



Legislative Assembly
of Ontario

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de l'Ontario

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**Official Report
of Debates
(Hansard)**

**Journal
des débats
(Hansard)**

Monday 22 November 1999

Lundi 22 novembre 1999

Speaker
Honourable Gary Carr

Clerk
Claude L. DesRosiers

Président
L'honorable Gary Carr

Greffier
Claude L. DesRosiers

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO

Monday 22 November 1999

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO

Lundi 22 novembre 1999

The House met at 1333.

Prayers.

WEARING OF RIBBONS

Ms Frances Lankin (Beaches-East York): I seek unanimous consent to wear the purple ribbon representing the struggle to prevent violence against women, and in recognition of 14 women killed at l'École polytechnique in Montreal 10 years ago, and the 33 women who have been murdered in Ontario by their intimate partners since July 2, 1998, the date of the May-Iles inquest jury recommendations.

The Speaker (Hon Gary Carr): Agreed? Agreed.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

UKRAINIAN TRAGEDY

Mr Gerard Kennedy (Parkdale-High Park): It is an honour as a member of provincial Parliament to stand and help this Legislature recognize the famine-genocide that occurred in the Ukraine in 1933, where over seven million Ukrainian men, women and children were starved to death by the then Soviet regime. This week, November 19 to 28, it is very significant that Canadian Ukrainians will commemorate the 66th anniversary of this great, horrific tragedy. To ignore this event would be only to invite its repetition. So great was the impact and disruption of this famine-genocide on Ukraine society that raw statistics to provide the exact number of starved cannot be determined. However, historians have documented victims between seven million and 10 million in number.

The Ukrainian community continues to make positive contributions to our society here in Canada. I appreciate and thank them for their support, and I'm looking forward to working with them on their future endeavours.

Coinciding with the commemoration date proclaimed by the decree of the president of Ukraine and the statement officially presented at the United Nations by Ukraine's ambassador regarding crimes of genocide, the Ukrainian Canadian Congress is to be congratulated for continuing to increase public awareness of the famine-genocide of 1933.

AL POOLMAN

Mr R. Gary Stewart (Peterborough): It gives me great pride to rise today and recognize a man of great talent from my riding of Peterborough. Now in his 86th year, Mr Al Poolman is a very respected and prolific artist who has masterfully captured the natural beauty of the Kawarthas over a career spanning seven decades.

Mr Poolman's works have told the stories of the First Nations people. These stories have centred around the Curve Lake reserve located in the heart of the Kawarthas on a peninsula between Buckhorn and Chemong lakes. His paintings have illustrated the rugged and natural beauty of the land, as well as the personal histories of its inhabitants. This is why it is important to recognize his contribution. He depicts the life of the people who first settled on the land and, in doing so, gives us a unique glimpse into an important past. His works speak both of a rich heritage and a proud culture, set together on the breathtaking backdrop of this province.

On behalf of the riding of Peterborough, I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate Al Poolman on his recent art exhibition at the Whetung Ojibwa Crafts Art Gallery and wish him continued success in the future. We also thank him for the unique voice that he has given to watercolours, oils and acrylics.

DISTINGUISHED HAMILTONIANS

Mr Dominic Agostino (Hamilton East): I rise today to pay honour to a great number of Hamiltonians who have achieved tremendous success in their life.

Let me start, though, by saying that yesterday I had the pleasure of being in Montreal and cheering the Hamilton Tiger Cats on to the Grey Cup, again in Vancouver next week. I'm certain we're going to come home with the cup again for Ontario and for Hamilton, and I certainly look forward to that happening.

Recently, the Sons of Italy honoured Dr Nicholas Mancini as Citizen of the Year for the Hamilton Italian Canadian community. Dr Mancini has had a dental practice on Barton Street for 51 years in the city of Hamilton. Over the years, 30, 40 or 50 years ago, he looked after new immigrants who couldn't afford dental care. Dr Mancini was there for them. He was knighted by Pope Pius XII. He was a former trustee and chair of the Hamilton Catholic School Board and has served on over 17 committees, boards and agencies in his career.

Also recently, Bill Bain was honoured. Bill Bain served for over 30 years with the Hamilton East Kiwanis Club. His community service in every aspect of our community has been outstanding. Mr Bain led that organization through many changes and through many great successes over the past 30 years.

As well, the other night six great Hamiltonians were honoured for their great work and their achievement, and I'm proud to stand here and thank them for their contribution to our great city.

1340

TORONTO COUNCIL

Mr Dan Newman (Scarborough Southwest): Once again, the council for the city of Toronto and Mayor Mel just don't get it. First, Councillor Tom Jakobek and Treasurer Wanda Liczyk warned that the city's debt would double within five and taxpayers could face a double-digit property tax increase. Now Mayor Mel sees the solution to years of city mismanagement as a Toronto separatist movement.

In the past few weeks, we have seen city council spend \$10.5 million on what they call a "modest reworking" of Nathan Phillips Square, councillors privately and openly lobbying for personal salary increases, and overspending by the Toronto zoo, whose answer to sagging attendance is to increase admission fees.

Many councillors and staff continue to bring forward unrealistic Christmas wishes. They're really wishing for a return to the days when governments could tax and spend at their leisure. Significant savings from amalgamation are still being left on the table. So far, there has not been the political will to aggressively go after those savings. Toronto council should work towards encouraging the growth and expansion of business as a means of increasing the tax base, not increasing the tax rate and chasing even more commercial activity away from the city. In short, get into the game and put an end to "Lucien" Lastman's absurd province-of-Toronto gambit. It is nothing more than a means to direct attention away from the real problems and solutions facing the city of Toronto.

POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION FUNDING

Mr Rick Bartolucci (Sudbury): After having cut programs and funding to post-secondary institutions and forcing many students to incur massive debt, Mike Harris is cutting government-funded student loan programs by another \$75 million. So bad are the policies of this government regarding post-secondary funding that our student association at Laurentian University in Sudbury opened its second food bank on Friday so that our brightest and best won't go hungry.

Todd Bosak, from Laurentian, points out that the cuts are even more disastrous for Laurentian because it has one of the highest percentages of students in the province

who need financial assistance. Massive tuition hikes, coupled with diminished access to financial assistance, is evidence that Mike Harris is attempting to create an elite system of post-secondary education.

In response to this continued assault on post-secondary education, student associations at Laurentian, in Ontario and across Canada are organizing Access 2000, a nationwide rally to protest these horrible cuts to colleges and universities.

Mike Harris seems to have the will to invest in his own golf games, travel and expensive lunches, but no interest in investing in the future of our province, which is our students. We can only hope that the united actions of Access 2000 will make Mike Harris finally pay attention to these real problems. The Premier should be ashamed of himself for initiating government policies that force university students to open food banks so that their fellow students won't go hungry.

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Ms Frances Lankin (Beaches-East York): Today I rise in solemn commemoration of the lives of too many women who have been killed by violence at the hands of men. Before me I have a number of roses. There are 14 red roses, in memory of the lives of the young women who were killed at L'École polytechnique in Montreal 10 years ago. There is one single white rose, in memory of the lives of all women who have died of violence at the hands of men in their lives. Then there are three purple and three white roses together, which together symbolize 33, the 33 women who have died at the hands of their intimate partners since July 1998, when the jury recommendations from the May-Iles inquest were released.

Today OAITH, the shelter representatives, were here speaking loudly and clearly, and I hope the government listened and heard. They pointed out that the jury recommendations were so clear on what needed to be done. Some of the things need to be changed in the justice system, and the government is moving on that front, but equally the jury cried out for changes in support to community-based shelters and second-stage housing. They have a simple request to you: It's \$120,000 per shelter and second-stage housing, to bring the first immediate resources in, and a review of the funding for the long term. It's not a lot. I hope you listened. I hope you heard.

CAIRINE WILSON SECONDARY SCHOOL

Mr Brian Coburn (Carleton-Gloucester): It's my pleasure today to speak to you about some very special young people who live in my riding of Carleton-Gloucester.

The students at Cairine Wilson Secondary School in Orleans have, over the last few weeks, been filling Christmas shoeboxes with toys, candies and other items for shipment to children in Kosovo, Central and South America, Southeast Asia and West Africa.

This first-time effort, with more than one third of the students at Cairine Wilson school participating, has produced over 230 Christmas boxes for Operation Christmas Child. Students decided whether their gift would be for a boy or girl and the age of the child. They stuffed the boxes with a variety of goodies such as small cars, dolls, school supplies, T-shirts and picture books. This volunteer initiative was launched by the school's Christian Fellowship Club, the staff, administration and students at the school.

Here in Ontario we enjoy a quality of life, community and compassion for one another that is unrivalled anywhere else in the world, and the students who participated in this effort are carrying on this great tradition as well as setting a fine example for all other Ontarians.

Christine Mudryk, who filled two Christmas boxes with some of her favourite toys, said, "We are so blessed here that we take it for granted."

My congratulations go out to the staff and students at Cairine Wilson Secondary School for their outstanding effort for children around the world.

SOCIAL ASSISTANCE

Mrs Marie Bountrogianni (Hamilton Mountain): We heard in the throne speech several references to "real people." This description was an obvious slap in the face to anyone in Ontario who doesn't live up to the government's definition. Should you need a helping hand in Ontario in order to succeed you're not "real."

Judy Visca is a constituent in my riding of Hamilton Mountain. She's a real person. She is in the process of attempting to better her life and the lives of her children by upgrading her education. She was a participant in the Ontario Works program until deciding to improve her employability chances by going back to school to train in hair design. At this point a number of Catch-22s began to apply.

She was accepted into a hair design program and made application to OSAP for financial assistance. She was accepted, making her ineligible for further assistance through Ontario Works—Catch-22 number one.

Her student financial support, because of the nature of her training program, is covered only by the federal portion of the OSAP plan—Catch-22 number two—thus limiting her support to \$6,980 for a 42-week program. Deduct from this \$5,300 for tuition and another \$500 for course materials and she's left with \$1,180 to live on for a 10-month period.

Ms Visca has joint custody of her children—Catch-22 number three. They stay with her 12 to 15 days a month. She has to feed them. These are her choices: Give up her plans to go back to school, or sink into debt to provide food and shelter while going to school, or cut her costs by giving up those 12 to 15 days a month with her children.

I ask this government to give consideration to this situation.

HEALTH CARE FUNDING

Mr Wayne Wettlaufer (Kitchener Centre): I rise today to comment on a component of the auditor's report, in particular as it relates to cancer patient waiting periods in my riding. This problem is not a new problem but is the result of too many years in which the health care system was allowed to decline during the NDP and Liberal governments of 1985 to 1995. Those two governments completely ignored the cancer treatment and other health care needs of my riding, Kitchener Centre. During their tenure the health care facilities declined to the point where one prominent doctor stated that the emergency ward in one of our hospitals had reached Third World standards.

That situation was intolerable, particularly in a region such as Waterloo, the GDP of which matches that of the province of New Brunswick at \$14 billion and is one of Canada's most important economic regions.

To prove its commitment to addressing this problem, this government has committed to opening a new cancer treatment centre in Kitchener in the immediate future. I look forward to the day I will be taking part in the groundbreaking ceremony for the new cancer treatment centre at the Grand River Hospital.

The health care professionals in my riding are excited about the improvements to the facilities and services which are taking place as a result of this government's determination to ensure that Ontario's health care system is among the best in the world.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

TAXPAYER PROTECTION ACT (GOVERNMENT ADVERTISING STANDARDS), 1999

LOI DE 1999 SUR LA PROTECTION DES CONTRIBUABLES (NORMES CONCERNANT LA PUBLICITÉ GOUVERNEMENTALE)

Mr McGuinty moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 17, An Act to end partisan government advertising / Projet de loi 17, Loi mettant fin à la publicité gouvernementale à caractère politique.

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

Short comment?

Mr Dalton McGuinty (Leader of the Opposition): My bill establishes for the first time in Ontario legal standards for government advertising, including that it be in the public interest and that it be non-partisan. My bill will, in keeping with the Provincial Auditor's recommendation, prohibit this government from using hard-earned taxpayer dollars to fund partisan political advertising.

1350

MOTIONS

HOUSE SITTINGS

Hon Norman W. Sterling (Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, Government House Leader): I move that pursuant to standing order 9(c)(i), the House shall meet from 6:45 pm to 9:30 pm on November 22, 23 and 24, 1999, for the purpose of considering government business.

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

APPOINTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL COMMISSIONER

Hon Norman W. Sterling (Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, Government House Leader): I seek unanimous consent to have a motion without notice regarding an interim appointment of the Environmental Commissioner.

The Speaker (Hon Gary Carr): Do we have unanimous agreement? Agreed.

Hon Mr Sterling: I move that an humble address be presented to the Lieutenant Governor in Council as follows:

“To the Lieutenant Governor in Council:

“We, Her Majesty’s most dutiful and loyal subjects, the Legislative Assembly of the province of Ontario, now assembled, request the appointment of Ivy Wile as the Environmental Commissioner for a term of two months, commencing December 1, 1999, as provided in section 53 of the Environmental Bill of Rights Act.”

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

ORAL QUESTIONS

OAK RIDGES MORaine

Mr Dalton McGuinty (Leader of the Opposition): Pending the arrival of the Deputy Premier, who I understood was going to be here today, I will direct my first question to the Minister of the Environment.

When you wrote your now infamous letter, you made it perfectly clear that when it comes to the Oak Ridges moraine, you are firmly planted in the corner of Ontario developers. This weekend, when 200 delegates attending a conference on our water supply came together and called on you to place a temporary freeze on development, increase legislation to protect the moraine, you were offered a shining opportunity to redeem yourself. But what did you do? You said no. You said you were completely satisfied with the voluntary guidelines that had been in place in this province since 1991.

Minister, developers couldn’t have said it any better themselves. I’m asking you now: When are you going to start acting on behalf of the environment in our province and table legislation that’s going to protect the Oak Ridges moraine?

Hon Tony Clement (Minister of the Environment, Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing): The characterization of the honourable member is completely wrong. I was at that meeting. He wasn’t, so I wonder where he gets his reports from. Maybe from a certain publication that is very supportive of him but does not represent the views of the people of Ontario. If he wants to know what I said rather than what he reads in the papers, because he wasn’t there, I’d be happy to share that with the honourable member at any time.

Mr McGuinty: Those voluntary guidelines which you continue to insist are adequate have been assessed by every expert in the province as being completely inadequate when it comes to protecting the Oak Ridges moraine, not only for this generation but for generations yet to come.

With respect to farming, in the GTA now we are losing 7,500 acres of farmland each and every year. Over the course of the next 20 years, we’re going to lose 150,000 acres of valuable farmland that happens to be the most productive farmland in the province. Over the next 20 years, if you continue to sit on your hands, we’re going to lose one quarter of the farmland that is available in the GTA.

Minister, again, when are you going to start standing up for the environment, start standing up to developers and table a bill? If you can’t do that, then why don’t you adopt the legislation that has been put forward by Mike Colle, who has done more than you have since you’ve had the job?

Hon Mr Clement: The honourable member didn’t care enough about the moraine to be there. I was there, and I gave an opening address, which I think was received very warmly by the delegates. I will share this with the Legislature, because this is important public policy. I said that we wanted the input of the stakeholders. There were a lot of good ideas that I and the honourable member representing Oak Ridges heard at the meeting, and we are quite willing to assess the ideas of the waterfront regeneration trust. I also said that we are at the OMB, representing the provincial interest, which is our responsibility as a government, on the environmental issues he purports to care so strongly about.

I also said that we have a very strict—in fact stricter than when he was in power—water-taking permit system in this province, which is designated for the long-term interest of the province, and is there to ensure that water taken from the moraine or any other area in Ontario is replenishable. That’s how we’re acting, not engaging in cheap rhetoric.

Mr McGuinty: You’re not acting, Minister. Give us a break. All you’re doing is fiddling while we sell off the Oak Ridges moraine to developers. You are doing nothing. If you want to look decisive on this issue, stand

up now and declare an immediate freeze—it'll take effect immediately, it'll start today and it will ensure that we take the time and the care to put in place legislation that will protect the interests not only of this generation but of generations yet to come.

Your problem is that you are spending so much time shilling for developers that you should be registered as a lobbyist acting on their behalf.

Minister, one more time, will you stand up in this Legislature, tell us that you are going to freeze development effective immediately and that you are going to pass Mike Colle's bill that will protect this property for generations yet to come?

Hon Mr Clement: All I can tell you is that I was at the meeting. I wanted to take part in the meeting.

Mr Dwight Duncan (Windsor-St Clair): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: The Minister of the Environment was there, and the Liberal Party's environment critic was at that meeting as well. For him to suggest—

The Speaker: Order. It's not a point of order.

Hon Mr Clement: The member who asked the question is busy finding every last McGuinty to stack into every last delegate position to his convention.

The fact is that we are protecting the long-term interests of the province of Ontario. We have a strict water-taking permit system, which is better than any freeze that says, before you take a single drop of water out of the moraine, you have to prove to me, to my ministry and to everyone that it is scientifically replenishable. That is better than any Liberal quick fix, because it protects the long-term interests of the moraine. It is better than some bill that is presented by his party that says that whenever you want to build a new tool shed in your backyard, you have to get the approval of a bureaucrat.

We have the long-term interests of the province in mind. It is better than anything they are presenting to the people of Ontario, and we're proud of it.

GOVERNMENT ADVERTISING

Mr Dalton McGuinty (Leader of the Opposition): A question for the Deputy Premier. But in passing, we now understand and see the true colours of this Minister of the Environment, and I can tell you they're not green.

Deputy Premier, last week the Provincial Auditor was very critical of your government for having used hard-earned taxpayer dollars for partisan political advertising. One of the things he did was quote with approval a guideline that's in place in another jurisdiction, which says, "A government should not ... disseminate material that ... is designed to secure or has the effect of attempting to secure, popular support for party-political persuasion of the members of the government."

Mr Deputy Premier, a few moments ago I introduced a private member's bill that would have the exact intended effect of the guideline quoted with approval by the Provincial Auditor. Will you support my private member's bill and protect the interests of the taxpayers in Ontario?

