris government, which will be part of its legacy, is that it is now proven that despite major reductions in tax levels and increased emphasis and spending on critical services like education and health care, government can live within its means. The days of unchallenged increases in government spending followed by unchallenged increases in taxes are over and must never be allowed to return to this province.

This government, in its actions, has shown an unprecedented level of respect for the taxpayers of this province, never before seen in Canada and never before seen in our province. It has recognized the hard work and commitment that each of our citizens must exhibit to raise a family and to maximize his or her personal potential. That effort must not be taken lightly. By frittering away hard-earned tax dollars on wasteful or unnecessary government spending or programs, we are being disrespectful to the millions of men and women whom we purport to represent and serve. We must spend our tax revenue prudently and wisely, ensuring that the taxpayers of this province are getting the maximum return on their investment.

Make no mistake about it: It is an investment, and the taxpayers of this province are the investors. We must never lose sight of that, and that something of value must be made in return for that investment. That's what the Taxpayer Protection and Balanced Budget Act recognizes: that the taxpayer of Ontario is not merely a source of tax revenue but also an investor and a shareholder with a stake in how the government conducts its business. If a government should ever find itself in a position where it cannot live within its budget and believes it must run a deficit or seek additional tax revenue, it must go to its investors for approval.

As I previously indicated, the act proposes that future Ontario governments receive the voters' permission before introducing any bill that imposes any new tax or increases the rate of any existing tax. This approval would be sought through either a general election or a province-wide referendum.

The combined balanced-budget and taxpayer protection provisions of this bill make the legislation one of the toughest and most comprehensive of its kind. Ontario would have to balance its budget each fiscal year, as do most other provinces with balanced-budget legislation. Ontario's legislation would have the highest penalties. As I mentioned, cabinet members would be penalized 25% of their cabinet salary for the first deficit, 50% for the second consecutive deficit and 50% for each consecutive deficit thereafter.

The government would be held to the accounting policies in place at the start of the fiscal year in determining just how that budget had been balanced. It wouldn't be able to circumvent the legislation by changing the rules halfway through the game. We've seen what happens in this province when that happens. In other

words, we would not see a return to the accounting procedure known as Petersonomics.

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The Ontario taxpayer protection provisions would be the most comprehensive in all of Canada, going far beyond the provisions in both Manitoba and Alberta. The need for this legislation was clearly enunciated by Premier Harris and Progressive Conservative candidates across this province during the last campaign. Taxpayer protection was indeed spelled out in our Blueprint, leaving no doubt as to where our commitment was in this area. The taxpayers of this province responded by giving Premier Harris the first consecutive majority government since Premier John Robarts, who, I might add, led this province during the last undisputed balanced-budget years.

The taxpayers of this province have been taken for granted for far too long. They are now, with this bill, should it be passed, being given the authority to say no. They can say no to a government which cannot keep its financial house in order. The Taxpayer Protection and Balanced Budget Act is a very powerful piece of legislation and is a momentous step in the continuing evolution of government in this province. It recognizes that democracy is far more than the right to vote in an election. It is also the need for accountability.

Scarborough is a community of hard-working citizens who have twice elected me to represent them at Queen's Park. In 1995 I was elected to represent Scarborough Centre, and in 1999 I was elected to represent the people of Scarborough Southwest. They have entrusted me to ensure that government continues to display financial integrity in how it conducts its business. They have entrusted me to ensure that they are not taken for granted and to ensure that government becomes financially accountable. They have entrusted me that we never return to the days of spiralling spending and relentless tax hikes that we saw during the Liberal and NDP years from 1985 through 1995.

I wholeheartedly support this bill and the motion before the House today. I believe that it is not only the right thing to do but is an absolutely critical and essential thing to do for the taxpayers of our province.

In the few minutes that I have been speaking, Ontarians have paid approximately \$275,000 in interest payments to service the debt in this province. This is a legacy that we leave to our children. We must be able to free them of this suffocating burden, and it can be and will be done.

The Taxpayer Protection and Balanced Budget Act will pave the way for future generations of Ontarians, who will once again be able to enjoy the benefits of living and working in the province of opportunity where their hard work and efforts are respected by those they elect to represent them.

The opposition parties really have no legitimate argument for voting against this bill or for voting against this motion today. They were there on June 3 when the results were tallied. They know that this legislation was

the fundamental plank in our platform, and the people of Ontario soundly endorsed that platform.

We have listened as they used the debate on this important and desperately needed legislation to espouse their views on a number of unrelated subjects. They wouldn't stand up and say, "I support balanced-budget and taxpayer protection legislation." They wouldn't say it; they talked on a variety of other topics. But it is time to move on. The people of this province have endorsed the need for this legislation, and we owe it to them to pass this bill and this motion without further delay.

The Acting Speaker: Further debate?

Mr Mario Sergio (York West): I am glad to join the debate and have a few minutes in the House to speak on this so-called "history-making" piece of legislation, as the member from Scarborough Southwest mentioned, and this momentous occasion.

What I didn't hear in any of the government side presentations is that we are dealing with closure, if you will. Cut the debate: no more talking, no more speaking. Cut the democratic process, let alone the content of the proposed legislation. This is what we are supposed to be debating now. I ask the Premier, if it is so important to him and his so-called government—which he says is not the government, by the way. If it's not the government then why does he come up with such a proposal? If it is so important to him to present this earth-shattering, so-important piece of legislation, why are they cutting the debate?