Hon Ernie L. Eves (Deputy Premier, Minister of Finance): I don't know, because I haven't seen the member's private member's bill. I'd have to look at it. But I will say that just because you are proposing a piece of legislation—I can recall a government you were a part of, the David Peterson government, that made a great fool of itself about introducing conflict-of-interest legislation. In fact, they took the standards that the Davis government had, watered them down so they could have conflict, and then professed to the world that they had done a great job.

1400

We are taking this quite seriously, as we do every comment that the Provincial Auditor makes. We are currently reviewing his directives, we're looking at his report, and we will come forward with what the government will do with respect to guidelines.

But just because you've introduced a piece of legislation, I sure as heck hope it's better than David Peterson's conflict-of-interest legislation, which allowed his cabinet ministers to have conflicts and still serve in the government of Ontario.

Mr McGuinty: The Deputy Premier is great at taking shots at past and ancient governments. I wonder if he might take a shot at answering this question. Deputy Premier, you were provided with notice to this effect on December 16, 1998, by the Provincial Auditor, who registered his concerns with the secretary of cabinet back then. Notwithstanding that notice, notwithstanding the expression of his very grave concern about your use of taxpayer dollars, you continued with an orgy of expenditures on partisan political advertising that had nothing to do with defending the interests of taxpayers and everything to do with defending your interests and the Mike Harris re-election campaign. I put a solid proposal on the table today, Deputy Premier. Will you act now, in keeping with the request of the Provincial Auditor, and support that bill and the interests of Ontario taxpayers?

Hon Mr Eves: The current directive that the government is using was put in place in 1985 by the then Liberal government. If you're now saying that directive is not good enough and those policies aren't good enough—and the Provincial Auditor has indicated, with all due respect—we'll be reviewing the directive. I indicated to you that the government will be reviewing the directive and taking the Provincial Auditor's opinion into account. But just because you've introduced a piece of legislation, don't sit there and be smug. Why didn't the government of the day, in 1988 when the Provincial Auditor's report was filed, do something about the directive if they thought it was that important?

Mr McGuinty: Last week a cabinet document floated to the surface and we discovered that this government has intentions to cut programs to children who are blind, children who are deaf and children who are suffering from severe learning disabilities. This government later made an announcement of \$300 million in cuts and told us that there are \$600 million more in cuts to come. But at the same time, this government proceeded with \$100

million in expenditures for partisan political advertising that has nothing to do with the interests of Ontario taxpayers and everything to do with the interests of this government.

Tell me, Deputy Premier, how can you justify making cuts to programs that serve the needs of our most vulnerable while at the same time you refuse to adopt a proposal that will cut back on partisan political advertising?

Hon Mr Eves: I've said no such thing. I said we'd be happy to take a look at the leader of the official opposition's proposed piece of legislation. We're looking at the Provincial Auditor's opinion. We are looking at the directives that have been in place since 1985.

Mr McGuinty: I gave it to you two years ago.

Hon Mr Eves: Excuse me. The David Peterson government was put on notice by the then Provincial Auditor in 1988. Obviously the government of the day looked at it and didn't think there was any need. The Provincial Auditor—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon Gary Carr): Order.

Was the Deputy Premier finished?

Hon Mr Eves: The Provincial Auditor did go on in his report to note that these recommendations are new, that no other government in Canada, including the federal government, has them in place.

Interjection.

Hon Mr Eves: I would say with all due respect to the member for Windsor West, she might want to look at the Liberal government's record in terms of expenditure.

Mrs Sandra Pupatello (Windsor West): This is the worst in the history of the province.

Hon Mr Eves: It is not. We have spent—

Interjections.

The Speaker: The member for Windsor West, order.

Is the Deputy Premier finished?

Hon Mr Eves: To sum up: The expenditures in advertising of this government between 1995-96 and 1998-99: \$163 million; the NDP government between 1990-91 and 1994-95, \$238 million; and the Liberal government between 1985-86 and 1988-89, \$277 million.

CHILD CARE

Mr Howard Hampton (Kenora-Rainy River): My question is for the minister responsible for children and it is about your child care cuts of last week, which I believe is just another example of the growing gap in Ontario. One week you announce tax cuts for the well off, and the next week more than 3,000 children across Ontario lose their child care subsidy. How do you defend cutting \$25 million from an essential service for children and working families in Ontario?

Hon Margaret Marland (Minister without Portfolio [Children]): Mr Speaker, I'm referring this to the Minister of Community and Social Services.

Hon John R. Baird (Minister of Community and Social Services, minister responsible for francophone affairs): We recognize and support parents in providing

child care for their children. We understand and appreciate the importance of it to them: to allow them to work, and to allow them to search for work, for those on social assistance. Our commitment to child care is matched not just by words but by actions. Since we were elected the child care budget and the budget for parents to support child care has increased substantively. I think that demonstrates our clear commitment to child care.

We support child care in a whole host of ways. We support child care through fee subsidies, through wage subsidies, through resource centres, through special needs resources, through Ontario Works child care, through LEAP, to name just a few.

Mr Hampton: The minister is right about one thing: This is a government that has made several child care announcements, and then all of what was announced failed to happen. I actually think the Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care has it right. They put it very bluntly: This Premier's only purpose is to cut taxes on the backs of the poor and our children.

I'll put the question to you another way, Minister. How is it that one week you can stand in this Legislature and justify tax cut subsidies for NHL hockey players of \$16 million, but the next week you announce child care cuts of over \$25 million? How can you afford the money for NHL hockey millionaires, but kids are told there's no money?

Mr Baird: I think it won't come as any surprise to the leader of the third party that I don't share his view with respect to the NHL. I don't support, nor does this government support, any subsidies to professional sports. What we do support is substantial supports to child care.

I read off a number of things this government has done to increase spending on child care. We also have introduced a \$200-million Ontario child care supplement for working families. We have a 30% workplace tax incentive to encourage workplaces to construct child care spaces, a whole host of initiatives designed to increase child care spaces in Ontario.

What we've seen since this government was elected is that we have more child care spaces in the province, we have more child care centres, and this government is now spending more on child care than any government in Ontario's history.

Mr Hampton: The sum total of what the minister has said is this: If the parents can afford it, they can get child care. That's your government's definition of child care in Ontario, just like your definition of health care and more and more your definition of education. If parents have the money, they can get child care, but if parents are hard-pressed, you have no answer. In fact all you're doing for parents who are hard-pressed is doing away with the child care subsidy spaces. There's now a waiting list of 15,000 children for subsidized spaces and you are making the situation worse.

Minister, everything you announced last week hits at children. You're not doing something that's going to assist municipalities or give benefits to municipalities, you're taking child care spaces away from children. How

can you justify tax cuts for the well off and taking more child care spaces away from children?

Hon Mr Baird: The members of the New Democratic Party like to measure one's commitment and the priority one accords to a particular issue purely in money. By their own measure, this government is spending more supporting parents and providing child care to their children; this government is spending substantially more money than they spent. They must be embarrassed that Mike Harris's government, this Conservative government, is showing more support to child care, more support to children's aid societies, more support to children with autism, more support for a variety of children's programs than their government provided.

1410

SERVICES FOR ABUSED WOMEN

Ms Frances Lankin (Beaches-East York): My question is to the Minister of Community and Social Services, and I would like a page to come.

During my member's statement, I spoke about the significance of these roses, symbolic, beautiful, poignant reminders of the lives and the deaths of too many women in this province. There's a group of them, and I am going to send these over to you, that represents the 33 women who have lost their lives at the hands of intimate partners since the recommendations from the May-Iles inquest jury.

They asked you to do a number of things, some things on the justice system side, but many things on the community side. You have moved forward with respect to changes in the justice system, but increasing the independent, community-based supports that abused women rely on, shelters, second-stage housing programs, you've failed miserably on that front. The jury was very clear on that point, but we've yet to see any action.

Today, the shelters are here to ask you to do two specific things: They're asking for \$120,000 for each shelter and second-stage housing project—that will hire just two more counsellors for every site—and they're asking you to initiate the funding review for shelters and for second-stage housing community supports. Will you do those two things, Minister?

Hon John R. Baird (Minister of Community and Social Services, minister responsible for francophone affairs): I want to say at the outset that this government recognizes the importance of this issue and the very serious consequences of domestic violence. Through the government's Agenda for Action strategy, we're providing an additional \$27 million between 1997 and 2000-01 to support women and their families in breaking the cycle of violence.

The member opposite raises the request of a group that came forward this morning with a report. I haven't had occasion yet to receive their report, but I want to say very earnestly to her that I'm certainly committed to reviewing the report and giving every consideration to the request.

The Speaker (Hon Gary Carr): Supplementary.

Mr Howard Hampton (Kenora-Rainy River): Minister, once again we've got the clear presence and the clear direction of your government. These women have been knocking on your door for over four years asking you to address these problems. The reason they put forward this very specific solution is because you've ignored every other plea they've made. It's not lost on them that your government can stand here one week and can say to the whole world that your government has found room to give NHL hockey franchises in Ontario \$16 million in tax breaks. Their total proposal, if you add it up, for all of the women's centres across this province would amount to less than \$15 million.

I ask you again, how is it that your government can find, without any problem whatsoever, \$16 million to finance the fat salaries of NHL hockey millionaires, but 33 women have been killed since the May-Iles report, and you say, "I'll study the situation"? How do you justify that?

Hon Mr Baird: This member and this government certainly don't support subsidies to millionaire hockey players, and, as I said earlier, I'll repeat that to let that not go on the record.

This year we'll spend more than \$73 million on over 98 shelters and over 100 counselling agencies for abused women and their children across the province.

The government has recently received a report from the Joint Committee on Domestic Violence, and we're presently awaiting the report from the Office for Victims of Crime, which is to advise us on how we can improve services for victims. Once I receive this report and the report that was released today, I can certainly commit to the members opposite and to all colleagues in this House that we will review the recommendations together and determine the best course of action.

The Speaker: I know it's a sensitive issue, but the members also know that the use of props is not a part of the standing order, and I would appreciate the members' co-operation.

GREENHOUSE GAS EMISSIONS

Mr James J. Bradley (St Catharines): My question is to the Minister of the Environment. It is now becoming apparent that Ontario Power Generation, previously known as Ontario Hydro, has no intention of living up to its commitment made in 1991 to cap its nitrogen oxide emissions next year at 38 kilotonnes. We've had press conferences by the Ontario College of Family Physicians and the Ontario Clean Air Alliance focusing on this issue.

As a result, its coal-fired generating stations will pour smog, acid-rain-producing gases, toxic air pollutants—including the nerve toxin mercury—and six cancer-causing substances, such as arsenic and lead, into Ontario's air and increase by 42% its emissions of sulphur dioxide.

While you and your government smile and nod at Ontario's largest corporate air polluter, Ontario Power

Generation, and sit on the sidelines, letting Ontario Power Generation call its own shots, people of Ontario suffer. Will you now at long last admit that your voluntary acquiescence approach with polluters is a failure, and will you implement tough new, unequivocal regulations and legislation to compel OPG to meet its so-called voluntary commitment?

Hon Tony Clement (Minister of the Environment, Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing): I thank the honourable member for the question. Indeed, we have in place and we are seeking to continue to augment our regulations in this area, but also working with various industries, because they're the ones that have to implement what is in the best interests of Ontario, which is cleaner air and lower emissions.

As the honourable member, being a member of this House, well knows, we have had a particular challenge for Ontario Power Generation because of the nuclear facilities being off-line. We are anxiously awaiting the approval of the federal government to ensure that those facilities can go on-line in a safe manner. That in itself will reduce the emissions which he is concerned about and which I am concerned about.

This is a problem that we have in place right now that does have a solution. Part of it is a better mix of power generation, which Ontario Hydro or Ontario Power Generation is seeking in and of itself to get to, and part of it is a constant review of our air quality standards, many of which are 20 years old now. Our government has committed to reviewing those over the next weeks and months.

Mr Bradley: Minister, you and the Harris government have played footsie with polluters now since you came to power. The one promise you have kept—I'll give you credit for this—is to get the Ministry of the Environment out of the faces of polluters in this province.

Your friends in Ontario Power Generation have in fact abandoned their commitment to reduce energy consumption, have abandoned the commitment to buy cleaner electricity in this province. Highly regarded scientist Dr David Suzuki has estimated that pollution from fossil fuels—coal, oil and gas—means premature death for up to 6,000 Ontarians each year and increased hospital admissions for asthma and respiratory illness for children. Family physicians in Ontario will now be making their patients aware of their very serious health problem.

Minister, your government is prepared to play hardball with the weakest people in our society. You and your Premier still kowtow to polluters by allowing voluntary pledges and promises from the province's top polluters. Will you now stop being an apologist for Ontario Power Generation and demand that your big polluting friends cap their nitrogen oxide emissions at 38 kilotonnes, as they promised to do?

Hon Mr Clement: Mr Speaker, you know how I hate to disagree with my honourable colleague, but the fact of the matter is that we have binding commitments from OPG and from other industrial sectors to reduce smog-

causing emissions by 25% over the next five years and by 45% over the next 15 years. This is the government of Ontario policy. This isn't just the policy of the Minister of the Environment; this is government of Ontario policy under our anti-smog action plan. We are committed to this as a government.

The interesting thing is that the people the member rails against are at the table and want to get there too. Is it going to take some creativity? Yes, it will. But it is for our children and our grandchildren that we are doing this. Reducing smog-causing emissions by 45% is a worthwhile goal and it is a goal of the province of Ontario that we will meet. That is our goal.

SPECIALISTS' SERVICES

Mr Frank Mazzilli (London-Fanshawe): My question is to the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. I've read with interest reports that certain medical specialists are not able to provide services to their patients and their communities because of a cap on specialist billing under the Ontario health insurance plan. I'd like to know what our government is doing to ensure that people in my riding of London-Fanshawe can obtain specialist care when they need it.

Hon Elizabeth Witmer (Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): Our government certainly wants to do everything we can to ensure that all Ontarians have access to the quality health care services they require. We have been working hard to encourage more specialists to locate in underserved areas. I'm pleased to note that the number of specialists practising in this province has since 1997 increased by about 238 specialists, and since 1995 we have seen an increase of 450 specialists in Ontario.

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We have a specialist retention initiative in this province. It is a system that was introduced in 1991. It exists to exempt physicians from the impact of thresholds to ensure that patients receive the health care services they need. Each year this is reviewed by the Ontario Medical Association and the Ministry of Health to determine the criteria—

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

Mr Mazzilli: I'm aware that these initiatives have been effective in certain areas of the province. However, I'd like to know what our government is doing to address the overall issue of access to physician supply and distribution.

Hon Mrs Witmer: Our government has worked extremely hard. This is an issue that has been a priority. In fact, in response to the need to move forward, we have Dr McKendry at the present time conducting a review of the scope and the cause of issues related to physician supply and distribution. He'll soon be bringing his report forward. When he does, we'll set up an expert panel.

We also have indicated that we are developing a system whereby we will reimburse students who are at our medical schools, students entering our medical schools, if they move to an underserved area.

We have also worked with northern communities and northern hospitals to provide incentives for doctors and specialists to locate in those areas and provide the services that are needed, particularly in our emergency rooms.

So we have undertaken many initiatives and we want to ensure that we have the appropriate distribution of physicians throughout the province. The ICES report indicated that the problem in the province is one of distribution as opposed to supply.

GOVERNMENT'S RECORD

Mr Gerry Phillips (Scarborough-Agincourt): My question is to the Minister of Finance and it has to do with the Provincial Auditor's report. The public will recognize that this is our independent auditor whom we hire—we pay the office about seven and a half million dollars a year—to give us an independent, objective look at the government's spending.

I was interested to see what I can only regard as a scathing report. Here's what the auditor said about your government. He was asked:

"You've seen them now in action for more than four years. From your perspective, do you think that under this government the use of our tax dollars and the services provided by our government are being provided more efficiently and more effectively?"

What was his answer? "Well, as my report points out, the answer is they really aren't. The improvements are not very noticeable at this point. Spending of public funds needs accountability and it's not being done." He says, "There are many examples where clearly the taxpayer is being taken for a ride and things almost die for lack of attention."

The Harris government has now been in office for four and a half years. How can this mess continue to exist?

Hon Ernie L. Eves (Deputy Premier, Minister of Finance): First of all, we have responded to almost every recommendation the Provincial Auditor has made from year to year. The honourable member is quite correct. The Provincial Auditor is an independent person appointed by the Legislative Assembly to make recommendations to the government of the day. I can tell the honourable member that certainly in my endeavour we will make sure we comply with the Provincial Auditor's suggestions where possible.

Mr Phillips: One of the other concerns the auditor had was that you don't do anything about it. He says, "I raise issues; four years later there's nothing done about it." Specifically in his report he says here, on child care, \$800 million is being spent. He says: "I made these recommendations in 1995. The ministry agreed to take action to implement my recommendations but they did not follow through. Therefore we again make the recommendations." Four years later, you've done nothing. Four years later, \$800 million being spent on child care and the auditor says you haven't acted. He says that he raises issues and continually things don't get done. It's a mess

over there. You are not managing the finances of the province. That's not me. It's the independent Provincial Auditor, who the taxpayers paid \$7.5 million. He has given you an "F." You're failing.

I ask you again: Four and a half years later, you're now in charge, Premier Harris said he was going to improve things. Why are things such a mess under Mike Harris?

Hon Mr Eves: The honourable member is quite selective in dealing with specific programs. I acknowledge that there are difficulties with certain programs in government. There are always problems with certain programs in government. The objective on this side of the House is to strive to make them better. I don't see anywhere in here, in the Provincial Auditor's words, that he has given the government an "F," to quote the honourable member. The honourable member is somewhat dramatic. I understand it is his occupation in life to be such during question period. However, I can say to the honourable member that we do take the suggestions and the direction of the Provincial Auditor very seriously. With respect to my own ministry, I can tell the honourable member that every time the Provincial Auditor recommends something, we follow up, and so do my colleagues on this side of the House. I think that record speaks for itself.

ONTARIO STUDENT ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

Mr Brad Clark (Stoney Creek): My question is to the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities.

In last Friday's newspaper, I was concerned to see reports about student leaders who were condoning fraud in the Ontario student loan program. In particular, it was stated, "I don't blame anybody for fudging the numbers on how much they earn if that's the only way they can get the money to go to school."

Taxpayers demand that governments spend their money prudently. What is your position on OSAP fraud, and can you assure taxpayers in my riding that only deserving students get loans and that the money will be paid back?

Hon Dianne Cunningham (Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities): I'd like to thank the member for Stoney Creek for his question. Obviously I don't think there's a member of this Legislative Assembly who would tolerate any kind of fraud, including fraud by students. Fraud is not only illegal, but unfair to the hundreds of thousands of students who actually put down the facts on their OSAP application forms. I'd also like to say that these same students tell the truth and play by the rules, and that's what we expect from everyone.

This is unfair to taxpayers because taxpayers pick up the bill, and it's unfair to students because students are there to study, to work hard and to achieve.

The government has announced tighter controls to ensure fairness in the system and to tighten the credit check, which I think is fair to everyone, also fair to that

student who may in fact achieve a loan when they already have private-sector loans. That's not the rules. It doesn't happen in our public institutions at banks and it's not going to happen when taxpayers are footing the bills for loans that cannot be paid.

We're going to continue ways to help our students to eliminate fraud and to—

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

Supplementary?

Mr Clark: You made it clear that student loan fraud is unacceptable. Parents and high school students in my community would like to know what the government is going to do to help them pay for their education when they leave high school.

Hon Mrs Cunningham: Our government is taking several steps to assist our students. I think the most important fact that everyone in this House should know, when you get this question, is that we are spending more than ever on student assistance to support our students.

We have increased OSAP spending by 30% since we came to power and this is to twice as many students. In fact, for those of you who are interested, under the Liberals about 100,000 students were assisted, and currently over 200,000 students are being assisted.

We have asked the colleges and universities to set aside 30% of the increase in tuition to help students in need.

I think I'll just finish on this point: We have created the Ontario student opportunity grant program to provide debt relief for students who borrow more than \$7,000. I'm not sure the members of this Legislative Assembly—

The Speaker: The minister's time is—order. Minister, take your seat, please.

On a point of order, the member for St. Catharines.

Mr James J. Bradley (St Catharines): I would like to request unanimous consent to allow the member another supplementary to ask about the income tax fraud.

The Speaker: Unanimous consent? I heard some noes. New question.

1430

GREENHOUSE GAS EMISSIONS

Ms Marilyn Churley (Broadview-Greenwood): My question is for the Minister of the Environment. As you have made abundantly clear, you already know that Ontario Power Generation's five coal-fired plants will exceed the voluntary cap on greenhouse gas emissions by 42% next year. That's equivalent to putting 1.6 million more cars on the road.

Your government promised that Hydro would reduce greenhouse gas emissions to 1990 levels by the year 2000, yet today we learn they plan to increase these harmful emissions next year to 37 million tonnes. That's 11 million more tonnes than the 1990 level.

Minister, will you stop OPG from putting more greenhouse gases into the air; admit, once and for all, that voluntary compliance hasn't worked; and bring in a

legally enforceable regulated cap on greenhouse gas emissions?

Hon Tony Clement (Minister of the Environment, Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing): I thank the honourable member for her suggestion. I want to assure her and this House once more that we are concerned about air quality in Ontario and the emission of greenhouse gases. This is a problem that we're grappling with.

As the honourable member knows, the OPG is going through a nuclear recovery program right now, which is on a temporary basis because those uses were made off-line as a result of some safety concerns. We all want to reduce our greenhouse gas emissions but to do so in a safe manner, which is the paramount interest for the people of Ontario.

I would say to the honourable member as well that the issue of greenhouse gas trading—and some of the criticism has been on the trading system for greenhouse gas emissions—is something that actually the federal government has been pursuing, so perhaps she and I can also make that inquiry as to why the federal Liberals are allowing this sort of situation to develop, if it is something that she feels strongly about. But I want her to know that air quality is our number one concern and there are going to be some changes in this area over the next few weeks and months as well.

Ms Churley: Hydro promised in 1995 not to use emission trading to meet emissions caps before such international emission-trading rules were federally approved. I don't want to hear empty promises from you today about down the road and later. People who have children sick with asthma and elderly people don't want to hear you give lame excuses today as to why you're not moving on this.

We want a commitment today. A promise was made and a promise was not kept. It's that simple. We know that in 1997 the all-party select committee on Hydro said in its report that Hydro must comply with voluntary targets and should actually seek to improve emission levels.

Minister, let me ask you again: What will you do to make OPG live up to its promise—forget the shell game that you're playing today—and actually reduce the amount of dangerous greenhouse gas emissions instead of increasing them by 11 million tonnes? That's unacceptable.

Hon Mr Clement: I find myself in partial agreement with the honourable member. This is not a situation that any of us would like to see, and that includes OPG but it also includes the people of Ontario and the government of Ontario.

We're left with a situation where the nuclear units are off-line. That was not a situation that was predictable when these limits were first discussed. We've got a particular issue that has to be dealt with in the near term. We think it can be dealt with in the near term, but it has to be dealt with safely. In the meantime, the Kyoto accord and other international accords recognize the right

of emissions trading. This is something the federal government has been promoting as well, so OPG is operating within those parameters.

In the meantime, we are accepting submissions, which is an ongoing process, as we discuss with our stakeholders ways to get at these problems, just as we've gone through it with Drive Clean to reduce vehicle emissions. This is an area where we will see more announcements in the future, I'm sure.

HIGHWAY MAINTENANCE

Mr Jean-Marc Lalonde (Glengarry-Prescott-Russell): My question is to the Minister of Transportation. Last Thursday at 6:30 am a fatal accident happened on Highway 417. A pregnant mother of a two-year-old daughter, Deborah Rainey from Hawkesbury, was driving to work and rolled over on an icy bridge near Casselman. A 26-year-old father of two young daughters from St-Isidore, Luc Vigneux, whose funeral is taking place today, had stopped as a good citizen to help Deborah out of the car. Unfortunately, because of the icy road conditions, both of them were killed instantly when a coming truck slid and ran over them.

Minister, this fatal accident is directly related to your ministry's cuts. You have privatized the maintenance of this highway. In the past, as of November 1 of every year, MTO maintenance crews were on duty 24 hours a day. According to a confirmed report, the maintenance crew was out on the road 35 minutes after receiving the call from the MTO patrol and arrived on the scene five minutes after the fatal accident.

Minister, as this relates directly to your cuts, will you accept full responsibility for this fatal accident?

Hon David Turnbull (Minister of Transportation): This is a tragic event, that somebody dies. The circumstances were that a bridge iced; it had black ice. I've spoken to the OPP about when black ice occurs, and there's very little anybody can do to anticipate it. The ministry was monitoring it, and at the time that they believed iced conditions would occur, a very experienced member of the Ministry of Transportation, which still manages this area, called out the salting trucks. The salting trucks were out within 35 minutes, which is a very quick turnaround. It's early in the year to experience ice and it's probable that the victims passed the salt truck on their way.

I will wait until the supplementary, but it is a tragic event.

Mr Lalonde: The ambulance operator told me that the whole of Highway 417 was icy all the way through. At 4:50 in the morning the patrol people had called this contractor to get his crew out. No one was at the site to come out on the highway.

As noted in last week's auditor's report, the auditor wasn't too happy at what he saw. Your ministry is in the process of contracting out all highway maintenance without making sure that security and services are maintained adequately. The contractor involved in last week's

fatal accident had followed your guidelines, which, if I may say so, are putting our people's lives in danger just to save a few bucks.

Minister, my question is, will you restore the 24-hour maintenance service and rehire the former MTO employees you have let go, in order to save the loss of other lives?

Hon Mr Turnbull: First of all, I will recall a personal experience I had some years ago on my way back from the cottage. I experienced a car off the road and I tried to stop to help the automobile and I hit black ice. By the time the OPP arrived, yet another car had hit black ice, and there were three cars off the road, all having hit the same piece of black ice. The comments of the OPP officers were that when you hit black ice, there's nothing you can do. The fact is that this area of contract was being managed by the Ministry of Transportation, so in that respect there was no change.

To the best of my knowledge, and I will double-check this, there have never been 24-hour trucks standing by at this time of the year. There was, however, ministry staff out prior to this and they called out the people when they felt it was needed to have salt trucks out.

I realize that it may be easy for you to make—

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

Mr Dwight Duncan (Windsor-St Clair): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: I seek unanimous consent to table a document that we believe is extremely important to this House's deliberations today. Earlier, my leader introduced a bill, and the Canadian Taxpayers Federation has now called on all of us to support it. So I would seek unanimous consent to table this.

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

REPORT CARDS

Mr Dan Newman (Scarborough Southwest): My question is to the Minister of Education. I was interested to read news reports over the last several weeks that indicate some school boards are having difficulty with the new standardized report card for grade 9. I also see that the OSSTF issued a news release on Remembrance Day in which they say, "Parents should not expect miracles with the new standardized report card."

I have received numerous phone calls from my constituents in Scarborough Southwest from parents who are concerned with this information from the OSSTF. This government is clearly committed to clearer standards and greater accountability, which is why I understand we implemented that standard report card in the first place. This way any parents, whether they live in my constituency of Scarborough Southwest or even Ottawa South or Kenora-Rainy River, will know exactly how their child is doing.

I would like to ask, Minister, if boards across the province are in fact having problems putting these new

report cards into use and, if they are, what is the government doing to fix the problem?

Hon Janet Ecker (Minister of Education): I thank the member for Scarborough Southwest for a very important question. He has spoken out very often in support of reforms to have better-quality education in this province.

A standardized plain-language report card that students and parents can understand is something we are delivering on in grade 9 in this province. I was quite disappointed that despite the fact that OSSSTF had an opportunity to raise this with me directly two days before, they chose to put out a press release and go for a headline rather than trying to actually find out if there was a problem.

We called all the boards that were mentioned in this news release—we called all the boards, actually—and they all assured us that things are proceeding as they should be and that there is no difficulty with implementing this in the time lines we have committed to.

Mr Newman: I want to thank the minister for her response, and I'm glad to know the boards across the province are moving forward with the implementation of the new grade 9 report card this year. I know as well as anyone that implementing new technology solutions can be a difficult process. Anyone who has used new software can relate to this.

I'd like to ask the minister how this government is going to support school boards as they implement these new report cards.

Hon Mrs Ecker: The honourable member is quite correct that implementing any kind of new information technology is a challenge. That's one of the reasons why we gave the boards additional resources to help them do that. There was \$2 million that was given to them for training and supports to implement this particular step on our improvements in education. We also gave them a great deal of flexibility in terms of how they would do it, the software they would purchase, the providers they would select, because using electronic report cards for many boards is nothing new; they have great experience in doing it.

The new standardized report card, a card that parents and students can understand, was something that parents asked us for, it's something we are putting into place and, because of the co-operation between the boards, the ministry and the teachers, we know we are going to deliver this as the parents expect and want.

SPECIALISTS' SERVICES

Ms Caroline Di Cocco (Sarnia-Lambton): My question is for the Minister of Health. On Monday, November 13, I handed in a petition signed by over 2,500 of my constituents asking your ministry to respond to a crisis in Sarnia-Lambton.

Lambton county has 120,000 people and only two ophthalmologists. One ophthalmologist has closed his doors because your ministry has once again changed the

rules. This change has also affected people in St Catharines. Previously, this ophthalmologist was able to obtain a billing cap exemption because Sarnia-Lambton had been designated as an underserved area. Lambton county went from the "underserved" designation to "not underserved," not because we have more eye doctors coming into the area and not because we have fewer people who need eye doctors. What you did was change the geographic catchment area.

Your ministry's rule change has affected thousands of patients and their families, and I would like to read to you a letter from one of my constituents who outlined a real problem they're facing because of this rule change. It states: "My wife and I have been patients of Dr Murari Patodia since he opened his practice in Sarnia four years ago. Recently I was referred to him by an optometrist, with a problem." He goes on to say, "I can see possibly that we will lose the services of this excellent ophthalmologist who is badly needed in this area."

Minister, will you be responsive to this situation by reinstating the underserved designation and thus returning the billing cap exemption to this ophthalmologist before this person loses his sight because of your rule change?

Hon Elizabeth Witmer (Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): As I indicated earlier this afternoon, the specialist retention initiative was introduced in 1991 along with the system of threshold reductions, and each year the criteria for the initiative are reviewed by the Physician Services Committee. That is a committee composed of physicians and staff from the Ministry of Health. They make the determination as to what criteria will be used. When there is a situation and physicians feel the need to apply for the SRI status, it is very carefully reviewed by the ministry and the reasons are given for the support or the denial of that application.

Ms Di Cocco: Last year his cap was exempt because your rules were different. You changed the rules this year. You can't blame this on anyone except your ministry. It is your responsibility. There are people who are being affected now and all you have to do is, with a stroke of a pen, address this situation. He has applied again. There is no reason why this cannot be changed to what it was in the past. We still have the same people who need help. We only have two ophthalmologists.

Again, will you step in to rectify this situation? It's a real situation that's affecting thousands of people today. I believe that you've got the opportunity to address this situation now, and it is your responsibility.

Hon Mrs Witmer: As I tried to indicate, we try to work very co-operatively with all our health partners. We try to have the benefit of all of their advice and expertise. Each year it is the Physician Services Committee, which is composed of physicians themselves, with the Ministry of Health, that makes decisions around the criteria that will be used. Physicians are exempted from the impact of the threshold if they are in underserved areas or if they are in a unique speciality where there could be a service access problem. We will continue to support the initiative

and we will continue to respond to any physicians who apply for the SRI status.

PUBLIC SAFETY

Mr Wayne Wettlaufer (Kitchener Centre): My question is for the Solicitor General. Minister, public safety is very important to my constituents as well as the people of Ontario. As you're probably aware, I had about 50 police officers in my office last week. They had a number of concerns but the overriding concern was public safety.

The Ministry of the Solicitor General is responsible for enhancing public safety in Ontario. The public safety division in your ministry is solely dedicated to promoting public safety for the people of Ontario. Minister, so that I can allay the concerns of my constituents, could you please tell the House some of the ways that the public safety division in your ministry contributes to the public safety of Ontario?

Hon David H. Tsubouchi (Solicitor General): I'd like to thank the member for Kitchener Centre for the question. Our public safety branch consists basically of three areas: the forensic centre, the fire marshal's office and Emergency Measures Ontario.

I'd like to focus for a second, if I could, on the Centre of Forensic Sciences. As you know, most noteworthy in the forensics area is the area of DNA testing. You can understand that lately this is an area of expertise we've developed in Ontario that has been of great assistance in current and pressing cases, but also in the solving of cold cases, cases which have remained unsolved for many decades. This is just a small part of the technology and science that's available through the forensics centre. There are many exciting areas; laser technology, for example, that is able to bring out latent prints and detect blood that has been cleaned over.

1450

The Speaker (Hon Gary Carr): Order. The Solicitor General's time has run out. Supplementary.

Mr Wettlaufer: On the Centre of Forensic Sciences, you weren't finished giving your information. I'd certainly like to hear more and I know my constituents would like to hear more, so I wonder if you could share that information with us.

Hon Mr Tsubouchi: If I could continue speaking about the Centre of Forensic Sciences, science and technology is a very important tool in combating crime in the province. I talked a bit about DNA testing, but I might say that in terms of remaining cutting-edge in DNA testing, we've already committed to and infused double the funding into the size and capacity of DNA labs, and also double the number of employees in the DNA section. So this is quite a commitment we've made.

In addition to that, understand that our province and our chief coroner, Dr Jim Young, have been called upon by other provinces to assist them. Most noteworthy recently, in the case of the Swiss Air tragedy Dr Young was asked to come out and assist in that testing.

I might conclude by saying that our commitment is to science and technology. This is a very important tool to provide to our police in the fight against crime in this province.

HAZARDOUS WASTE

Ms Marilyn Churley (Broadview-Greenwood): My question is to the Minister of the Environment. In September you announced, to great fanfare, that you were going to strengthen hazardous waste regulations as part of a six-point action plan. We find that once again in Stoney Creek the ministry has allowed 9,000 tonnes of hazardous waste to be dumped at the Taro landfill site. In fact, in 1998 the ministry initially said that the waste was non-hazardous. Now, one year later, when the ministry eventually got around to testing, we are told that it is hazardous.

My question to you is, what are you going to do about the 9,000 tonnes of hazardous waste at the Taro landfill and when are you going to come through, as you promised, to bring in measures to prevent this from ever happening again in Ontario?

Hon Tony Clement (Minister of the Environment, Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing): I thank the honourable member for her question, because it has been of great concern. I can tell the honourable member two things specifically. When the ministry was informed that there was a potential problem, that there was a potential for it to be hazardous—because there was a complex chemical reaction occurring with the subject waste—we immediately required that Philip Services stop receiving that waste at the site. In the second place, once we had completed our tests and found out there was a potential for it to be hazardous, on November 18, last week, we wrote to Philip enterprises requiring that they immediately remove and dispose of the approximately 9,000 tonnes. So we have acted quickly on behalf of the interests of the people of Ontario.

PRESENTATION OF PETITIONS

The Speaker (Hon Gary Carr): As members will remember, we had some discussions about petitions. The government House leaders have come together with a procedure which they will be talking about with their caucuses.

Any member wishing to present a petition during routine proceedings will deliver the petition, by noon, to the Clerk's office in room 104 of this building, or room 1521 of the Whitney Block.

If it is delivered by noon to either office, it will be examined by the Clerk and returned in the House in time for the petitions that day. If it is received later than noon hour, every effort will still be made to try to examine the petition and return it for presentation that day. Otherwise it will be returned.

Petitions may also be left at the table when the House is meeting, and should be sent to the table by one of the

pages to avoid crowding. For the simple reason of decorum, I would ask that all members not crowd around the table to deliver or wait for the petitions.

Again, the Clerk will make every effort, as time and circumstances permit, to examine the petition and return it to any member in time for presentation during petitions that day.

If the petition meets the requirements of the standing orders, it will be certified by the Clerk's signature and the petition will then be presented in the House.

If the petition does not meet the requirements of the standing orders, it will be returned with a notation explaining why.

I will be vigilant in enforcing this new practice and will call to order any member attempting to present a petition that does not comply with the standing orders, and that will begin tomorrow.

Mr David Ramsay (Timiskaming-Cochrane): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: Do I interpret your remarks about petitions to mean that you're saying that the table officers have to pre-approve petitions before they're read in the House?