This is what we are discussing. Today is the last day that we can speak on this legislation. But I agree on one aspect: that it is an important piece of legislation, and I'm asked, Mr Speaker, not only to cut the debate today and vote on it—and it's going to carry, of course, because it is politically correct—even though I have to say that I remember our NDP side, back in 1997 during the committee hearings, said, "It is worthwhile to have a democratic process, so we would support it." I saw them the other day just going after the Liberals and saying, "The Liberals are changing their mind and supporting it." Well, hold on a second here. What did they say when this bill went to the committee?

But having said that, if this was so important for the government—this is not the first time we have been faced with the threat of this proposed legislation. We have quotes here back to 1990 or 1992, back in 1993 and back in 1995 from the now Premier, Mr Harris, saying, "Yes, in order to do certain things, that we give people power, that we follow the democratic process, that we do everything openly, we've got to have referendums."

It's interesting that memory is so short even on the government side, because in the 1995 election the Premier said, "Not even one penny will I cut from the education system, not one cent from the health care system." The debate in this House today revolves around \$800 million from a leaked government document, which the minister did say in the House was a leaked document. They want to cut another \$800 million from the school

system, from the education system, from our kids, from the classroom, from the textbooks.

Mr Harris, why don't you go to the people? You want call a referendum? Well, do it, but don't cause another \$800-million cut, because eventually somebody will have to pay—and you know who's going to pay for it—before you go through with this piece of horrendous legislation. It is supposed to increase accountability, which it does not, because that would call this a piece of legislation to hide what's behind it. If you are a good government, what's the problem? If you're a good leader, Mr Harris—and you're not—then why do you need this legislation? If your government is such a good government, then why do you need this legislation so that before imposing taxes or cuts you've got to go to a referendum? Why didn't you do it back in 1995, 1996, 1997 and 1998? You did all the dirty work before and now you're coming and saying, "Well, for any tax increase, for taxpayers' protection, for balanced budgets, we are going to do that."

How silly I have to say it is that once they have done all the cuts, they have decimated our education system, they have totally decimated our health care system, now they're coming back and saying, "Before we do anything else, we are going to introduce this legislation."

You know what's interesting—and the members from the government of course have to support it. They have to speak their language. It is not aggressive but progressive language in their view, and when the member from Scarborough Southwest says, "You know, Mr Speaker, in the last few minutes I have been on my feet it's cost taxpayers \$275,000," I am totally outraged. This government has borrowed every single penny and our debt went up from \$88 billion or \$98 billion to \$124 billion, and they have the gall to get up in the House and say that the few minutes that we are talking in this House is costing \$250,000.

1700

Let me ask the Premier: Isn't it a shame that they can say so openly—I mean, people are not stupid out there. They are not silly, like they would have us believe. If it's costing us \$250,000 for a few minutes in this House, why then not pay off the deficit, completely balance it and start to pay off the debt instead of going to borrow the money?

Interjection.

Mr Sergio: Oh yes, indeed. Let me say, just for the interest of our member, just prior to the last budget, what did they say? "Our members for a long time have known that deficits and debts are really tomorrow's taxes." If I'm not wrong, even Mr Harris used to say that some other time, some other place. Who did say that? That was Judith Andrew of the Canadian Federation of Independent Business. This is a wonderful quote: "I have to question, really, the wisdom of the dramatic and drastic tax cuts in light of deficit financing. It is not how we would have gone about it. In fact, it is not the way we did go about it." That was Ralph Klein, the Conservative Premier of Alberta.

I had 17 minutes and we can't do justice to debate, any one of us in the House, to discuss the merits of closure on this particular piece of legislation. But it's most unfortunate that the government continues to impose closure, to cut off debate, when they consider that this piece of legislation is a very important one. Mr Speaker, I thank you for the time given to me today.

Ms Shelley Martel (Nickel Belt): I'm pleased to participate in the debate today. Here we are again, starting off the session in a fine way, dealing with a time allocation motion on behalf of the government to try and cut off any further debate on Bill 7. My understanding is that there has not been extensive debate on this bill to date. The government is in a position where in fact the Liberal Party is supporting its position, thinks that it's okay that we have balanced-budget legislation but don't deal with health and social and economic and environmental deficits that come and that you can't deal with under this kind of legislation. So I'm surprised at the move of the government today particularly to stop the debate. I'm more surprised that the government has also included in its time allocation motion notice that there will be no public hearings on this bill. The government has no interest whatsoever in taking this out to the folks even for a few days, because a few days of public debate has become the tradition under this group, three or four if you're really lucky, depending on what the issue is, and if you're exceptionally lucky, it might get out of Toronto, in the rarest of circumstances.

I don't understand why the government wouldn't want to take this out and talk to the people and get their view about this particular bill. I think the points that we have been raising, in terms of an NDP caucus, are concerns and points that are shared by a number of people who live in the province of Ontario, particularly people who do see that the cuts this government has made to health, to education, to the environment will have a long-term impact. They are important deficits as well, just as important as the budget deficit that the government likes to harp on. I think people would like to have an opportunity to raise the concern of why it is that the government, in this bill which requires that we go out and have a referendum before we raise things like personal income tax, gas tax etc, wouldn't have included user fees, for example, or tuition fee hikes or even, what the government has been famous for doing, the downloading of costs associated with services that it has dumped on municipalities.

I think the reason the government doesn't want to have public hearings on Bill 7, the reason why in the time allocation motion we are dealing with today it says specifically there will be none of that, is that the government doesn't want to hear from people who are concerned not only about the short-term political hit that the government is trying to make with this bill but the long-term, significant, permanent problems that we will have to deal with when the sole focus is trying to deal with a budget deficit with no regard whatsoever for what that means for the health deficit, the education deficit, the

environmental deficit, the community deficit that this government has started and continues in Ontario.