The Speaker: Yes. We are saying that they will go to the table, and they will authorize and approve them. What we have said, if you read the statement, is that it will be by noon hour and we will get it on the same day, and we'll try to be flexible. The House leaders have agreed to this procedure, and, as I understand it, they will be dealing with each of the caucuses and outlining the procedures. I did want to, however, announce it here in the House as well.

Mr Ramsay: On a point of order, Mr Speaker: Are you saying that if the petition is not in the prescribed format, the table officers will then not allow the member to read that petition in this House?

The Speaker: The standing orders are very clear on this point, for the member. That is why these procedures have been put in place, to meet the standing orders, which we obviously have to do.

Mr Ramsay: On a point of order, Mr Speaker: I would like to put on the record that I strongly object to that. I represent a riding that has the second-most under-educated people in Ontario. When they are concerned about an issue, they don't necessarily think of approaching my office to get the standardized format, which I certainly supply them. They usually go off and, in very good conscience, start up a petition. I don't think it's right that the rules of this House would forbid a duly crafted petition, which my constituents put a lot of work into to express their view about issues of the day, from being presented in this House.

The Speaker: The member knows the standing orders have been changed. They are very clear. The standing orders were changed by the members of the House. It isn't a point of order, but I appreciate your registering—

Mr Sean G. Conway (Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke): On a point of privilege, Mr Speaker: I don't intend to prolong this debate, and I'm not one who brings a great number of petitions, but I do think the member

from Timiskaming-Cochrane raises a concern that any self-respecting member of Parliament ought to think seriously about. As I listen to this debate, I would think that perhaps it would be a lot more convenient for all here assembled to simply dispense with the idea of bringing petitions to the chamber.

I say it's a matter of privilege because, as I watch the ebb and flow of things in this place over nearly two and a half decades, I just think I see more and more constraint on the opportunities for members of Parliament to do their duty as many of their constituents might imagine it to be done. I can understand how from time to time there will be materials brought and presented that do not conform with some antiseptic nicety imagined by some very finely focused bureaucrat. But I simply say again, as I take my seat, that as I listen to this discussion, I have to think, why would I bother to bring and present a petition from the people of the Ottawa Valley if I know in advance that it can only be presented if it meets with the approval of my good friends at the table, who will not be in many of these communities, as the previous speaker indicated, as the petition is gathered about?

The Speaker: That is not a point of privilege. I say to all members that the standing orders are very clear. The Speaker did not write the standing orders. They have been very clear in this regard. We've attempted to be flexible, and I believe all three House leaders have agreed on a procedure. I also will say—and I didn't say this in summing up—that we will attempt to be as flexible as possible on this, particularly in the beginning when there may be large numbers that will be coming. But the standing orders are very clear on this issue.

Ms Marilyn Churley (Broadview-Greenwood): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: Just to add to this debate, you're quite right that there was an agreement between the three House leaders on this, although these concerns of course were expressed at the time. I think we would all expect there to be flexibility, especially at the beginning. I believe, however, that there are clearly problems and people don't support it. Perhaps members can start petitioning, in the proper format of course, all three House leaders of the Legislature to perhaps go back and revisit that particular item, because I believe people are expressing real concerns for their constituents to have the ability, in some cases, to write the petitions in the proper format.

The Speaker: To the member, it's not a point of order, and we will attempt to be flexible.

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Mr Jerry J. Ouellette (Oshawa): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: Under standing order 38, I fail to see where it is complied with as yet or where we have a requirement to comply with the Clerk's desk before presenting petitions. As well, are we going to receive updated standing orders?

The Speaker: If you read the standing order—which I don't have in front of me, but the table is looking at it as we speak—it says that petitions will be in good order. If you give me a moment, I will read the standing order:

“Presentation in the House

“A member may present a petition in the House during routine proceedings under the proceeding ‘Petitions’. The member may make a brief statement summarizing the contents of the petition and indicating the number of signatures attached thereto.”

It goes on to say,

“Petitions to be certified as to form

“No member may seek to present a petition unless it has already been given to the Clerk of the Assembly who has examined it and certified that it is correct as to the form and content.”

So I will say to members that the standing orders are very clear on this.

Mr Conway: On that point—

The Speaker: Order. I will say very clearly that these are the new standing orders.

Mr Conway: On that point, it will happen on many occasions that many of us as members will be presented with petitions—in some cases they will have hundreds of names—that will not conform with the precise language of the standing orders. Under these rules, I take it that the members in question will not be able to present those petitions in the normal course of events. They can simply return them to their constituents in Peterborough or Pembroke or Pefferlaw or wherever and say, “They don’t conform with language you would have no reason to understand to begin with, and if you want them presented, then you’d better redo them consistent with this language.” Is that the rule?

The Speaker: The member will know that sometimes we get situations where photocopies can be put in. The wording needs to be very clear. What could happen on occasion is that photocopies could be made and names could be put in that weren’t there. So the standing orders are very clear about this procedure.

As I said to the member for Broadview-Greenwood, we will attempt to be as flexible as we can in this, including when the table is dealing with them in the beginning. But I want to be very clear to all members that these are the standing orders of the House. It is not the Speaker’s responsibility to write the standing orders, and I did not. The standing orders are very clear. Our new standing orders have come in, which I have read to you, and they are very clear on petitions.

The member has another point of order, but before he does, I want to be very clear on this. The standing orders, in my estimation, are extremely clear.

Mr Conway: I don’t doubt that they’re clear. I’m not one who plays games with petitions. I understand only too well—

Interjections.

Mr Conway: I want to be fair about this. I understand, as a former government House leader, the games that have been played with petitions. I’m not here to be boastful. I don’t play games with petitions. I can tell you that over the years about 50% of the petitions I would routinely receive would not meet this standard, and I am quite prepared to take the direction of the House. But I

can tell you that my advice to my constituents will be, “Save your effort.” The petitioning process, which is one of the most fundamental in our system, is, for a very nice, bureaucratic requirement that I don’t doubt has its supporters, not going to accord with the democratic life and times as you might understand it in your community.

I’m quite prepared to live with that. I think it’s unfortunate.

The Speaker: Members will also know that there have been occasions when petitions have not been allowed to be tabled in the past. This is not something new. Some have been rejected, based on what has happened.

Hon Norman W. Sterling (Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, Government House Leader): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: I think the goal of the House leaders, in terms of talking about this aspect of petitions, was that so many petitions were coming forward that were not in form and, therefore, while the petition was read in the House, there actually was never an official acknowledgement of that petition. In fact, what would happen would be that the petition would be returned to the member and there would be no record that the petition had been read, except that it was in Hansard. Therefore, I believe it was an effort on the part of the House leaders to try to make the practice more regular.

The other part was that a few members were not in fact presenting petitions of their constituents. They were using it as another opportunity to put forward a point of view which they had, and therefore they would write the petition and perhaps get a few people out back to sign the petition and were presenting it as a petition.

May I say that I would be open—

Interjections.

Hon Mr Sterling: I don’t believe there’s a desire on the part of any of the House leaders to make the practice more restrictive in terms of people bringing in a petition to a member of the Legislature where it didn’t conform strictly to form. Therefore I think we should ask the Legislative Assembly committee to look at it to try to make it more inclusive and less exclusive than it presently is in terms of the form. I’m quite willing to join with the other House leaders, and I’m sure that they would, in asking the Legislative Assembly committee, which is normally charged with looking at matters like this, to look into it and make a recommendation to the House leaders. Then we can talk about this matter again, at that time.

Mr John O’Toole (Durham): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: I appreciate the comments just made by our House leader and I think that more or less takes the sting out, but I really feel that the point that was made by the member from Nipissing-Pembroke is really the important one, that we can’t in any way create any more barriers of access for people to this process. With all due respect, I’m not sure if the member from Davenport or the member from St Catharines or the member from Durham may have been in violation of that, but the point here is that, to have the table turn down, for a procedural issue, the will and the wishes to express the concerns of constituents—that’s our job, and it’s a primary requirement

for us to listen and speak on behalf of constituents. If there's a format error or a procedural kind of error, that to me is not sufficient grounds to stamp out the voice of the people.

So, with respect, I know our House leader and the other House leaders will work to find a formula where we can speak and represent our constituents.

Mr Joseph Spina (Brampton Centre): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: While I agree with the situation the House leaders have brought forward, the interesting thing we must keep at the forefront is that all of us, as members of this Legislature, must hold that it is incumbent on us that if we have constituents who wish to communicate a particular viewpoint to this Legislature, we should be the ones to assist these residents in formulating that particular legislative petition. That's incumbent upon us as members. I have done that; I know members of the opposition have done it. Where people wish to have an acceptable petition to this House, we have worked with them.

If I may make a suggestion, perhaps the rules around a petition could be circulated very clearly so that we as members would be able to assist our constituents in expressing their viewpoint.

The Speaker: I thank all the members for the points of order.

LEGISLATIVE PAGES

The Speaker (Hon Gary Carr): I would like all members to join me in welcoming the second group of pages for the first session of the 37th Parliament: Brianna Baraniecki from Northumberland, Sarah Campbell from Toronto Centre-Rosedale, Adam Carricato from Sault Ste Marie, Patrick Cooke from Thunder Bay-Atikokan, Dawn Crandlemire from Whitby-Ajax, Caroline Dennis from Windsor West, Lauren Duimering from Kitchener-Waterloo, Amanda Klarer from Haliburton-Victoria-Brock, Kenneth Knibb from Etobicoke-Lakeshore, Zacharie LeBlanc from Essex, Graham Leitch from London North Centre, Kumiko Mackasey from Don Valley West, Alan Medri from Parkdale-High Park, Katherine Monsma from Prince Edward-Hastings, Shaka O'Brian from Don Valley East, Kartik Senthilnathan from Mississauga West, Lauren Vancea from Niagara Falls, Laura Walter from Oak Ridges, Joshua Wang from Cambridge and Kurt Whittaker from Markham.

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PETITIONS

GASOLINE PRICES

Mr Rick Bartolucci (Sudbury): This is a petition in fine form. It's from residents and constituents of my riding and it's to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

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

"Whereas we, the consumers, support the Ontario Liberal caucus's attempt to have the Mike Harris government introduce predatory gas pricing legislation;

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

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

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

"Therefore, we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to introduce predatory gas pricing legislation in order to control the amount of money we, the consumers, are forced to pay at the gas pumps."

I affix my signature to this petition.

EDUCATION FUNDING

Mr Bruce Crozier (Essex): I have a petition from 4,000 constituents of the county of Essex, and today I'm assisted by a page from the county of Essex, Zach LeBlanc, in presenting this petition.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the Ontario Conservative government has gravely impacted the education of our students with special needs through the introduction of the special education funding formula and the subsequent freeze in funding;

"Whereas the children of Ontario, especially those requiring extra support, are being forced to accept lower levels of service while at the same time being expected to meet higher expectations by this government;

"Whereas each and every child deserves the right to learn to his or her potential;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Minister of Education and the Ontario Conservative government to make the necessary changes in the funding formula to see that every child has the support required to learn, especially our children with special needs. We petition the minister to listen to parents, teachers and school boards who have acted as strong advocates for these students."

In support, I add my signature to this petition.

PASSENGER TRAIN SERVICE

Mr David Ramsay (Timiskaming-Cochrane): "Whereas the passenger train service in northeastern Ontario has reached a critical stage, with low passenger usage and spiralling operating costs; and

"Whereas it is now proposed to have the passenger train service downgraded and ultimately removed; and

"Whereas it is imperative that the passenger train service should be maintained to service the many isolated communities in northeastern Ontario as the population is

aging and in many cases it is the only means that seniors have to get to the major centres in southern Ontario; and

“Whereas it is essential that the train service be returned to a night schedule; and

“Whereas Premier Mike Harris stressed the need to continue passenger trains in the north when he wrote to a Cochrane citizen on June 25, 1993, stating in part as follows:

“I share your concerns regarding the fate of passenger rail service in northern Ontario. You and I both know this region’s contribution to the province is invaluable. It is crucial that northern Ontario and southern Ontario be accessible to everyone and the railroad was providing a valuable service in this regard.”

“Now, therefore, be it resolved that we, the concerned citizens of northeastern Ontario, respectfully request the Premier and the cabinet of the present Ontario government to impose an immediate 24-month moratorium on the removal of the passenger train service so that the government and the Ontario Northland Transportation Commission can look at viable alternatives.”

I affix my name to this.

IPPERWASH PROVINCIAL PARK

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

“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 concerns among all parties in the Legislature and many Ontarians;

“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 affix my signature.

HIGHWAY BILLBOARDS

Mr Michael Gravelle (Thunder Bay-Superior North): I have an important petition delivered to me by Ms Corinne Grann in Thunder Bay related to the Ministry of Transportation’s insensitive and arbitrary decisions on erecting billboards in front of property. The petition reads, to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the placement of the billboard erected on the easement in front of ML15 L6, Shuniah township, without the landowners’ knowledge, we the undersigned protest such action; and

“Whereas the respect for the property owner in front of such easement was not given consideration; and

“Whereas this stretch of highway is hazardous enough with high incidences of traffic accidents, the distraction of such a structure will contribute to the problem that already exists. Safety concerns are a major aspect; and

“Whereas the Ministry of Transportation should consult with the property owners in front of such easement, before giving permits for such structures to be erected; and

“Whereas a permanent structure that has been erected on an easement directly in front of a property that has not been approved by the affected property owner should be removed immediately;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, support the property owner’s right to approve or disapprove of a permanent structure that may be erected on the easement in front of their property.”

There are 180 people who have signed this petition. It’s a major issue and I’m very pleased to support them in their concerns.

HEALTH CARE

Mr Steve Peters (Elgin-Middlesex-London): I wish to present a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario. This petition is signed by 575 residents expressing their views about the governance of the Elgin-St Thomas Health Unit, and I wish to present this petition on their behalf.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

SAFE STREETS ACT, 1999

LOI DE 1999 SUR LA SÉCURITÉ DANS LES RUES

Resuming the debate adjourned on November 17, 1999, on the motion for second reading of Bill 8, An Act to promote safety in Ontario by prohibiting aggressive solicitation, solicitation of persons in certain places and disposal of dangerous things in certain places, and to amend the Highway Traffic Act to regulate certain activities on roadways / Projet de loi 8, Loi visant à promouvoir la sécurité en Ontario en interdisant la sollicitation agressive, la sollicitation de personnes dans certains lieux et le rejet de choses dangereuses dans certains lieux, et modifiant le Code de la route afin de réglementer certaines activités sur la chaussée.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Bert Johnson): Pursuant to the order of the House dated November 18, 1999, I’m now required to put the question on second reading of Bill 8. Mr Flaherty has moved second reading of Bill 8. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Pursuant to the order of the House dated November 18, 1999, this bill is referred to the standing committee on justice and social policy.

TAXPAYER PROTECTION
AND BALANCED BUDGET ACT, 1999

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

Resuming the debate adjourned on November 15, 1999, on the motion for second reading of Bill 7, An Act to protect taxpayers against tax increases, to establish a process requiring voter approval for proposed tax increases and to ensure that the Provincial Budget is a balanced budget / *Projet de loi 7, Loi protégeant les contribuables des augmentations d'impôt, établissant un processus d'approbation des projets d'augmentation d'impôt par les électeurs et garantissant l'équilibre du budget provincial.*

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Bert Johnson): Pursuant to the order of the House dated November 17, 1999, I'm now required to put the question on second reading of Bill 7. Mr Harris has moved second reading of Bill 7. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? It is carried.

Pursuant to the order of the House dated November 17, 1999, the order for third reading should now be called.

TAXPAYER PROTECTION
AND BALANCED BUDGET ACT, 1999

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

Mr Klees, on behalf of Mr Harris, moved third reading of the following bill:

Bill 7, An Act to protect taxpayers against tax increases, to establish a process requiring voter approval for proposed tax increases and to ensure that the Provincial Budget is a balanced budget / *Projet de loi 7, Loi protégeant les contribuables des augmentations d'impôt, établissant un processus d'approbation des projets d'augmentation d'impôt par les électeurs et garantissant l'équilibre du budget provincial.*

Hon Frank Klees (Minister without Portfolio): I will be splitting my time with Mr Skarica and Mr Wettlaufer.

I'm pleased to begin debate on this most important piece of legislation before the House, the Taxpayer Protection and Balanced Budget Act, 1999. This bill is drafted in two schedules, schedule A and schedule B, both of which are dependent upon each other to ensure fiscal responsibility to the taxpayers of this province.

I'd like to start out by referring to the balanced budget portion of this legislation and I'd like to read, for the benefit of the House, the article that I believe sets out very succinctly what this legislation is all about: "For each fiscal year beginning on or after April 1, 2001, the executive council shall plan for a balanced budget in which the expenditures of the province for a fiscal year do not exceed the sum of the revenues and the accumulated net surplus for the year and the Minister of Finance shall present a balanced budget."

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The very fact that a piece of legislation like this is having to come before this House is an indication of the kind of government we have had over the last number of years, leading up to 1995 when we were elected to serve the people of Ontario, in this province. As you will well recall, the deficit in this province was strangling not only government but the very services that we as a government are called upon to deliver to the people of the province.

I think there is something very important here that we need to be reminded of, and that is the degree to which governments continue to mount up deficits; that is, spending more than they have. That amount of deficit continues to be added to the debt of the province. The fact that today we continue to have a debt in this province well in excess of \$100 billion—when we were elected the deficit in this province was approaching \$11 billion. That simply meant that every year governments continued to mount up deficits, \$11 billion was added to the debt.

I recall in the election campaign one of the great thrusts of the opposition, primarily the Liberal Party at the time, was accusing this government of providing tax cuts, and yet during that same period of time the actual debt of the province continued to increase. Somehow this was supposed to be interpreted as a profound statement by the opposition.

Every constituent I spoke with could very readily understand that, yes, of course, until such time as our government was able to manage the financial affairs of our province in such a way that we eliminated the deficit, that we balanced the budget, there would continue to be an amount left over at the end of the year that would have to be added to the debt. That's simple, pretty fundamental economics. And, yes, had we not continued to approach the issue of the deficit, then not only would the debt have increased by perhaps \$2 billion or \$3 billion, it would have been another \$25 billion greater, had we not implemented the kind of policies we did.

The good news is that as a result of the fiscal policies of our government, as a result of the initiative of cutting taxes at all levels in this province, we were able to ignite economic activity. That economic activity resulted in the creation of some 650,000 new jobs in this province. That in turn created more economic activity and today we have the privilege in this House to be looking towards a balanced budget imminently in this province.

For the first time in many years we will be able to go to the people of the province with a budget and demon-

strate that the very difficult decisions we have taken as a government in all ministries—there isn't a ministry that was protected from the scrutiny of Management Board, from the scrutiny of cabinet, from the scrutiny of our caucus in terms of saying: "How can we do more with less? How and where can we be cutting expenses in this government to ensure the sustainability of services and the sustainability of good government?"

The rest is history. We took those difficult steps, and continue to do that, in the public interest, in the interest of the people we serve. We are on the doorstep of a balanced budget.

More importantly, we are now at the point where, because of that fiscal policy, we'll be able to begin to pay down the debt of this province and give true hope not only to business people, to men and women and young people, but to future generations as well. Because we know that only through fiscal responsibility will we be able to provide the kind of services that people in our province have come to expect, top-quality health care and the best education not only in this country but internationally. People come to this country from around the world because of the reputation Ontario has of providing a high standard of living, the best quality of life anywhere in the world. Our commitment as a government is to ensure that we continue to provide the people of Ontario with the services they have come to enjoy.

We have come through many years when governments have been insensitive to the needs not only of the general population but of business and, as a result, businesses were starting to leave Ontario. There was a lack of confidence. There was a lack of initiative in terms of investing in their own businesses, and businesses were saying, "Why should we stay in Ontario when we're going to be taxed to death here, when for every dollar we invest the government is going to claw back 60% to 70%?" Other places were rolling out the red carpet. Here in Ontario, we were rolling out the red tape. I heard from many people in my own constituency who said: "If there hadn't been a change in the economic environment, in the legislative environment and in the regulatory environment in this province, we wouldn't have stayed here. We had choices, and other jurisdictions around the world were beckoning to businesses in Ontario." In fact there were provincial leaders who were coming to Ontario to entice our business owners to come to their jurisdictions because they realized what the previous NDP and Liberal governments had done to constrict their ability to function and basically to strangle businesses where they were.

The Canadian Federation of Independent Business did a survey in April this year. I often hear from members opposite, particularly from the NDP and most recently from the Liberal Party as well, that our government has continued to give benefits to our so-called rich friends, and that somehow all that business wants is to be given handouts from government. I tell you that that is not reality. The truth is that business in this province isn't looking for handouts. They're not looking for grants.

That is what other governments in the past thought that business wanted and, of course, they created programs to hand out grants. And if the government creates a program to hand out money, what business person in his right mind wouldn't take it? But that's not what business wants at all. What business wants is for government to get off their backs, for government to simply create a level playing field where they can go out and do business, where they can enterprise, where they can invest and expect a reasonable return, without government interference.

The Canadian Federation of Independent Business survey results are very clear: 83.6% of respondents said that their top priority for tax policy is to reduce payroll taxes. The second item on their list of priorities was to reduce income taxes, some 81.6%. The third item was to pay down the federal debt to reduce tax pressure, 81.2%. It's very clear what the desire of business is, and it's not for a government handout, it's not for make-work projects, because over 10 years, the lost decade as it has been referred to, that's exactly what governments in this province tried to do. They were well-meaning, but they were wrong-headed.

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The results were very clear: When you give businesses money, when you give them grants, when you give them credits, that is not going to be productive to the economic activity in the province; but when you give them a fair business environment, an environment in which they can invest their money and expect a reasonable return, they'll create jobs. Yes, they'll create profits. In turn, most business people I know are willing to reinvest a good portion of that profit back into the business. That's why we have seen the kind of growth that we have in the province over the last number of years.

Interesting as well, on the same survey, down the list to the area of increasing grants and subsidies, only 12% of respondents said that was important to them. Improve access to government procurement: 10% of the respondents referred to that. So it's clear.

I'm pleased that our government has had the courage to introduce this bill which will acutely make it illegal for future governments to run a deficit. It will be a requirement on all future governments in this province to bring in balanced budgets. That's what every business person in this province who has the responsibility to oversee and manage a business is forced to do every year. If they don't, they go out of business very quickly.

This bill also, in schedule A, requires that this government put in place some consequences for ministers not coming forward with a balanced budget. There has been some suggestion from the opposition that this is not a significant, important aspect of this legislation, that ministers and the Premier, who have the responsibility for overseeing the budget, be given very direct, specific consequences for not doing their job: a 25% reduction in the stipend that ministers get paid for the work they do.

My honourable colleague has said very clearly that there's no way he wants to experience that consequence.

But we know the most important consequence to us as ministers is not the 25%; the most important consequence to not balancing a budget is to put us back in the days of the Liberal and the NDP governments, when there was an erosion of confidence in the guidance and in the management ability of government. What effect does that have on the people in our constituencies? What effect does that have on the businesses which look to us to provide them with that kind of fiscal guidance?

I want to also say that very clearly this legislation before us, which then will make it a legal requirement for our government to bring in a balanced budget, will set some very clear terms, will make it effectively illegal for us to increase taxes. We have to go back to the taxpayers, to the voters of this province, before taxes in most categories can actually be increased.

Does that exclude the members of this House, the members of this government, from making decisions in the public interest? I would like to refer to a letter I received from a constituent, the Rev Bruce Ervin, who cautions, I believe rightfully so, in a letter to me and to my colleagues. He refers to the fact that "Balanced budgets and deficit budgets are neither inherently good nor inherently bad." In one way, I agree with him. He goes on to say: "These are merely tools for administering the financial affairs of the province. Sometimes one is called for, sometimes the other, depending on economic and social conditions at any given time."

I agree that there are times when, perhaps because it is in the public interest, exceptions have to be made to the given rule, and that's why even this legislation provides for special circumstances in the event, perhaps, of a natural disaster. When in a particular ministry we have to spend some additional money in the public interest, those exceptions are allowed for.

At the end of the day I and my colleagues, you included, Speaker, are sent here to make decisions in the public interest. We have a responsibility to do no less here than men and women are expected to do in their household budgets and in their business budgets, and that is to guard carefully so that we are good stewards of the resources with which we've been entrusted. We have been entrusted with managing the affairs of this province. Our government is committed through this legislation to do precisely that, not to spend more than we have and to ensure that all the good services people in this province have become accustomed to, health care, education, social services—that we can help those who cannot help themselves. If we're to do that for generations to come, in this generation, in this government, we owe it to the people of this province to pass this legislation and to do the kind of business we've been sent here to do, and that is the responsible business of government.

I thank you for the opportunity and I look forward, with other members of this Legislature, to enacting this legislation that will benefit Ontarians for generations to come.

Hon Norman W. Sterling (Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, Government House Leader): Mr Speaker, I'm just here on a point of order. I believe we

have consent that the time will be split equally among the three parties and that the time Mr Klees has used, approximately 18 minutes, will come off the some 52 minutes which each party has.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Bert Johnson): Do you agree? It's agreed.

Mr David Ramsay (Timiskaming-Cochrane): Just a further note with the government House leader: I will be sharing my time, Mr Speaker, to let you know, with the members from Sarnia-Lambton, Prince Edward-Hastings and Hamilton East.

Hon Chris Stockwell (Minister of Labour): St Catharines.

Mr Ramsay: Not the member from St Catharines, as the former Speaker would like to hear him speak in this House.

I'd like to take this opportunity this afternoon in our debate of this taxation bill to talk about some of the issues that relate to taxation that some of my constituents have been talking to me about as of late.

We had the opportunity because of Remembrance Day, two weeks ago, to spend the week in the riding. I think a lot of people would be interested to know that my riding is about 700 kilometres long and all the communities tend to be in that corridor, starting at one end through to the other. It's not like all the people just live in one end of the area, so having that week is well founded, and I thank House leaders in the past who've made that week possible so we could spend that time.

In that week you take advantage of it and go to various community events. On the Monday of that week I attended a meeting in a new town, for me, Matheson, which is about 50 miles north of Kirkland Lake in the riding of Timiskaming-Cochrane. There, the French separate school board is starting its school closure review process. They're being forced to do that. In order that taxes be cut, expenditures had to be cut, and now with the education bill that was passed in the last Parliament, school boards such as that are faced with a square footage funding formula that means many of our small rural schools in northern Ontario are going to be forced to close.

This particular school, école Sainte-Thérèse in Ramore, just south of Matheson, is embarking upon this process. If it does close, what it's going to mean is that because this board has junior kindergarten, three- and four- and five-year-olds will be on a school bus away from their mothers and their homes for over two hours a day every day during the school year. That's on a piece of highway in northern Ontario that can get quite treacherous, the highway being Highway 11, or they have the opportunity to take a back road from Ramore to Val Gagné, to the alternative school they would attend, and that's just as dangerous.

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I think it points out the fact that while the government wants to have more control over school boards and has devised such strict formulae for how the schools are to be funded, it overlooks the particular situations that we

have, especially in rural Ontario and again especially in rural northern Ontario, where our population is spread over a very vast area. In our very small communities are some very small neighbourhood schools, and when you close one of those, you basically close the community, because the only reason you would want to live in Ramore, in your final decision—it's a great community to live in, it's very close to some of the new mines that are being developed along the Highway 101 corridor between Quebec and Timmins and it's a great place to raise a family, but if we don't have a school for our young children, then there's really no point in establishing a household there. In the end, family after family will make that decision and no longer want to settle in Ramore. Basically that will be the end of the community if they lose that school.

That's the type of decision that our great, large boards of northeastern Ontario are now being forced to make, decisions, because of a square-footage formula, that threaten a community and also put our children at risk. Many studies have shown that children who, from their elementary years into high school, have to be bused for hours and hours on end have a much higher dropout rate in secondary school than those who are able to walk to school or have less than a 30-minute school bus drive.

As I said, these children would be on the highway more than two hours. First of all, children that young shouldn't be bused any more than about 15 minutes. They live in this town, and that school should remain open. I would ask that the Minister of Education revisit that formula as it applies to northern rural schools and its impact upon northern communities. I think it's necessary to take a look at that, and I'd ask her to do that. As she wants to save taxpayers' money, as I know this government does, we still have to think of our citizens.

Another area of taxpayer money where I know this government wants to try to save was the subject of the petition I introduced in the House earlier this afternoon, which had about 700 signatures on it. A lot of members probably don't know the government runs a railway in northeastern Ontario. The Ontario Northland Transportation Commission is a government of Ontario agency, headquartered in North Bay. Originally, through its act of 1906, it was given the responsibility of being the economic development agency for northeastern Ontario and the transportation development agency for the great northeast, and in doing so, it established a train route up through northern Ontario. It completed a route that had already been started as early as 1903, when it got to the town of Cobalt. That's when silver was discovered, when the train route was being constructed through Cobalt.

There's a lot of history to the Ontario Northland transportation system and its railway line that links North Bay through all the northeastern Ontario communities, terminating at Hearst. It also serves, at its third-last stop north, at Cochrane, which is a main terminus for the railway, as a linkage to the other Ontario Northland transportation train, which basically connects the rest of Ontario with our James Bay frontier. As you know, there

is no highway up to Moosonee, and rail and air travel are the only means of transporting goods and people from Timmins and Cochrane to Moosonee and Moose Factory.

So it's a very important part of our history, but it's also a very important part of our day-to-day reality in that, as the petition stated, many of our seniors use the train service to access medical care in southern Ontario, which we have to do because of the lack of specialists in northeastern Ontario. The train provides more comfortable accommodation for senior citizens, allowing them some room to move, to be able to get up and stretch, and makes the trip to Toronto a lot more comfortable for them.

The problem—and why some of us haven't been establishing a do-or-die campaign on this train—is that over the years the train has been allowed to suffer and to downgrade. What we now have is a third-rate train that not very many people use any more, and thus the rationale to cancel it.

What is really needed is a reinvention of that train service by putting in proper, modern railcars. Over a year ago I requested the transportation commission to take a look at ultramodern railcars—possibly double-decker cars built in Ontario, maybe by Bombardier in Thunder Bay, one of the best train manufacturers in the world—and instead of supporting and subsidizing a losing proposition, to run the rail service as a business, to basically create, as you do in any business, a profit centre.

There will be many opportunities to put profit centres on that train, such as a variety of dining experiences—fine dining being one of them—a proper bar car and also the introduction of casinos on that train. So rather than just sitting there and looking at the great scenery, which is wonderful, as the train travels up from Toronto in the evening, there would be entertainment and an opportunity for passengers who have the means to spend money on that train and thus have the riders subsidize the railway rather than the taxpayers.

I was trying to think like the government here and say that we have to run things more like a business. Because it is a responsibility of the government to run this agency and have the train, I felt that might be the way to do it.

The Ontario Northland Transportation Commission, to be fair to them, aren't business people. It has grown up to be quite a bureaucracy over the years. They know fairly well how to run trains, but they're not entrepreneurial and it would be a cultural shift for them to try to do that. Rightfully so, I would ask that maybe they entertain privatizing that aspect of the train. They could run the train but talk to some of the tour agencies to operate the different facilities on the train to make it profitable and attractive.

The opportunity there would be to reinvent this train as a tourism development tool for northeastern Ontario, with the amenities I have stated. I have also suggested putting a snowmobile car on that train so that a couple could get on the train in Orillia or Barrie on a Friday night, their snow vehicle would be loaded on that car, they could go in and have a drink before dinner, go into

the fine dining car if they wished to do so and then go upstairs afterwards to the casino. We would increase the number of tourists coming to northeastern Ontario. We would be generating revenue from the ridership to support that train that would also provide transportation for those of less means who need to come to Toronto for medical reasons and to visit family, and certainly rely on a good public transit system.

For us, since we don't have TTC because we don't live in a densely populated area, the Ontario Northland Railway, the Northlander, is basically our public transit. We move from town to town and from the north to the south. That is our transit system. In a sense, that's our GO system; it's just a longer ride. But it means we can visit family, see doctors that are needed and do business in southern Ontario. That's another area I'd ask the government to look at.

In the next few days I'm going to be introducing a private member's bill that speaks to another big issue affecting the economy of northeastern Ontario, and that is the number of Quebec workers who are basically stealing Ontario jobs. Unlike the bill last spring, which addressed this situation with regard to the construction industry, in my case in northeastern Ontario, and to a lesser degree to the rest of northern Ontario, Quebec workers are stealing our mining jobs, our tree-cutting jobs and our log-hauling jobs. It's very sad to see trees cut in our forest that are going to an Ontario mill being transported by a Quebec transport truck to that mill in, for instance, Cochrane or Iroquois Falls. It's very sad to see, with our high unemployment rate, Quebec people taking this work.

1550

I as a Canadian believe in labour mobility in this country; it's a principle that I would fight for. So I really hesitated in bringing such a bill across, but the fact is that Ontario workers in these industries, for whatever reason, do not get work in Quebec. The best example is to go back to Highway 101, which links Rouyn-Noranda and Timmins, where all these gold mines have been established over the last few years. Noranda Inc has a mine just north of Kirkland Lake on this highway and about 50% of the workers there come from Quebec. Noranda obviously has a mine also in Rouyn-Noranda, on the Quebec side, and there's not an Ontario worker in that mine.

I would certainly invite Quebec workers to come and work with us and share in our employment if we could do the same in Quebec. But the fact is that is not possible. Like this government did with construction workers, because of the great work of Jean-Marc Lalonde last year in this House in defending the rights of the workers of Ottawa and eastern Ontario, I wish to do the same for the workers in my area. This new riding, the northern part of it, is especially hard hit by these circumstances.

I know many of the companies up there that hire Quebec workers are now showing some interest in the bill that I'm doing, and I'm sure some of them are showing a little concern, I might say. But that's fine, because I'm here to work with my constituents and to

work for them and for their families. It really hurts when a Quebec trucker comes over and lives in his truck for a week and takes his paycheque back home and doesn't invest any of that money into our communities. That hurts especially when I have many of my truck drivers and tree cutters and miners unemployed, so it's a double insult and it hurts our communities.

I've been working with the Minister of Labour on this and I hope that he will take this as a friendly amendment to his present bill, although it can stand free-standing, and either adopt my bill or introduce a similar one of his own. It doesn't matter how it's done, but I think it's a situation that has to be addressed.

Mr Gilles Bisson (Timmins-James Bay): At the outset, I just want to say that our time will be shared equally between the member from Hamilton and the leader of the NDP.

I want to take a few minutes at the beginning of the debate just to have an opportunity to comment. I was listening earlier to the debate, I forget the member from across the way, the honourable government whip who talked about how this government was close to balancing its budget. I couldn't help but think about where we would be today in the province of Ontario if the government hadn't adopted its tax break policy that it has put in place. As we know, the government decided early on, before the election of 1995, to run on a policy that said Ontarians would get a 30% tax break.

We have to recognize that there has been a cost associated with that tax cut. I think that if you asked the question straight up, "Do you want a tax cut?" most Ontarians would probably say yes. But I think it's incumbent upon us to talk a little bit about what that tax break has meant when it comes to government services and when it comes to where we are with the deficit of Ontario today.

To put it mildly, the tax cut has probably cost in revenue to the province of Ontario somewhere around, depending on whose numbers you look at, \$3 billion to \$5 billion. The government would argue that no, we didn't lose anything because the tax break stimulated the economy into getting more investment in the province and therefore whatever was lost by way of revenue in the tax cut was offset by gains that they made in job creation. The reality is that, tax cut or no tax cut, the economy of Ontario would have done well for the last three or four years, specifically in southern Ontario. The reason for that is that the American economy has done well since the mid-1990s, and there were certainly signs of that, where the revenue was starting to pick up in the province, dating back to 1993-94. If the government had not gone ahead and dealt with the issue of trying to give a tax cut, the government would have that money by way of savings in revenue and we'd now be in a position, I would argue, that we would have balanced our budget probably about three years ago.

Ontario is one of the few jurisdictions across Canada, as a province, that has yet to balance its books. I think we need to recognize that the reason why that is so is because the Mike Harris government decided to give—

Interjection.

Mr Bisson: If you don't know the difference between debt and deficit, you shouldn't be sitting in this Legislature.