So let me speak to those concerns that I think the public would like to raise if the government would have public hearings but which the government has completely undermined in its putting forward of the closure motion that we have here today.

I said the bill focuses on the budget deficit. The government has harped on that all through its debate on this bill and, to the detriment of the environment, health and education and communities, doesn't focus at all, doesn't even talk about what the costs will be to those important things, things that people in this province feel very strongly about too. If you look at where health care and education rate in most polling that is going on right now, they are at the top or in second place.

The government has come forward and said that without a referendum, without going to the people, things like personal income tax, corporate taxes, sales tax, the employer health tax, gas and fuel tax cannot be raised. They can only be raised when the government goes to the people in a referendum or when the government makes that a particular platform in its election platform. If they get elected, then they would sense that that would give them permission to go forward.

It's interesting that the government doesn't talk about all those other deficits. If you look at what the auditor had to say yesterday, it is clear that the cuts the government has made to try to finance its tax cut, which benefits the wealthiest 6% of people in the province to the detriment of the rest of us, it's very clear that there has already been a very significant health, education and environmental deficit which has begun and which will accumulate under this government as a result of this legislation.

It is clear that people don't want to pay more taxes. If you talk to them in a referendum about doing that, they will not want to do that. The only way this government and others that follow will be able to deal with those kinds of things, especially in bad economic times, is to make more cuts to the things that are really important.

If you're trying to balance your budget in a recession period and you're trying to meet the needs of all those who have been affected by that recession, specifically those who lose their jobs—and there were hundreds of thousands of those in the early 1990s—the only way you can deal with the needs of those people, most of whom ended up on social assistance during that time, is to raise the deficit. There was no other way to pay to meet the needs that as government we had a responsibility to meet.

What this government will do, once this legislation is passed, is that when we have increasing health care needs—and we do; they're out there because the population is growing—when we have increasing environmental needs—and we do, because in Toronto in July you can't breathe on the city streets—and when we have increasing needs in education—and we do, because if Ontario is going to be competitive in the next millennium, we have to give the best advantage to our

students—the only way the government's going to have to meet all of those needs will be to cut in those areas. I'd be surprised if the government even went out on a referendum to try to poll people with respect to raising taxes. What will happen as the needs grow is that there will be no way to pay for them, and what you're going to see is increasing cuts in areas of priorities that people really care about.

Look at what's already happened in health care. I refer to the auditor's report yesterday, two brief examples in health care. The auditor reported yesterday that during their audit of Cancer Care Ontario, the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care, they found that certain standards set to ensure that people in Ontario receive high-quality cancer care were not being met.

"Only 32% of patients requiring radiation therapy received it within the recommended four weeks from referral.

"The Ontario breast screening program had insufficient mechanisms to monitor whether screening centres were meeting required performance standards and to ensure that high-risk women were identified for screening."

These are just two of the items out of health care that he found.

With respect to hospitals, this is what the auditor said. Examples of audit findings that can be linked to the problems associated with hospital restructuring were:

(1) "based on hospital estimates, the capital costs for hospital restructuring would increase to approximately \$3.9 billion from the \$2.1 originally estimated from the Health Services Restructuring Commission

(2) "one hospital reported that, due to a shortage of operating funds," from the Ministry of Health, "it was not fully utilizing new facilities that cost approximately \$110 million to construct. Four of its eight operating rooms were idle while local residents were forced to travel to other centres for specialized care."

That is the deficit in health care that we are starting to see as this government has diverted funds to its income tax cuts instead of paying for priority items.

Look at education, if people don't think we have a deficit growing. Ontario has the dubious distinction of ranking number one now in terms of its supports to colleges and universities: We are dead last in terms of the transfer payments we provide to those institutions. At a time when we know education at the post-secondary level will be more important than ever for Ontarians to be competitive in the next millennium, we rank dead last.

In terms of cuts to schools, it was interesting that the leaked document that the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities referred to today shows another proposal for cuts to primary and secondary schools, this time in the order of \$800 million: \$94 million from computers in classrooms; \$244 million from school boards over three years; another \$160 million from colleges and universities over three years; another \$30 million over two years in funds for textbooks and learning materials; an undetermined amount for schools with children who are

deaf, blind and learning disabled. And then the kicker: Private universities can be established where students would pay more for loans, and of course the government would have no exposure at all because they wouldn't provide any funding. That's the kind of education deficit we've got underway, one that continues.

1710

I heard the government try and deny today that this document existed, and then I heard the minister say it was a leaked document. I really wonder if anyone out there can believe for one moment that this wasn't done at the behest of the government. Someone tooling away in some ministry somewhere just didn't dream up this document for cabinet to consider. Of course cabinet directed that this document be prepared. Of course cabinet is looking at further cuts to education. That's the only way they can continue to finance the tax cut, another 20% the government had in its Blueprint.

Those are the kinds of deficits. If you look at the environment it's the same thing. The province of Ontario is now second-last in terms of its environmental record, not just in Canada, in North America. Isn't that a record to be proud of, that we are second from the bottom in 10 provinces in Canada and 50 states? What does that say about this government's commitment to clean air, clean water, all those things that impact on good health care that then impact on how productive your community can be? We have got a government, in its Bill 7, that focuses exclusively on a balanced budget and does nothing to deal with the deficit it is creating, has created and will continue to create in those other important areas, a deficit that is going to get worse, because in bad times, when the government has to look for money somewhere and it can't go back to the taxpayers for that, it's going to make even deeper, more significant, more serious cuts in those very areas that most Ontarians consider to be a priority.