Why is it that we still have at this point a deficit on the books this year? Because the government decided to give the tax cut. It added to the deficit. It's put us in a position where we now have a deficit where we probably wouldn't have had one about three years ago because we would have been in a position to balance. But the government now, because of this tax cut, has had to go out and find other ways to cut into government services to make up for the money that they're losing by way of revenue.

We would know that just last week there was a Toronto Star article that appeared and said, "It is rumoured that the government is going to cut some \$900 million yet again in government services in the province of Ontario." Hastily, the government ran back to the House in the afternoon and announced: "No, it's not really \$900 million, it's only \$300 million this year with another \$600 million to come over the next few years. It's not as bad as people were once led to believe." The reality is, it doesn't matter how you try to cut the mustard, at the end of the day we are going to have to cut more and more programs in Ontario because the government continues to persist with the policy that it put in place in 1995 when it comes to the tax cut.

You ask yourself, how does this affect everyday life as far as the cuts that have happened up to now and where they're going? I just want to take a few minutes and talk a little bit about this last weekend, the opportunity that I had to travel through part of my riding. Being a large riding like mine, Timmins-James Bay, we don't have constituency offices in each community. It's not like many of the ridings in Ontario, places like Toronto and Ottawa, where your riding is geographically situated such that if you plunk your constituency office in the middle of it, people can get on a bicycle and ride to your constituency office to tell you about their problems. In our riding you don't have that luxury, because from one end of the riding to the other it is basically a lot farther than people would imagine. The actual size of the riding in kilometres is somewhere around 1,000 from the southern part of the riding to the northern part of the riding, followed by about 600 to 700 kilometres across. You can't ride your bicycle across that, so as a provincial member we hold what's called community clinics.

This last weekend I had the opportunity on Saturday to hold community clinics in the community of Moonbeam and the community of Opatatika. It's interesting to note that the people who came out to these clinics were talking about the problems they were having in their everyday lives. You know what? It didn't matter if you were in Moonbeam and it didn't matter if you were in Opatatika, they were all basically saying the same thing: My life today is much more complicated because of what's happened with the provincial government over the last four or five years.

I had one woman who came to me in Moonbeam to tell me about problems she's having with municipal planning. There is a quarry that was allowed to be built on a property right next to her, and because of the changes to the Planning Act on the part of the Minister of Municipal Affairs in 1995, she had absolutely no say about the zoning being changed in her own backyard, literally, and a quarry was allowed to go into operation even though she was opposed to it. She didn't even have an opportunity to object. When she wrote to the Ontario Municipal Board after the decision was made to go ahead with the quarry, the Ontario Municipal Board said: "Your application is vexatious. Under the changes to the omnibus bill, Bill 26, you don't have the right to have access to the file." So this poor woman has a quarry built next door to her, 600 feet away, she had no opportunity to comment, and when she tries to find out more information in order to make some comment on it, she's told by the municipal board that she can't have the file.

1600

I have another individual who comes in who tells me about the problem that he's having. I don't want to get into the details because it's fairly dramatic and fairly personal, but let me just say that this individual having to deal with the mental health system has really had a lot of hard times because of all the cuts that have happened to the mental health field over the last four or five years. Here's this poor individual who went through a traumatic event about four years ago that drove him a little bit off the deep end. The guy had a hard time trying to deal with reality where it was, had to get in contact with the mental health services in our riding, and because of the cuts on the part of the provincial government—it was always difficult to get access to those types of services before, but now it's even more difficult. This poor individual had a lot to say about what had happened to him and how he would like to see the issues resolved so that people who have happen to them what happened to him don't have to go through the experiences he did.

Je m'en vais à Opatatika puis j'ai la chance de parler à des individus qui me disent qu'ils ont un problème. Un soir je m'en vais rencontrer le club de l'Âge d'or d'Opatatika, un club d'une soixantaine de personnes âgées de cette communauté qui se rassemblent pour un peu de détente, pour avoir la chance de se parler, pour causer ensemble. Il y a un beau petit centre. Ils ont pris ce qui était le presbytère dans le passé et c'est devenu un centre de loisirs pour les personnes âgées de cette communauté.

Ils ne veulent pas avoir beaucoup. Ils veulent avoir environ 8000 \$ pour changer la fournaise et pour être capables de faire des réparations très minimes sur la bâtisse pour avoir la capacité d'utiliser ce centre en hiver et continuer de passer ces bons temps ensemble. Aucune offre provinciale n'est disponible pour le club de l'Âge d'or d'Opatatika ou n'importe quel autre club en Ontario. Pourquoi? Parce que le gouvernement de Mike Harris a fallu couper les subventions aux groupes comme ce club

pour pouvoir payer pour les changements de taxation que le gouvernement a donné il y a deux ou trois ans.

J'ai eu la chance de rencontrer encore un autre groupe à Opatatika. La municipalité dans ce cas-là a dit : « Écoutez, on a une vingtaine de femmes dans notre communauté qui sont veuves qui ne veulent plus demeurer dans leur maison. Elles se trouvent à un point dans leur vie où elles aimeraient déménager dans un appartement pour avoir un peu plus de sécurité et rester ensemble avec d'autres personnes de leur âge, et en même temps cela leur donnerait la chance de vendre leur maison, ce qui ferait beaucoup de logis pour la communauté. Il y a du monde qui voudrait aller à Opatatika pour y faire leur chez-eux.

Encore, ça veut dire que dans le passé des personnes feraient une application auprès du ministère du Logement pour avoir du financement pour bâtir ce qu'on appelle un « seniors' housing project ». Ce qui est arrivé, c'est qu'en 1995 le gouvernement de Mike Harris a complètement fermé le ministère du Logement en ce qui concerne bâtir des maisons à but non lucratif. Il n'y en a plus. Les pauvres personnes à Opatatika n'ont jamais eu d'appartements pour les personnes de l'âge d'or dans leur communauté et n'ont pas même l'habileté de faire une application pour bâtir des appartements dans leur communauté. Le gouvernement de Mike Harris en 1995 a complètement fermé le financement de ces programmes.

Je continue sur la route et je rencontre du monde à Hearst. Je rencontre un homme qui veut trouver un emploi. Il se trouve dans une situation où il a perdu son job, il n'a plus d'assurance-chômage et il lui a fallu aller sur le bien-être social. Il veut commencer une entreprise, pas une grosse ; il veut acheter un camion pour être capable de participer dans l'économie, pour charrier des « logs » d'un bord de la forêt pour aller au moulin à Hearst. Le monsieur n'a pas d'argent et doit, comme tout le monde, aller à la banque pour en emprunter. Il était prêt à donner sa maison en guise de sécurité pour acheter son camion. Mais la banque a dit que non, ce n'était pas assez de sécurité. Le pauvre homme, qui est sur le bien-être social, quelles chances est-ce qu'il a ? Il a déjà été à travers des programmes comme boulot Ontario du gouvernement de M. Rae et STEP du gouvernement de M. Peterson.

Ces programmes donnaient l'habileté à ces individus de faire l'investissement pour donner les connaissances nécessaires pour commencer une entreprise, et dans certains cas d'avoir même l'argent pour pouvoir commencer une entreprise. Ce pauvre monsieur se trouve dans une situation où il n'y a aucun programme pour l'aider. Il n'y a pas boulot Ontario, où on peut utiliser son bien-être social pour créer son propre job. Il n'y a plus de programme « heritage », qui était un fonds de 25 \$ millions à 30 \$ millions par année où un individu pourrait aller au gouvernement avoir des garanties sur un emprunt. Ces programmes n'existent plus pour ces personnes. Ceci est seulement une indication de ce qui est arrivé durant une journée dans mon comté ce samedi-là.

Si tu vas à Moonbeam ou à Opatatika ou à Hearst, c'est toujours la même histoire : le monde vient te voir et te parle d'où ils se trouvent dans leur vie quotidienne. Ce qu'on apprend est que ce monde se trouve pire aujourd'hui quand ça vient aux opportunités dans cette économie à la descente depuis 1995, et pourquoi ? Parce qu'il a fallu au gouvernement de Mike Harris de couper les programmes provinciaux pour s'assurer d'avoir de l'argent pour la réduction d'impôts qu'il a donnée à la population ontarienne. Est-il populaire d'avoir des réductions d'impôts ? Oui, monsieur le Président. Vous en tant que Président et moi en tant que député ou M. ou M^{me} Tout le monde dans la rue voulons tous avoir des réductions d'impôts. Mais il y a des coûts dans cette affaire-là. À la fin de la journée on paie de l'autre bord.

And it's not even to talk about what happens to user fees. Do you recognize how many user fees exist in Ontario today, since 1995? I was listening to the member for St Catharines: 653 new taxes that this government has raised over the last six years, from 1995, and most of them, I would say 100% of them, by way of user fees. Children who go out and play hockey—unfortunately, I was at the hospital visiting my father, who was ill this last week, and I was talking with one individual who has been involved with minor hockey for years in my community, Condo Pontello. Condo said to me, “We used to be able to rent the ice in order to promote hockey in our community for X dollars.” The ice time that clubs now have to pay, since 1995, has about doubled. It means that those kids are having to go out, either through their parents or by way of fund-raising, and pay those additional user fees that the government has put on.

Yes, the government can stand here and try to take all the credit it does for the economy and everything else, but they have to take credit for what they've done wrong. That is, their tax cut has basically cost us when it comes to provincial services and also cost us when it comes to user fees. There's nothing for free in this world. I think we're going to start to find, over the next few years, that the legacy Mike Harris is leaving us is a pretty sad legacy when it comes to what it means to people's lives on a daily basis.

Mr Wayne Wettlaufer (Kitchener Centre): I'm pleased to speak to the Taxpayer Protection Act, Bill 7. It's heartening to listen to the members of the opposition speak in favour of the bill, that they will support it. It is a little disheartening to hear the members from the third party say they are opposed to it. But even knowing that the members of the opposition are going to support the bill, I notice they still speak with some reservation. They say they'll support it, but on the other hand they're opposed to it. They point to all kinds of reasons why it won't work. This, to me, indicates one more example of how Liberals are opposed to restricting spending. They really would like to have the flexibility to increase spending—not like what we say, that the bill allows it in times of war or in times of severe economic downturn. They would like to be able to increase spending much more at will.

The taxpayers in my riding recognized even before the 1995 election that we could not continue to increase the debt in this province. They recognized that annual deficits increased the size of the debt. They recognized that we were paying out \$9 billion a year in interest charges on the accumulated debt. That money was affecting the amount of money that a provincial government could provide for health care and education. Funding for these two items was felt very severely in my riding of Kitchener Centre, in which at the time two hospitals were located. Now one, because of restructuring, is in Kitchener-Waterloo.

We had severe underfunding during the terms of the two previous governments for hospitalization and health care. In my riding, we had so many people who didn't have doctors. We still have that shortage, but it's gradually being rectified. We had no health care that was what our riding should have had, a region that is so economically important. We had a shortage of cancer care, we had a shortage of MRIs, we had a shortage of cardiac care, we had a shortage of psychiatric care, and the list goes on and on. A region with a \$14-billion gross domestic product, the equivalent of the province of New Brunswick, greater than the provinces of Newfoundland and PEI together, but we didn't have proper health care. Money that we could have used was going to pay interest on the debt.

1610

The Liberals like to say that our government could have reduced the debt faster if we hadn't cut taxes. Let's examine this. We could have reduced the debt faster if we had restricted spending on health care to what the Liberals promised in 1995 in their red book. Do you remember that, Mr Speaker? I'm sure you do. Their red book said, "... spending of \$17 billion a year on health care." What is being spent in Ontario today? Some \$20.6 billion. Our government has increased health care spending to \$20.6 billion, \$3.6 billion more than the opposition party would have spent. Yes, we could have balanced the budget this year. Let's look at it another way.

The NDP said we shouldn't have cut taxes, because if we hadn't cut taxes we could have balanced the budget. Is that right? Two thirds of the tax cut has gone to families earning between \$25,000 and \$75,000 a year. This is the majority of the consumers in this province. They have, through their increased spending patterns over the last four years, increased consumer demand, increased incentive to invest. They have—the tax cuts I'm talking about—improved the economy because this group of people spent money. When you spend money, you create demand. When you create demand, you provide jobs. When you provide jobs, you increase provincial revenue. When you increase provincial revenue, you then have more money to spend on health care and on education.

We recently fought a provincial election and this issue came up at the door over and over again. The people of my riding understand it. In fact, most of the people of

Ontario understand that. The only ones who don't understand it seem to be the Liberals and the NDP.

We were elected in 1995 because we listened to Ontarians, who said they wanted lower taxes. Why? I mentioned consumer demand already, but higher taxes increase the brain drain because they reduce incentive. Higher taxes reduce incentive to be productive, reduce incentive to invest. Investment creates jobs. Jobs. Isn't that what this is all about?

I remember in 1995 the people of Ontario considered their number one priority jobs. While our economy is getting stronger, nevertheless it is very tenuous. With the effect of the global economy that we have had over the last five to 10 years, most people in this province realize that people in other countries can be just as productive as or can be more productive than members of our own province can be, or they can produce some things at terrifically reduced costs because wage rates are so low. We have a major challenge in that. The global economy puts tremendous strains on us, and because of those tremendous strains we have to ensure that while our people have a good standard of living and while they have good social benefits, they need the incentive. We cannot increase taxes.

What does the Taxpayer Protection Act do? It ensures that there will not be irresponsible tax increases by a future provincial government. It does not permit tax increases without a referendum. Is that so wrong, to go to the members of the public, to our constituents? Is it so wrong to ask them for their approval before increasing taxes? I believe the people of this province are intelligent enough, sophisticated enough, that they can judge for themselves whether or not their government should increase taxes. It seems reasonable.

Would a future government be so irresponsible as to increase taxes if we didn't pass this legislation? I will ask, what has Jean Chrétien said very recently? Our Prime Minister, and a Liberal, said: "If you looked at only one aspect, taxes, maybe you would prefer living elsewhere. There's nothing forcing you to stay here." He said that on August 8. Our Prime Minister. That's only a couple of months ago. I would say that indicates that without passage of this legislation, we could very easily have a future government increase taxes irresponsibly.

Again I say to you, our commitment is to reduce taxes. There must no longer be irresponsible deficits. The people of this province must not be forced to pay for irresponsible deficits run up by irresponsible governments. My children and their children should not be forced to pay for irresponsibility on the part of governments of our generation.

Again I say, we must increase initiative, we must increase productivity. That is the role of government, through tax cuts. This ensures our commitment to tax cuts. This act ensures our commitment to balanced budgets. This act ensures our protection for the taxpayers of Ontario.

I will be supporting this act.

Ms Caroline Di Cocco (Sarnia-Lambton): At the outset I want to say that it's a pleasure to speak to this bill, the Taxpayer Protection and Balanced Budget Act, because it's a concept I agree with. I have to say, who wouldn't agree with such a statement?

I will say again that it's the style of the government to look back and remind everyone of past records and consistently divert responsibility to others. A true aspect of taxpayer protection is, in my opinion, all about accountability. In the recent auditor's report, it is clear that accountability is not provided by the style of this government.

Mr Bisson: Mr Speaker, on a point of order: You would know that we have had a change in the standing orders. I wonder if you can tell me how many people it takes to have a quorum in this House nowadays, because I believe we don't have one.

The Deputy Speaker: I am not entitled to answer questions like that, but if you would like me to check and see, I will.

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Mr Bisson: Then I would call for a quorum.

The Deputy Speaker: Would you check to see if there's a quorum present, please.

Clerk at the Table (Ms Lisa Freedman): A quorum is not present, Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker ordered the bells rung.

Clerk at the Table: A quorum is now present, Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The Chair again recognizes the member for Sarnia-Lambton.

Ms Di Cocco: Again, I'll say that it's the style of this government to look back and of course remind everybody of past records. They consistently divert responsibility to others. A true aspect of taxpayer protection, in my opinion, is all about accountability. In the recent auditor's report, it's clear that accountability is not provided by the style of this government. This government is great at producing the appearance of accountability, but in reality it is something else.

I agree with the member for Oak Ridges that we all have been elected to protect and represent the interests of our constituents and that accountability is, in reality, the best protection for taxpayers.

I will cite some examples from the auditor's report about value for money, because that is what accountability is all about as well.

The Ministry of Health provided \$7.1 billion to operate public hospitals, with \$246 million for one-time costs incurred by the hospitals. In addition, the health capital program provided financial assistance to hospitals for the cost of approved capital construction. In the 1998-99 fiscal year, the ministry did not have in place the key findings from the audit about payment to public hospitals—and accountability framework, delineating the roles and responsibilities of both the ministry and the hospitals.

What was lacking was a mechanism to monitor and assess the impact of restructuring. So you're going to restructure, and accountability is figuring out if the

restructuring is working or not. This government doesn't seem to have that in place.

Accountability about systems to fund hospitals based on demand for services—so if you have a demand but you're not providing the services, then you're not meeting, I call it, the accountability factor. There are consistent criteria, or should be, for providing financial assistance to hospitals experiencing financial difficulties, because hospitals are not in the business of making a profit. There's also another area, and that is indicators to measure and report on the performance of the public hospital system in delivering quality services, and we don't have those measures.

Taxpayers' protection is also how the government is spending money and what services we're getting for this money. I'm going to read a letter from a constituent who is today feeling the consequences of a government that is not providing services. It says here:

"I'm writing this letter to protest the cap that was placed on the above physician.

"Please explain to me what's the difference of paying a doctor in the London or Toronto area versus one in our own backyard. In my opinion, this makes no sense whatsoever."

That's when they redesignated Sarnia-Lambton from "underserviced" to "not underserviced."

This gentleman states: "I've paid into OHIP"—we're talking again about accountability and how money is spent—"since its inception. In my younger years I never used OHIP and now, in my twilight years, when I need this benefit as a resident of Ontario, this system is falling into such a state of disrepair. What can we as seniors expect in the future for health care when we need it?"

He goes on to say that as a veteran of the Second World War and an individual who has stood for peace and prosperity for every Canadian citizen, "I am deeply concerned of the sad state of affairs that we as citizens are facing as time rolls on towards the new millennium."

This is the reality about how government is spending or not spending money in this province.

Where is taxpayer protection? This is reported in the auditor's report: A hospital reported that due to a shortage of operating funds, a new facility that cost \$110 million cannot use four out of eight operating rooms. Taxpayer protection is as much about how money is spent as whether taxes are raised. A balanced budget, in my estimation, should not need legislation; it should have been something that the government intended to do and should have done already.

What was also pointed out in the report was that this government is not spending taxpayers' dollars more efficiently than their predecessors. Of particular interest to me is that accountability for spending of public funds is not in place. We must ask ourselves, when we talk about accountability and we talk about taxpayer protection: "Do we have an improved health care system or a better education system, or better environment standards than five years ago? After all these cuts, has the province achieved a better fiscal report card?"

Under the Conservative watch, the debt of this province has increased from \$88 billion to \$108 billion, with another \$4 billion to be added this year. Our debt-to-GDP ratio has increased from 28.8% before Harris to 31.9% today, and that is an evaluation of fiscal health. This has kept our credit rating to AA-, as was the case during the NDP years. What makes these facts remarkable is that we have been experiencing an unprecedented economic boom for the past four and a half years. All I hear in response to these facts is that there was a mess from before and that the Conservatives have to clean it up. What I'd like to know is, when does this government begin to take responsibility, after almost five years of being in the driver's seat?

I agree with balanced budgets. Again, I don't understand why we need legislation for this government to set a goal to balance the budget. On the other hand, I still believe that the Harris government has put the cart before the horse by giving tax cuts before they got their fiscal house in order. I believe that government must be held accountable, but in action, not just in rhetoric. It is a fact that government agencies such as the environment, health, education, culture, heritage and so many other sectors have become ineffective because they cannot provide the services that this province needs.

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What good is a tax cut if we lose what I consider sustainable people development? What good is it to hear in the Financial Times that the economy is booming if the disabled and students and patients and other infrastructure do not reap the benefit of this economic boom? The question is, of course, who is the economic boom for? It certainly isn't for the people of this province.

I also don't understand how every sector has to continue to do more with less but the Premier's office has doubled, why cabinet has increased in size and their staff wages have risen. The Ontario Conservative government has a double standard. If you are a well-placed Tory, providing direct political assistance to help the government get elected, you'll be rewarded. But if you're a corrections officer or an environmental officer or a nurse or a teacher or a doctor or somebody who's providing direct services to the public, you will not be rewarded; you'll be insulted. By comparison, in August the government quietly approved raises of up to 30% for the 326 political aides who work as communications assistants, chiefs of staff and policy advisers to the province's 25 cabinet ministers, yet it was just announced that there are going to be more cuts in every other sector. Again, we have a double standard. Sustained economic development means we need to balance fiscal responsibility with a social conscience.

Yes, it's the trend around this country and this continent, but if all those hikes in user fees, licence fees and services that you must pay for—I wonder whether the tax cuts come into play as we raise our taxes. I call it a subversive tax hike.

In this House we're all members who have voted to protect the interests of the people who elected us and I'm wary about the words said by this government and the actions taken. I have to say that fiscal responsibility is not just the appearance of fiscal responsibility; it is what I believe in and that's what we on this side of the House believe in. There are many examples of how the actions do not follow the words of fiscal responsibility on the other side of the House. Yes, let's get our fiscal house in order, but let's maintain a social conscience as well.

The Acting Speaker (Mr Michael A. Brown): Further debate?

David Tilson (Dufferin-Peel-Wellington-Grey): I'd like to speak in favour of this bill this afternoon for a few moments. Then the parliamentary assistant for the government, the member for Wentworth-Burlington, will conclude on behalf of the government.

This bill has come after much thought. We on the government side during the—

Interjection.

Mr Tilson: Yes, it has been a number of years that this has been promised and we were stymied in the last House and we've brought it forward. We are going to pass it, as we promised that we would. This is legislation that the people of Ontario have asked for. Members of the opposition may or may not agree with that; in fact, listening to some of the Liberal speakers, I don't know where the Liberals stand. When you watch what happened during the Liberal reign, specifically during Mr Peterson's reign, that is, those are considered good times, very good times.

If that was the case, why did we spend? Why did we increase the taxes by, I don't know what it was, 32, 33 times? I don't know why we did that, particularly when the opposition talks about times that go up and down. The taxes were raised, in our opinion unnecessarily, during that time 32 times or 33 times.

The NDP came along, of course, and then there was a big dispute between Mr Laughren and Mr Nixon as to whether or not there was a deficit.

Interjection.

Mr Tilson: I'm not going to get into that. The problem was that there was a deficit during the good times.

So the NDP came into what appeared to be a recession. Yes, it was a difficult time. They decided to spend their way out of the recession. Some of us can still remember sitting in this place, watching as Mr Rae and Mr Laughren stood up to read their first budget. Holy smokes. Couldn't believe what they were going to do to this province and what they did do to this province. At the end of the time in 1995, taxes had increased a total of 65 times. The debt had increased, I think, to 80-some-odd billion dollars. The deficit had increased up to \$11.3 billion. That is why our government had to take a number of the stances that it did to change that. We couldn't continue to bankrupt the province as had been going on by the NDP and the Liberal governments. So we changed that.

We are now at a time when we have undertaken to—and we are going to—eliminate the deficit in the year 2000-01, as we promised. Every last one of our commitments has been honoured. That was one of our commitments. We have also undertaken to say that never again will a government during the good times of the Liberals or the bad times of the NDP be allowed to implement those taxes without going back to the people.

You read some of the taxes that came in during those times. The Ontario personal income tax surtax levied 3% on Ontario tax in excess of \$5,000. In 1998 the gasoline tax increased by one cent per litre. Now we're talking about fuel and wondering why our gasoline taxes are so high. It's because of the taxes of these two governments. In 1989 gasoline tax increased by two cents per litre. The fuel tax was increased by two cents per litre. Then, of course, there was the tire tax. Do you remember the tire tax?

Interjections.

Mr Tilson: Mr Speaker, I need protection here.

The Acting Speaker: Order.

Mr Tilson: The commercial concentration levy was imposed. It goes on and on, very serious taxes that affected the economy of this province.

We on this side have spoken about how our economy has improved since we have changed the process. We've cut taxes 99 times since we came into office in 1995 to increase jobs and investment. We're on the track to, as I say, a balanced budget for the year 2000-01.

In its June Ontario forecast—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker: Order. This place works much better when only one member speaks at a time.

Mr Tilson: I'm glad you said that, Mr Speaker. I thought at one minute I was going to be rushed. However, we're here.

I started to say a forecast was made by the Toronto-Dominion Bank in June: "The Ontario economy is expected to grow by almost 5% in 1999, its best showing in a decade, and it accounts for two thirds of the new jobs created in Canada this year." The opposition is going to say that's because of the US economy. It hasn't been. It's been because of the policies of this government. We are going to continue to put forward the good economic policies. We don't want another mess created by these two governments—the Liberal and the NDP governments—and that's why we're asking that Bill 7 be approved.

Those are my comments.

Mr Toni Skarica (Wentworth-Burlington): It's my pleasure to finish the debate on behalf of the government caucus on this bill. Why are we here? You'll recall that in 1995 a taxpayers' pledge was signed. The Premier, who was then leader of the third party, Mike Harris, signed the taxpayers' pledge, basically indicating that one day this legislation would come to pass, and here we are.

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Basically what this is is a promise made, a promise kept; a commitment made by the Premier of the province

many years ago. It was one of a number of commitments made, such as a 30% tax cut. I remember that when I campaigned on that pledge people didn't believe it. Back then, in 1995, when a politician promised something, it really didn't mean anything because they just didn't keep their word. But our government has changed that. It has brought integrity back to government. When we say we're going to do something, we do it.

So the Premier, who wasn't the Premier then but was about to be, signed the taxpayers' pledge and he signed it because he believed in it. Not only did he sign it, but 129 of the 130 candidates for our party signed it, and to this day I'm wondering who that person was who didn't sign it. The reason I signed it and virtually all the members here signed it was because we believed in it.

Mr Dominic Agostino (Hamilton East): Who didn't sign it? Was it Chris Stockwell?

Mr Skarica: The member from Hamilton East said it was Chris Stockwell who didn't sign it. I expected him to say that, so I asked the Minister of Labour before I took the podium: "Are you that person of the 130? You were the rebel of the day. You're the obvious candidate at that time. Were you the person who didn't sign that?" Perhaps he didn't sign it. The fact of the matter is that the Minister of Labour did sign the taxpayers' pledge.

It didn't get him into cabinet, so why did he sign it? It's obvious why you signed it. It's because you believed in it. That's why we all signed it. We believed in what we were running on. We ran on the Common Sense Revolution. We ran on pledges like this and we intended to keep our word. That's why we were re-elected, not because we raised taxes, not because the economy is thriving, which it is; we were re-elected because we brought back integrity to government. When we said we were going to do something, we did it. We do what we say and we say what we do. That was a refreshing change and it was the first time people had seen that in Ontario in many, many years.

Now the Liberals say, "We're supporting this as well." I have to say that when I listened to the members over on the Liberal backbench, when I heard what they had to say, I wasn't sure. Are they still on board? Are they going to support this legislation or not? In my opinion the reason the Liberals are now supporting this legislation is because the public wants this legislation. We've been elected twice on this platform and on bringing integrity and accountability back into government. The Liberals are slow at times, but they've finally figured out, "Well, the public wants this."

Even as recently as the spring of this year, before the election, that wasn't their position.

Hon Mr Stockwell: Have they changed a lot?

Mr Skarica: Mr McGuinty, the leader of the party—I thank the Minister of Labour for asking me the appropriate question. I didn't ask him to do so ahead of time. On April 18 the London Free Press reported, "Ontario Liberal Leader Dalton McGuinty says he's not crazy about planned government legislation that would encourage more use of referendums in the province." On the

same day the Toronto Star quoted Mr McGuinty as well. What did he say to the people of Toronto? "We'll take a look at the legislation, but in principle I don't like referendum legislation. I believe I know what the people of Ontario are looking for. They're looking for a government that listens."

Basically Mr McGuinty took the position we'd heard for the last 20 or 30 years: "Government knows best. Yes, we'll listen, but in the end we don't need people having a say. They should mind their own business. We're politicians, we know what we're doing." Basically it was, "Trust us."

Anyway, after the election the Toronto Sun reported on October 27, on the eve of this legislation being brought in, that Liberal leader Dalton McGuinty said that his party will support the balanced budget, just as it has in the last two elections. This is revisionism in the most extreme. I don't recall the Liberals supporting this legislation in 1995. I did some research on the matter. You remember that 129 of 130 Conservatives, including the rebel of the day, Mr Stockwell, signed the taxpayers' pledge. How many Liberals signed the taxpayers' pledge?

Mr Agostino: Why are you spending all your time whining about the fact that we're supporting your legislation?

Mr Skarica: The Hamilton East member is talking and I ask him the simple question: How many of your members signed the taxpayers' pledge in 1995? Did you? I don't think you did. Four out of 130 signed the taxpayers' pledge, and they probably got into trouble. Why? Because their leader, Lyn McLeod, didn't sign the taxpayers' pledge. Mr McGuinty didn't sign the taxpayers' pledge—four out of 130. So why are they now taking the position that, "Not only do we support it now, but we always have," which is completely untrue and a flip-flop? Again, it shows you politicians saying one thing and doing another. This is just another example of it.

This is why the Liberals are over there and we are over here. When we said we were going to do something, when we gave our word, we kept it. So why have the Liberals flip-flopped on this issue? The answer is simple: You want to win the next election, and now that you know the public supports this, you figure you're going to join the party as Johnny-come-latelys.

I'm going to refer to newspaper articles, not from my riding, not from ridings the Conservatives hold, but from ridings the Liberals hold. This is what you're hearing from people in your own constituencies, in ridings you hold right now.

The Windsor Star—I think Windsor has three Liberal seats right now—reported that Doug Robson, of the Ontario Chamber of Commerce, said: "You want this to be in place when that happens"—he's talking about recessions—"so people can't increase spending." The Ontario Chamber of Commerce supports this legislation. You've heard them, and that has caused you concern. In fact, they're saying this in areas where you currently have seats.

Let's go to the Welland Tribune—Welland is one of the very last strongholds of the NDP. What are they saying? Walter Robinson from the Canadian Taxpayers Federation was quoted: "'In the US and Canada the measures have proven so popular it would be political folly to get rid of them,' said Walter Robinson. 'A political party risks great heat in terms of tinkering with it or making a mockery of the law.'"

A report in the St Catharines Standard—the member from St Catharines is usually here, but since his demotion he's not here. The Taxpayers Coalition Niagara indicate that they like this legislation as well and that the "proposals in the throne speech are similar to those once advocated" by their group. On and on it goes.

Northern Ontario, the Sudbury Star—

Mr Agostino: On a point of order, Mr Speaker: The member made reference to a member's attendance in the House. I think we know that is inappropriate, and I ask him to withdraw that.

The Acting Speaker: That is a point of order.

Mr Skarica: To be fair, the member from St Catharines is here as often as anyone else. I didn't mean to say anything negative about him.

Continuing, northern Ontario, Sudbury, the same thing: The Sudbury Star praises this legislation, indicating that "financial penalties for cabinet ministers is a good thing and would serve as a deterrent against such actions." I'm sure that will cause the Minister of Labour some concern.

Toronto Star: Judith Andrew, from the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, indicated that the legislation is good. This is in the Toronto Star: "Your provincial government understands that small business's ability to create jobs is hampered by excessive taxes and wasteful deficit spending."

In northern Ontario, the Kenora Daily Miner and News supports this legislation.

Basically, if you look at Ontario newspapers, the Ontario-wide response to this from the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, the Ontario Chamber of Commerce—

Interjection: It's a juggernaut.

Mr Skarica: That's right, it is a juggernaut—the Taxpayers Federation, the number of newspapers that normally are Liberal-leaning and, if I dare say, somewhat left-leaning, all support this legislation.

The Kenora Daily Miner, from northern Ontario, has this to say about Liberal leader Dalton McGuinty: "McGuinty is backing this legislation now because of political expediency," backing up my argument completely. "He sees it as a vote-getter." They'd be right again. The Liberals didn't endorse similar legislation in 1995 and skirted the issue in the spring campaign. Obviously, either they didn't review the Liberal revisionism of history or they just don't believe it.

If I could deal briefly with some of the criticisms of the Legislation, one criticism is that it doesn't cover all the provincial taxes. There's a bunch that are included. What are they? Tobacco tax, land transfer tax, racetracks

tax, estate administration tax, mining taxes, preferred share dividends tax and gross receipts tax. When you hear that list, it sounds pretty impressive. You think maybe it's not as good as the government is saying it is. That's quite a few taxes. But if you pull out the budget and look at page 53, the bottom six or seven taxes aren't covered, but there's no revenue from there. It's the top six or seven that are included in the legislation, and they cover 97% of the taxes raised in Ontario. So basically, 97% of what could be taxed is covered by this legislation. I think that's pretty comprehensive legislation in the end.

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The NDP doesn't support this legislation, and the Liberals, I suggest, are lukewarm on it. Another criticism I have heard is that you get boxed in if you have referendums, you don't have flexibility. As I indicated last time, if you want to lose flexibility you should run deficits, get huge debts and pay a lot of interest. Eventually your interest payments will become one of the biggest expenses you have. That's where we are right now, paying almost \$10 billion in interest. That's the third-highest expense, behind education and health care, which are the two big-ticket items. We spend more on public debt interest than virtually on any other ministry.

Another criticism is that it boxes people in and limits the power of the Legislature. Yes, it does. They can't go out and spend as freely as they used to, because they can't raise taxes as easily. One of the other important components of this legislation is that it forces integrity on to the political process. When I ran in 1995, we had just had a Liberal federal government take over. If you remember, they were going to get rid of the GST. That was a popular thing, and they said they were going to do it. What happened? Once they got into power, they forgot about what they said. Their word didn't mean anything. Yes, they said they were going to do it. Then they got into power, and all of a sudden they didn't do it. They probably helped us get elected, as a matter of fact, because it was just another example of the politics of the day, the cynicism, that you can say whatever you want, but in the end you're not going to do it.

Then we came along in 1995. We had a plan and we had commitments. When we got elected, no matter how difficult it was, no matter how many protestors we had, no matter how many phone calls we got, when we passed legislation, we looked back at our campaign platform, the Common Sense Revolution, and said, "This is our commitment, this is our word, this is what we're going to do," and then we did it. We brought integrity back into the political process. The federal Liberals probably helped us out by campaigning on the GST and then immediately retreating on it. To this day, six or seven years later, they haven't kept their word. They haven't gotten rid of the GST. They're not going to get rid of the GST. In fact, if there's anyplace where there should be referendum legislation, it should be with the federal government. Now they have a surplus and they're talking about spending it instead of reducing taxes, as the vast majority of the population wants.

How has this legislation worked elsewhere? I think it's too early to talk about Manitoba and some of the other provinces in Canada, because they've just passed it, so let's go to Switzerland. Switzerland has had it for a long time. Over the years, over the decades, especially in the 1970s and 1980s, it really didn't matter who was in power. It didn't matter if it was Conservatives, Liberals or the NDP. What was happening at all levels of government—municipal, provincial, federal—was that we were getting massive spending programs, massive deficits, massive debt. Yet the core problems were still there. The number of people on welfare doubled between 1985 and 1995, when we took over, despite all kinds of increases in spending there.

What happened in Switzerland during that time was that they ran very small deficits. They had virtually no debt. As a result, the Swiss franc became one of the strongest currencies the planet has ever known. Why did they run small deficits? Their spending on government as a percentage of GDP is now 30% now. That's virtually almost half of what we're spending in Canada, and why is that? Because in Switzerland they've had this legislation for a long time.

If you want to raise taxes in Switzerland, yeah, you can do it, but you've got to go to the public with a referendum. It's a difficult thing to do and it takes time, plus you have to get the people's OK. They give it sometimes, but a lot of times they don't. So before you go into a government spending spree in Switzerland, you've got to think about: "OK, I've got to raise taxes to get it. Am I going to be able to do it?" Just that very thought, the threat of "I have to go to a referendum," causes them to back off. The result has been that in Switzerland, with this legislation over the last 20 or 30 years, they don't have deficits, they don't have debt, they have one of the strongest economies in the world and that's where we're headed.