It's interesting that the legislation doesn't talk at all about the need for a referendum for user fees and for tuition fee increases. I wonder why that is. If you look at it, the government would be hard-pressed to deny that it has been in those areas where they have been dumping on to the local taxpayer as they have made their cuts. The government makes cuts in terms of health care and then turns around and tells seniors, "You can pay a \$2 copayment fee" or "You can pay a copayment fee and you can pay the dispensing fee as well. That's the new surprise we have brought you, thanks to Mike Harris." The government turns around and can say to students, "Under our regime, tuition has probably increased 60%, but that's OK; students can afford that." We are now entering a regime where unless your family is fabulously wealthy, you won't be able to access post-secondary education in the next number of years, but that's OK.

It's interesting that the government has no intention whatsoever of going to the people and getting the people's opinion about the whole new, wide-ranging regime of user fees that it has brought on to the taxpayers. Of course they don't want to go in that direction, because it's those same kinds of user fees the govern-

ment's going to have to depend on. When it can't find any money in a bad time to fund health, education and community services, the government's going to have to rely on new user fees, increased user fees to pay for some of those costs, because they won't be able to get it from general revenues.

It's interesting as well that the government through the bill makes no reference to a need to have a referendum before the provincial government dumps services, and then costs, onto municipalities. You'll recall that most of the legislative time in this place in 1997 was spent on dealing with all the legislation the government brought forward to dump child care, to dump municipal transit, to dump highways, to dump police services in unorganized areas, any number of new services, new costs, onto municipalities and hence onto the local property taxpayer.

It's interesting that the government completely ignored the need to have a referendum before it dumps further services and hence further costs on to municipal taxpayers. The Premier has said before that there's only one taxpayer, and he is right. Why is it that he doesn't want to hear from that one taxpayer when his government proposes to increase user fees, when his government proposes to increase tuition fees, when his government proposes to dump services on to municipalities so that local property taxes will have to be increased in order to provide those services? Why doesn't the government want to hear from people in a referendum then?

I submit to you it's because those are the very mechanisms this government has used during their first mandate and that they have every intention of continuing to use to meet the health and environmental and education deficits that are growing, and that they will continue to incur when they can't go back to taxes in order to raise the money that's going to be necessary, particularly in those down times.

I think it's interesting that the government that talks about how we should hear from the population with respect to personal income tax increases, with respect to gas tax and sales tax increases, doesn't want to hear from the people when they want to talk about user fees, government user fees, new ones, increased ones, doesn't want to hear from the people. When we talk about increased tuition fees—60% under the Conservatives—it doesn't want to hear from the people, and when we talk about how everyone's property taxes have increased directly as a result of the changes the government made in 1997 when it downloaded services and costs onto our municipalities. Of course, the government doesn't want to hear from people because the people would say quite a bit about how they're concerned about how the government on the one hand tries to do a big political ploy by saying, "We're going to talk to you about raising your personal income tax," but doesn't want to hear from them when they're talking about all the new user fees they have to pay.

My own community in the last two years has had a new water fee and a new sewer fee directly as a result of the cuts the government made to municipalities. I'm not

alone. There are thousands of people who are paying new fees, whether it's seniors paying for drugs when they didn't before, students paying increased tuition fees, and a whole host of new user fees across every branch of this government to make up for the cuts the government has made in other areas to pay for the tax cut.

It's a real shame that the government doesn't want to take this bill out to hear from the people. It's a shame that in the motion that's before us today the government specifically blocks that, doesn't allow it to happen. It's a shame that the government doesn't want to hear any more opposition from the New Democrats with respect to this bill. I think that a number of people have serious concerns about what the government is trying to do, which is a cheap political trick, in essence, where the social and the health and the environmental and the educational deficits will continue to grow while the government tries to focus solely on a budget deficit. When it gets into a bad time and has nowhere to go to raise money to deal with those important things, people will pay new user fees, higher tuition, any new range of new property taxes to cover up for the government's mistakes.

Mrs Brenda Elliott (Guelph-Wellington): I am pleased to rise this afternoon and speak in support of Bill 7, the Taxpayer Protection and Balanced Budget Act. As the MPP for Guelph-Wellington, I am particularly pleased to be back in the House representing two new townships, the townships of Puslinch and Guelph-Eramosa.

This bill is divided into two main parts. The first part is the Taxpayer Protection Act, and this part will require government to get the approval of people before it introduces a new tax or any increase in a wide range of taxes.

The second part, the Balanced Budget Act, will assure the taxpayers of Ontario that no government ever again can spend more than it can afford. It proposes that in the fiscal year of 2001-02 a deficit may only be run in extraordinary circumstances such as natural disasters or war.

This legislation is among the toughest and most comprehensive in Canada. It has the highest penalties; for instance, cabinet ministers will be held personally responsible. A deficit can only be allowed, as I said, in extraordinary circumstances.

Governments will be held to the accounting policies that will be in place at the beginning of the fiscal year. In other words, they can't change the rules midway through the year—and, as I said, more comprehensive than any other legislation across Canada.

My constituents in Guelph-Wellington are conscientious and they work very hard to take care of their families, but they are no different from most families all across this province who are facing an increasing tax burden. In 1998, a quarter of the average Ontario household's income was turned over in federal and provincial taxes—one quarter. This is a 17% increase from 1980. That includes things like personal income tax, employment insurance, the Canada pension plan and other taxes.

Between 1985 and 1995, Ontarians saw their provincial income taxes increase 65 times and were never once asked if they agreed to these. Here are some examples of these increases: In 1985, the personal income tax was jacked up to 50% of the basic federal tax. Then, adding insult to injury, they said they had to pay another 3% surtax on any tax over \$5,000. In 1988, the gasoline tax was increased by 1%, the retail sales tax increased by another 1%. In 1989, the gasoline tax was hiked again by two cents per litre; personal income tax was raised 53%; those of us who were in small business certainly know about the job-killing employer health tax; the tire tax was imposed; the commercial concentration levy was imposed, all by a Liberal government at a time when Ontario's economy was booming.

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When the voters finally got their say, they told David Peterson what they thought of that tax grab. They got rid of him but, regretfully, were stuck with the taxes.

Our government believes that it's important to do things differently. That's why I'm proud to be part of a government that has reduced taxes 99 times since 1995. Now that we are finally getting hold of the reins of a skyrocketing taxation, we want to make sure that these detrimental patterns of tax and spend don't start up again in the future. The taxpayers are always the losers.

That's why we are proposing that governments must ask for consent to increase or introduce new taxes. This proposed legislation will force parties of all stripes to be honest about what they propose. If a big new program is being suggested with no tax increases mentioned, voters have to know that something is going to be reduced and will have an opportunity to ask the tough questions that prospective governments should have the courage to answer. This increased transparency will make it easier for voters to understand their options at election time. This legislation will go a long way to teach voters that their votes won't be disregarded in the future. This is very important. I believe that this legislation will go a long way to reduce voter apathy and cynicism in Ontario.

The Balanced Budget Act is part of this Legislature's promise to the people of Ontario that we will no longer spend indiscriminately. To back up that pledge, each member of the executive council or cabinet will have to turn over a quarter of his or her salary if the budget isn't balanced; 50% if it isn't balanced the following year. Talk about putting your money where your mouth is. We are sincere in turning this around.

A balanced budget is important. In the last 35 years Ontario has only had four balanced budgets, and the result of that is that the accumulated debt to each child now born in Ontario is \$28,711. That's the combined total of the federal debt and the provincial debt: \$19,139 attributed to the federal government; \$9,572 attributed to the provincial debt. These numbers are shameful. That is why we need balanced budget legislation, to safeguard the future of our province's finances, so that never again can, for instance, an NDP government be able to run up a \$49-billion tab in just four short years, or, like the Liberal

government before them, overspend their budget each year by \$300 million, up to \$2 billion.

Right now our province is struggling, spending \$18,000 per minute just to service our debt. This cannot continue, and our government knows that. That's why we have been diligently and steadfastly moving to reduce the deficit each year, from in 1995 over \$11 billion, down to \$8 billion, then to \$5 billion, then to \$3 billion. Next year, for the first time in decades, under our government's leadership, we will have a balanced budget in Ontario.

Taxpayers' pleas have been heard all across this country. All of the provincial governments and the federal government have achieved or are on their way to achieving a balanced budget.

Balanced budget legislation is not new. Alberta and Manitoba both have this type of legislation. Our proposed legislation is more comprehensive because, for instance, Alberta's only applies to general sales tax and Manitoba's only applies to new and more taxes.

How governments have achieved a balanced budget is a topic of debate. We believe that the right approach is through tax reductions to stimulate the economy and increase revenues, combined with reduced spending, and that is what we have implemented. The federal Liberal government, on the other hand, has been balancing its budgets primarily on the backs of thriving provincial economies like Ontario's. It's very interesting that just this week the provincial premiers of every political party once again are requesting that Paul Martin respond fairly.

To achieve their surplus, the federal Liberal government has cut nearly \$20 billion a year from the Canada health and social transfer since 1994. Add this up and this is very close to the \$80 billion of their projected \$95-billion surplus over the next five years. In the meantime, they have paid only cursory attention to the huge tax burden shared by Canadians. Surely, he can find room in the \$95-billion surplus to give Canadians meaningful tax relief.

I know in my riding of Guelph-Wellington constituents only know that they keep paying. They are very pleased that the Progressive Conservative government has worked hard to lift that tax burden from their shoulders. The irony, of course, is that the more we seem to work hard to reduce taxes for the people of Ontario, the more the federal Liberal government keeps adding taxes. The loser is always the poor taxpayer. We believe the federal Liberal government must take action to address the drag on our country's economic performance, and going on another spending spree is not the answer.

In this bill, one of the most interesting provisions is the legislation referring to the referendum. For the first time since the days of temperance, Ontarians could go to the polls to direct their provincial government's actions. Members of the House might be interested in knowing that the bill states clearly that a referendum question must be "clear, concise and impartial," and that any proposed questions would be evaluated by the chief election officer to ensure that it meets those criteria. This is an important

provision to make sure that any referendum held in our province will not face the questions and mysteries that have dogged other referendums in other jurisdictions. The vote would also be held under rules similar to a provincial election campaign.

It is also worthy to note that a referendum would not be necessary if during an election campaign the leader of one of the recognized parties provided the chief election officer with a statement that the party intends to raise or introduce a new tax if elected to government. Voters should never have to write governments a blank cheque every four or five years. Forming a government should never be considered a licence to reach into the pockets of taxpayers whenever it's convenient. This legislation will require governments to justify a tax increase to the most important people: the people who pay. Ontarians will have the opportunity to weigh the benefits of a proposed tax increase against its cost, and they will have a say before a tax is imposed, not during an election years afterwards.

This legislation asks that governments of any party treat the dollars they receive from taxpayers with the same care they would treat their own personal dollars. We are demanding that future Ontario governments be responsible with the money that taxpayers entrust to them. That's an important word: "entrust." We are asking that governments cannot any longer get themselves into a hole and try to bail themselves out by taking more money from Ontarians without consent.

The good people in my riding of Guelph-Wellington work hard and live by the rules. They know they must pay taxes to ensure that the services they need are delivered. But in Guelph-Wellington the people know the difference between need and want. In their own households and in their own businesses they make daily decisions about expenditures and reductions so that they can live within their means and meet their family's needs. They expect no less from their government.

Many people in my riding are from Scottish heritage, and of course people are always making jokes about the Scottish being tight with their money. In fact, frugality is not a bad thing. When we are elected to this House, we are expected by all Ontarians to be frugal, to be wise and to be fair.

My constituents know that their standards of living have improved over the past few generations, but they are never satisfied when they see evidence of government waste. When I speak to constituents to talk about the fact that \$9.8 billion of our entire provincial revenue, almost a fifth of everything we have to spend in this province on services, is wasted paying interest payments on the debt, quite frankly they are appalled. In Guelph-Wellington this is viewed as wrong and it is unsupportable. This is money they know that we are simply throwing away, money that we cannot invest in roads or hospitals or schools. The debt is now \$109 billion, 50 times greater than it was in 1964 and literally eats up crucial revenues that would be better directed in other places.

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They are also angry in that I think my constituents have felt over the years a sense of betrayal. When elected to this House, we are all entrusted to act in our constituents' best interests and for the provincial good as a whole. Running up unmanageable debt on their behalf without their permission robs them of future possibilities. It's no different than if someone were to run up a huge bill on your credit card and expect you to pay when you had your own different obligations. But it is worse than that, because they know that the debt and the deficit are so huge that managing and reducing them is a daunting task. It means, in many cases, saying no to services and programs which some may have become accustomed to or which in fact should be offered.

I found interesting—I have a list here—some of the things that have been suggested and will take place in the 1999 budget initiative that add up to the money that would be, for instance, spent each year on the interest for the debt. These are some of the kinds of good things that this money could be directed to all over again. In other words, we could double each one of these things: 10,000 new nurses over the next two years; expanded home care beyond our original \$2-billion long-term care plan; an innovation trust for colleges, hospitals, hi-tech equipment and other research infrastructure; expansion of access to opportunities program, which is a scholarship program; strategic skills investment for community colleges, partnerships with industries and self-sustaining programs; Aiming for the Top scholarships; post-natal care for mothers and their newborns; early years challenge fund; access to children's mental health services; respite care for families caring for medically fragile or technologically dependent children; increased investments to build and modernize universities and colleges.

I dare say in my riding there's not one of these proposed projects that my constituents wouldn't wholeheartedly support. With that \$9.8 billion we could double each one of those or offer many many new programs. Sadly, the consequences of increased debt and deficits have robbed us of those opportunities.

One thing that my constituents have mentioned to me time and time again, particularly my older constituents, the seniors in my riding, is that the burden of debt disappoints them in that it will fall primarily on their children and their grandchildren's shoulders. I mentioned earlier that \$28,711 is the debt, both federal and provincial, that our children face when they are born into this province. It's a very serious issue because someone will always have to pay the price, and in this case it will be the taxpayers. The pain of not dealing with it is very serious, because it grows exponentially.

I found it very interesting to read this quote from Dalton McGuinty, the Liberal leader, who said in 1996, not long after he became the leader, "I don't think we should become obsessed with deficit reduction because it causes too much pain." The pain of not living within your means is very significant and is not something our government is willing to allow.

If this legislation is passed, it is my view that with it will come an increased respect for government. Irresponsible spending without permission has increased cynicism on the part of the voter and I do not think that this is healthy for democracy in the long term. Bill 7, the Taxpayer Protection and Balanced Budget Act, is a bill about accountability. It is about transparency. It is about being responsible to voters that each one of us represents. It is very important, in my view, to the long-term health of this province and I would urge each and every member of this House to support it.

The Acting Speaker (Mr Tony Martin): Further debate?

Mr James J. Bradley (St Catharines): Thank you very much Mr Speaker for the opportunity to speak on yet another time allocation motion. So that the people at home know what this is, it's a motion which chokes off the debate in the Legislative Assembly once again. One thing this government has established a record on, in its first term and into this term now, is the number of times it has slammed the door shut on debate in the Legislature. One would think that if the legislation was popular enough or had compelling reasons to pass it, the government would be prepared to have a full and frank debate of all the stipulations contained within this particular legislation. But once again the Harris administration has shown its lack of respect for the democratic process. I suspect that many members who are not in the cabinet or not aspiring to be in the cabinet would, if they were in opposition, be publicly expressing the same concerns that I am at this time.

Members of the public may not be aware that the Legislative Assembly had sat, before we came back into session, only seven days this year, a total of seven days. You've heard the Harris administration and some of the right-wing ideologues within it talk about people having to work harder in our society, and yet the Legislative Assembly was not in session but for seven days at the stipulation of the Premier of this province, who refused to bring the House back into session early last year, who brought it back just a few days before the election was called and then refused to bring it back until late October of this year, even though the regular timetable would have called for a September return to sessions.

What does this mean? It means that there is less effective time to deal with legislation. The best legislation passed is often that legislation which is subjected to the most scrutiny, where there are amendments put forward in some instances or where the government simply recognizes that the legislation is not appropriate and withdraws it, or withdraws it for the purpose of making specific modifications to it. Instead, as usual, the Harris regime is interested in simply shoving everything through the Legislature as quickly as possible using the hammer of the majority that this government has—not a majority of the popular vote; they received 45% of that, but a majority of the seats in the Legislative Assembly. That is the way our system works. I do not quarrel with the fact that that is the case, but I do say that not having

received over 50% of the vote, I would have thought the government would have been more cautious in its approach to the Legislature and allowed more members of the House to canvass many of the issues which arise from this legislation.

We know that this government has, for instance, had to borrow for its tax cut. Let's look at why the budget has not been balanced. Here's a full term of a Tory government. I used to listen to the right-wing people say: "All you need is a Conservative government and you'll be fine. The budget will be balanced."

The problem is, they didn't listen to the more astute members of the Conservative caucus, some of whom are in cabinet today, some of whom sit in the Speaker's chair, some of whom have not aspired to—I shouldn't say "aspired to," but have not reached the cabinet table. I wonder why. I have great respect for some of those individuals who should be in the cabinet. But the new members should know that what they told Mike Harris and the whiz kids was, "Look, it makes all kinds of sense to implement our tax cuts after we balance the budget." Instead, they decided to borrow money to give a tax break which benefits, in real dollars, the richest people in this province the most.

So what we've had is four years of deficits, and at least \$21 billion has been added to the provincial debt. I can't believe this, under a government whose rhetoric was about saving money. The member for Scarborough whatever it is now—Scarborough Southwest—gets up and gives the Guy Giorno line about, "This is how much we pay per hour to service the debt"—per day, per hour, per minute. But his government is the government that has added \$21 billion.

The Dominion Bond Rating Service—

Interjection.

Mr Bradley: I say to the member for Etobicoke North, who tries to interject again with some astute observations, that the Dominion Bond Rating Service, certainly no bastion of Liberal or NDP thought, certainly a small-c conservative organization, was critical of the government. It said it was going to cost the government close to \$5 billion a year. In other words, the government would have to borrow that money. Wish they had listened to the present Minister of Labour; wish they had listened to Ted Arnott—I can't remember what his riding is now, Wellington something—wish they had listened to Morley Kells; wish they had listened to the new Speaker, Gary Carr, and some others who weren't so public about it, who said: "Come on, be smart about this. Be politically smart, yes, but even more so, for the sake of our economy, let's bring in our tax cuts after we've balanced the budget." I agreed with the arguments they made.

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Instead, what we have is borrowing all this money, putting the province further into debt. I'm going to tell the chamber of commerce, because the chamber of commerce used to tell me they were concerned about the debt. I'm going to tell the taxpayers' coalition and Ontarians for Responsible Government, all these organizations,

which I know are not fronts for the Conservative Party—I don't care what anybody else in this House says; they're not fronts for the Conservative Party—that this government has borrowed all this money and increased the debt of this province simply to be able to say they had a tax cut, which would have been reasonable after the budget had been balanced. That is, of course, what should be done now.

I heard people talk about solemn promises that were made. The one solemn promise I think most people in this province were made—I'm going to quote this promise verbatim. You will remember the 1995 election campaign. The now Premier of this province, Mike Harris, leader of the Conservative Party, when asked whether he was going to close hospitals, said, "Certainly, Robert"—Robert Fisher from Global TV—"I can guarantee you it is not my plan to close hospitals." Now we have over 40 hospitals closed or forced to merge in this province. The Provincial Auditor, another independent voice, said this is costing hundreds of millions of dollars more—

Mrs McLeod: Almost \$2 billion.

Mr Bradley: Almost \$2 billion, says the member for Fort William—almost \$2 billion more than was estimated. We knew that. We said that. People in our local communities said that. The only people who wouldn't say it were the Tories and the hospital closing commission they set up, which had some Tory fundraisers and others on it. They closed some hospitals, and I stood up for the member for Etobicoke Centre when they closed the hospital in his riding. I was with him on that.

Now we're hearing about \$800 million in further cuts. Instead of saying, "Let's implement our tax cuts later," we're going to have \$800 million in further cuts. The police officers cheered loudly in the gallery for certain legislation. When I sat down with a couple of them later, I said: "Do you understand what the new legislation means? Do you understand what those new cuts mean?" What they wanted to see was a lot of front-line officers on duty in the province. Instead, there are fewer front-line officers on the street today than there were under the NDP, and you used to criticize the NDP for that.

I know that you people over there know the cost of everything and the value of nothing. As a result, we're seeing drastic cuts to many essential services in government, and you're getting the calls about them. I think the more moderate members of the caucus—unfortunately they're few in number—are probably cautioning the Premier and the whiz kids about this. When they hear about people who can't get a licence quickly, for instance, who have to wait for a long, long time getting health care, cancer care—in the Niagara region, the ophthalmologists now have a cap on them. That means people are going to suffer as a result.

What are we going to do? Are we going to have a chance to debate this further? No. You're choking off the debate now, slamming the door shut on further discussion, and once again using the heavy boots—I

didn't say jackboots—of the government to put an end to this debate.

Mr Joseph Spina (Brampton Centre): I'm very pleased to take the debate and perhaps use the Liberal member's comments as my launching pad.

He claims that we're slamming the door shut on debate, yet it was interesting. In the fall of 1995 I happened to be at a local function, a fundraiser, a charity event, and the previous member from Brampton South, one Bob Callahan, whom everybody should know, said to me, "Joe, if your government does anything"—

Interjection.

Mr Spina: Yes, Bob was a Liberal. Absolutely, yes. He said: "If your government does anything, you have to do something to quicken the pace of the legislative process, because right now it allows empty rhetoric to drag on for hours and hours. Quicken the pace." I spoke to Bob at a much later time, after we had changed the standing orders, and he said: "Good move. Maybe you didn't go far enough." Nevertheless, Bob, thanks for the suggestion. We took it to heart, probably one of the few Liberal suggestions that we've taken, but we're pleased.

Then the member from St Catharines said that he wanted to quarrel with our approach. There's a little quote that I have here from Robert Frost that says, "A Liberal is a man too broad-minded to take his own side in a quarrel." That's what I was reminded of when Mr Bradley made that comment. In addition to that, there was another expression: "As usual, the Liberals offer a mixture of sound and original ideas. Unfortunately none of the sound ideas is original and none of the original ideas is sound."

Then when we talk about the issue of taxes, which is what this legislation is about, George Bernard Shaw says, "A government which robs Peter to pay Paul can always depend on the support of Paul." That's fundamentally the reason why the Liberals and NDP constantly raised taxes. They wanted to buy the people's support. Isn't it amazing? This is the exact opposite. We have cut taxes and, my gosh, Peter supported the government to a majority.

My colleague from Scarborough indicated earlier that he didn't have the opportunity to talk about the tax increases that the opposition brought in from 1985 to 1995. Those tax increases were a litany of sin. There wasn't a scintilla of conscience. Besides the personal income tax increases, gasoline tax increased by a cent a litre. Retail sales tax increased by a percentage point to 8% in 1988. In 1989, gas tax increased two cents a litre. Fuel tax increased two cents a litre. The PIT went up 53% of basic federal tax. The infamous employer health tax was levied on all Ontario employers, replacing OHIP premiums. There was a tire tax imposed, for Pete's sake, in 1989. Beyond that, of course, was the real famous one that almost choked development in Toronto, the commercial concentration levy. This was unbelievable.

Interjection.

Mr Spina: Was that the Bradley tax? He was the Minister of the Environment, I think.

But the amazing part is that here you had a government that was in one of the most prosperous periods of the economy of this province, and yet the only way they could attempt to come close to balancing the budget was to raise more taxes 30-some-odd times. Unbelievable.

It was interesting that during the 1995 election campaign the Canadian Taxpayers Federation wanted candidates to sign a pledge. One hundred and twenty-nine of 130 PC candidates signed it. Only four Liberals signed it. Dalton McGuinty was not among that small group; neither was Lyn McLeod, the leader of the Liberal Party at the time.

Finance Minister Paul Martin said: "Canadians have paid to see the movie *The Deficit*. They don't want the sequel." I think those are pretty good words. Finance Minister Paul Martin, the Liberal finance minister of this country, said that we don't want the sequel. What's the taxpayer protection act all about? Exactly that. In conclusion, I'm confused. Are the Liberals supporting this bill or not?

The Acting Speaker: Pursuant to standing order 46, I am required to at this time put the question on the motion before the House.

Mr Klees has moved government notice of motion number 7. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

Those in favour will please say "aye."

Those opposed will please say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

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

The division bells rang from 1751 to 1801.

The Acting Speaker: Members will take their seats.

All those in favour will rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Ayes

Arnott, Ted	Hastings, John	Runciman, Robert W.
Baird, John R.	Hudak, Tim	Sampson, Rob
Barrett, Toby	Jackson, Cameron	Skarica, Toni
Beaubien, Marcel	Johns, Helen	Snobelen, John
Clark, Brad	Johnson, Bert	Spina, Joseph
Clement, Tony	Kells, Morley	Sterling, Norman W.
Coburn, Brian	Klees, Frank	Stockwell, Chris
Cunningham, Dianne	Marland, Margaret	Tilson, David
Dunlop, Garfield	Martiniuk, Gerry	Tsubouchi, David H.
Elliott, Brenda	Maves, Bart	Turnbull, David
Eves, Ernie L.	Mazzilli, Frank	Wettlaufer, Wayne
Flaherty, Jim	Munro, Julia	Wilson, Jim
Galt, Doug	Mushinski, Marilyn	Wood, Bob
Gill, Raminder	Newman, Dan	Young, David
Hardeman, Ernie	O'Toole, John	

The Acting Speaker: All those opposed will rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Nays

Agostino, Dominic	Conway, Sean G.	Lankin, Frances
Bountrogianni, Marie	Crozier, Bruce	Levac, David
Bradley, James J.	Curling, Alvin	Martel, Shelley
Brown, Michael A.	Dombrowsky, Leona	McLeod, Lyn
Caplan, David	Gerretsen, John	Pupatello, Sandra
Cleary, John C.	Kormos, Peter	Ruprecht, Tony
Colle, Mike	Lalonde, Jean-Marc	Sergio, Mario

Clerk of the House (Mr Claude L. DesRosiers): The ayes are 44; the nays are 21.

The Acting Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

It being 6 o'clock, I declare this House adjourned until 6:45 of the clock.

The House adjourned at 1803.

Evening meeting reported in Volume B.

ERRATUM

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Should read:

comment on it, and that was a direct comment that she made to regional councillor Susan Para and myself when we asked her if we could sit down with her and discuss what this application meant to Uxbridge township."

Why is it that she decided that it was inappropriate for her to get involved but, on the other hand, you decided,

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