Mr Ernie Parsons (Prince Edward-Hastings): I'm pleased to enter into this debate. I'm intrigued by the title of this legislation. It assures me that the current government does in fact have a sense of humour. I recall many years ago when the government of Brian Mulroney introduced an act called the Seal Protection Act which in fact made it illegal to protect seals, and I thought there was some irony in that.

Since then we've seen this government follow the lead, and we've had the Tenant Protection Act which says that tenants don't really have protection; we've had the Ontarians with Disabilities Act which says that people with disabilities don't need any assistance. So this is fairly consistent.

It does also concern me that a government should not need to pass legislation to protect the people. It is the automatic role of the government to protect the people. I'm also intrigued by the legislation because it comes from a government that, before the last election, spent over \$100 million on ads that have now been ruled as clearly partisan. It's no wonder that the public is very cynical about politicians.

I find it a little difficult having this government introduce this legislation to protect taxpayers' money. I think back to the auditor last week, a neutral outside body that very clearly said that the government has not protected the taxpayer's money over the past year. We have comments that we have seen highway maintenance costs increase, rather than decrease, with privatization. We have seen, over the last four years, the average family debt in this province, the share of provincial debt, increase by \$8,000 per family. I would be intrigued if the public could have a referendum on the debt. We're talking about a referendum on taxes; let's talk about a referendum on the debt and how they want to deal with that.

During constituency week I was in Picton for a day and I met with constituents who were concerned that they in fact are not being protected by this government. They're concerned that the government is not protecting their health care. During the election, not having the money to put ads on TV such as the current government does, the Liberals went door to door and talked to people. It may appear that the motive is to get elected or re-elected, but the reality is it is a wonderful opportunity to talk to the individual citizens of this province and learn their concerns.

I talked to a gentleman who had made three overnight trips to Kingston for a heart operation. He went to Kingston, spent the night and in the morning he got sent home because there wasn't enough staffing for the hospital beds. He did that three times in a row and the fourth time, fortunately, got the operation. He commented to me that what he found particularly difficult was that each night, as he waited in hospital for that operation the next day that didn't happen, he watched the ads on television telling him what a wonderful health care system we have in Ontario. He said to me, "You know, it's a shame they couldn't have got one less ad and hired a nurse in Kingston so I could have had my operation." He and many others in my riding don't believe that they're being protected in their health care.

They're concerned that they're not being protected in their education system. We're seeing universities now talk about getting rid of the three-year program and replacing it with a four-year to adjust for the loss of one year in high school. That costs each student about \$15,000 for their tuition and living expenses if they are away from home. Our students need some protection.

When I first came to Toronto after being elected and walked down Yonge Street, I became convinced that the standard greeting in this city is, "Can you spare some loose change?" My constituents and people here believe that people in need of mental health services need protection.

People believe that they need protection from the anonymity of government. We have with all of the ministries a 1-800 no-answer line that they cannot get responses from when they call. They need to have access to their government. In fact, they're being protected away from having access to the government.

1700

They want to know, if the agenda is to protect the taxpayer, why the ministers' assistants' salaries were increased by 30%. I can't find anyone in my constituency who has had increases of 30%. How does doubling the size of the Premier's office protect the taxpayer?

If this government was serious about protecting the taxpayers, they would immediately bring about some changes in the Family Responsibility Office. The auditor's report was damning: 59% of the families that are cases with the Family Responsibility Office are being well served. We wouldn't accept 59% as a passing grade in anything else we do in life, and yet that seemed acceptable.

This government got elected in 1995 with a promise to create a revolution. They've done that, absolutely, without question. They also promised to introduce this legislation during their first term, and that brings me back to the sense of cynicism that exists among the public. The promise wasn't kept.

I can recall, as a youth in high school, reading the novel 1984. I now feel that, in this House, I'm living 1984. What is being said and what is reality don't mesh.

Instead of having a revolution that protected the taxpayer, and I refer back to the \$8,000 increase in debt per family, it simply produced a relentless assault on everyone who dared to question it or disagree with it.

The tax cuts on income tax have certainly been touted as wonderful, but you have to have income before you benefit from that tax cut. Statistics Canada says that the average single parent family in Ontario, headed by a female, has an income of \$14,000. Try to imagine living as a single person on \$14,000, let alone with children. It's impossible. What have the income tax cuts done for that individual? Absolutely nothing.

Would a sales tax cut have helped in some way? Certainly. But the cuts have been made and the tax advantages have been generated to favour wealthy taxpayers and big business. That's not to say that big business is inherently wrong, but we seem to be worshipping at the altar of big business, and we hear that big business does everything better than anyone else can do it. I think of big business when I think of Eaton's, Consumers Distributing, K mart, Canadian Airlines, and I think we need to have some respect for small business. With all of the touting of the savings that are being created by amalgamation, that we're hearing about, we need to recognize that amalgamation is in fact cutting small business out of the loop.

As we have the large amalgamated school boards and municipalities, the money is becoming of such substance on some contracts that our small business people can no longer compete. Our business people in the small towns that used to be near a municipal office or school board office have lost out on it.

We need to think about this province as being run as a family would be run. Perhaps that sounds corny, but I would suggest the same principles would apply to the operation of the province as to a family. I think of the

approach of my wife, Linda, and I to our family: We make commitments to our children and we make promises and they are kept. They are kept even when it hurts. But a promise is a promise. When this government talks about keeping a promise, the promise was not kept over the last four years.

We also believe that we need, as a family, to tell each other what is happening, what we are considering. We don't put trial balloons out, we don't leak things to the media to see how the public reacts; we tell each other what we're going to do and make a decision from that basis.

We don't speak down to our children. We recognize that not all knowledge rests in the adults in a family. I believe the people in Ontario have been spoken down to over the last four years. At times when input is being requested, the decisions have already been made, and that demeans the whole political process.

We need to recognize the strength of the collective decisions within the family; we need to do that within the province. We need to recognize that not all the expertise in Ontario resides in this room or on one side of this room.

We certainly, as a family, wouldn't spend our entire fortune on a new and unproven item, yet we see this government trying not a pilot project or a test project but, "Let's change every school in the province," and, "Let's change every community college," and, "Let's change every municipality."

Certainly, I have to support the concept of protecting the taxpayer, but I also have to look back at the last four years with some skepticism that this government can in fact do that.

Mr Agostino: I am pleased to join the debate as we're into third reading of this piece of legislation. I was listening with interest: The member for Oak Ridges, in his opening comments on behalf of the government, stated that this piece of legislation was long overdue. You've been in power for almost five years. It has taken you five years to bring in this piece of legislation, that you so fundamentally believe in and that in principle was so important to you. When you look at the hundreds of bills you've brought in, in the five years you've been in government, this was not one of them. So I question the commitment of this government. When you look at the track record, frankly, in the almost five year you've been in power, it is not a very good track record when it comes to dealing with the budget in this province.

We remind you that the last government in Ontario to balance the budget was the Liberal government in 1989-90, and the last time a Conservative government balanced the budget was in 1969-70. So the last balanced budget in Ontario was under a Liberal government in 1989-90. It has taken a Conservative government almost five years to bring in balanced budget legislation. To Liberals, this is not a new concept. We ran in 1995 with a commitment to balance the budget within four years, two years earlier than the Tories' commitment to it. In 1995 we ran on that commitment.

This government continues to talk about how wonderful they are in managing the finances of this province. Let me remind you that every single province, with the exception of British Columbia, has balanced its budget already—every single province. Your achievements when it comes to balancing budgets are on par with the great achievements of former Premier Glen Clark's government in British Columbia. If you want to match yourself on that level and consider yourself as the standard-bearers for that, go right ahead and do it. But clearly Ontario is now one of only two provinces in Canada that do not have a balanced budget.

This balanced budget legislation that is in front of us is not rocket science, folks; it's not some revolutionary idea. Frankly, we're behind there as well. Every single province, with the exceptions of Prince Edward Island, Newfoundland and British Columbia, has this type of legislation. This is nothing earth-shattering here. This is not some sort of great forward idea by the Harris government. Frankly, you're behind seven other provinces there as well. You continue to lag behind most other provinces (a) when it comes to balancing your budget as a province and (b) when it comes to bringing in balanced budget legislation.

The reality is the question of priorities for this government. When we look at its record, we see a government that has brought the debt of the province up \$21 billion, from \$88 billion when it took office. The previous NDP government took it from \$45 billion to \$88 billion. You took it from \$88 billion to \$109 billion. That is \$21 billion added to the provincial debt in four years, and estimations are it will go up another \$4 billion this year. That will be a total of \$25 billion added to the provincial debt by your government. You do all of this at the same time that you offer a tax cut.

1710

You talk about priorities—if you look at the evaluation of the credit rating agencies in Ontario, under a Liberal government it was AAA. Then under the NDP government it went from AA+ to AA, and then AA-. The Premier across the floor was jumping up and down and screaming daily about this rating when he was in opposition. Let me remind this House and the government that that rating has not changed since you've been in power, in great economic times, great growth across this province, across this country and across this continent, and the reason it has not changed is because you failed to deal with the debt, because your priority has continued to be a tax cut to your wealthy friends.

When you talk about how to best approach the issue of balanced budgets and what are the priorities, I would suggest to this government that clearly if your priority was to truly balance your budget earlier, to truly get the house in order earlier, you would have then forsaken the tax cut that you gave and applied that money to the budget of the province; and you would have, in a much shorter period of time, balanced the budget. You certainly would have been much further ahead rather than

simply being one of the last two provinces left in this country without balancing its budget.

If you look at the government's track record—and my colleague from Wentworth-Burlington spoke about commitments that they've kept and the fact that this is another government commitment they've kept—this is a government that runs on myth. It's a myth that they have built up through their own advertising, through using hundreds of millions of dollars, leading up to an election, on propaganda, on blatant partisan political advertising with taxpayers' dollars, but the reality is a little different than that.

They talk about keeping promises. I remember the Premier clearly promising not to close any hospitals across the province. We certainly have seen what has happened to that promise: not kept, a betrayal of the people of Ontario. Remember the Premier speaking three days before the election, saying that they identified the cuts without cutting one cent out of the environment? That was three days before the election in 1995. The reality is that they've cut well over \$100 million; I think it's in the range of about \$120 million out of the Ministry of the Environment's budget in this province. The reality is that they have gotten rid of almost half the staff who used to work in the Ministry of the Environment. The reality is that today we're no longer able to enforce environmental standards across Ontario. Today we've become the laughingstock of North America when it comes to environmental protection. Today in this province we are the second-worst polluter in North America, next to Texas. That is the reality of the impact of your cuts on real Ontarians in their health care and the protection of their environment.

We also look at mixed-up priorities. What was this government's priority when they took office in 1995? They decided, first of all, they were going to beat up welfare recipients. They were going to cut 22% out of welfare recipients, and you ended up cutting 22% of the benefits that 500,000 children at that time were relying on for support. When you took office, half a million children in this province were relying on that for support, and you cut their parents, often single parents, often people who were struggling. You took away to a great degree their ability to continue to feed those kids, to get a coat for the winter, to house them properly, to get shoes for those kids—basic necessities of life. But this government felt it was a priority to beat up welfare recipients with that.

Then you brought in this crazy thing called workfare that supposedly was going to change everything, that was going to bring all these people back to work. The reality of what you did there was spend a ton of money to simply rename and rejig a few programs, but the reality was that most of the programs that were in place were effective, were training people, were working with people. But you had to market this a little differently. You had to spend hundreds of millions of dollars to go out there and undo everything and set up your workfare scheme, which we now see has been a total failure, with a

small percentage of recipients involved in the so-called workfare programs.

Clearly, when you look at a government that claims to be the great fiscal manager, great at dealing with the finances and the economics of this province, let me suggest to you that the reality is much different than the fiction and the myths that the government members and their advertising continue to tell us.

When you look at an example of priorities—I know the federal Liberals have been brought up a number of times today, but they moved much quicker than this province has to balance its budget. They moved very quickly because they've realized the priority was balancing their budget rather than borrowing more money for tax cuts. The Tories believed that it was important to borrow money to give tax cuts to their wealthy friends, while they were ignoring the accumulated debt in this province. Why did it take them six years to balance the budget? Why are we the second-last province of this country to balance the budget? The great fiscal manager is knocked out of the House because they believed the tax cuts were the priority. We believe that there is a time and place for tax cuts, but there has to be an order to do that in. This party and my leader, Dalton McGuinty, believe very clearly that the time for tax cuts is only after you've ensured you have adequate funding for a proper health care system, which this government has abandoned completely.

Now we see Premier Harris is starting to show his true colours when he aligns himself with Premier Ralph Klein, talking about a two-tier health care system. He has destroyed the health care system of this province to the point where he now believes that he needs to bring in a two-tier health care. He did not distance himself from the comments made by Premier Klein with regard to private hospitals and private health care in the province of Alberta. This is the reality.

Whatever this government does is bent on what the American pollsters tell them, every single action. When you look at it, they've destroyed a great deal of the stability in the health care system with their blind cuts, with their closing of hospitals, with their destruction commission. You now have seen that the auditor has told you what we in the opposition have told you for the last five years: that the real cost will be double what you've estimated with this restructuring. You blew that one big time. They've destroyed the basic fundamentals of public education in this province with their massive cuts, and we see there's more to come.

Those are Liberal priorities, education and health care, not the priorities of this government, and then you balance the budget. Only after that do you look at the issue of tax cuts, but those priorities must come first. You don't seem to understand that. You seem to think it's OK to continue giving tax cuts while health care goes under, while education goes under and while the debt in this province continues to grow.

This government has come Johnny-come-lately to balance budgets in this province, in this country. As I

said, BC is one of the other two provinces that have not accomplished that. What this legislation today does is, it brings Ontario into line with most other provinces. We'll support this legislation because we said in 1995 we'd bring in a balanced budget within four years. We believe in that. The government has a responsibility to look after tax dollars and do it properly. I certainly hope the government will learn some lessons from the horrible mistakes they've made in the last four years and not repeat those mistakes in the next four years.

Mr Howard Hampton (Kenora-Rainy River): I enjoy the opportunity to take part in this debate because once again we're seeing all sorts of twisting by the Conservative Party and even more twisting and turning by the Liberal Party. The Liberals want to have it both ways: They want to try to say that they oppose what the government is doing here, but when it comes down to a vote, they're going to vote for it. I want to explore why both of them are wrong. I want to be very pointed about what's really going on here.

What the government has done over the last four and half years is this: They have reduced taxes for the most well-off people. The income tax is a progressive tax, so the more income you have, the more taxes you pay, and this government has gone after the income tax and cut it. The highest-income people in Ontario are enjoying a tax reduction.

But on the other side of the equation, this government has gone out, and every tax, every fee that affects lower-, modest- and middle-income families, they've raised with a vengeance.

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If you are a family and you have a son or daughter in university, this government has increased the tuition fees by \$1,500 a year, enough to wipe out any so-called reduction in income taxes for the majority of families. If you have a son or daughter in college, they've increased the tuition fees by \$900 a year. Those are tax increases.

For senior citizens, they've gone after prescription medicine. They've placed prescription medicine copayment taxes on any prescription. It means that senior citizens, in many cases, are paying \$400 or \$500 a year in prescription medicine copayment taxes. Most senior citizens didn't get an income tax reduction because they have modest incomes, but they're sure being hit with the increases in prescription medicine copayment fees.

Then there is the motor vehicle registration fee. It used to be that people in northern Ontario did not have to pay a motor vehicle registration fee, to offset the chronically higher gas prices. Under this government, oh, no, get that motor vehicle registration fee up there. So for most families, another \$100 tax.

Then there are fishing licence fees. This is the government that has almost doubled fishing licence fees; again, a tax which hits the average person who maybe can't afford to have a condo in the Caribbean or to holiday in Hawaii so they like to go fishing in the summer. This government is going after them.

They have almost doubled hunting licence fees.

Remote cottage lots: Some people who, again, can't afford the condo in Florida or the luxurious vacation will have something called a remote cabin. There used to be a tax on that of about \$130 a year. This government has increased it by 400% and 500%. Ordinary people who go to these remote cabins, which have no road, no sewer, no water, no electricity, no services whatsoever, got an announcement in the last two months that this government is going to increase their annual tax from \$130 to, in some cases, \$550.

That's what this government has done. They have reduced taxes for the highest-income people in the province and then, in every single case, they have increased the taxes on ordinary people.

The announcement of the minister responsible for Management Board last week said that the government is going to reduce investments in child care and in college and university students by another \$300 million a year. What he didn't say is that the government is going to increase a whole bunch of fees, a whole bunch of taxes, that hit at lower- and modest-income families again. A vulnerable child or a vulnerable adult who is dealing with the public trustee is being hit with a whole new list of fees—taxes—on vulnerable people, people who have low incomes.

People who have to deal with the Family Responsibility Office, although there is absolute irresponsibility in that office, are being hit with a whole new list of fees. People who want to appeal their property taxes in this province are hit again by a whole new set of fees by this government.

Who do these fees strike at? They strike at lower-income, modest-income and middle-income families. The history of this government is, if you've got a high income, this government has had a tax break for you. If you're a middle-income family, a modest-income family, a low-income family, this government has gone after you with a vengeance. They've increased every fee and every tax that impacts on you, every one they could find.

Now, with this bill, this government wants to cement in place this unfair and unbalanced situation: Tax cuts for the well-off and a long list of tax increases for middle-, modest- and lower-income families. That's what they want to try to cement in place with this bill.

And you know what? The Liberals are going to support them. The Liberal leader and the Liberal caucus are going to stand up and vote for this unfair, unbalanced and unprincipled approach to income distribution and taxation in the province.

It goes beyond this, because in order to finance their tax cut for the well-off, this government went out there and attacked health care. They went out there and attacked education. They went out there and attacked environmental protection, they went out there and attacked not-for-profit and affordable housing, they went out there and downloaded in a most unfair way on to municipalities. That's what they've done.

Just to give you an example of some of the things that are going on, of how unbalanced this has become, it used

to be that Ontario had one of the better post-secondary education systems in the country. We used to have a good college and university system. Today in Canada, Ontario invests less in its colleges and universities on a per-person basis than any other province in the country. Even poor provinces like Newfoundland, Prince Edward Island and Saskatchewan invest more in their colleges and universities on a per-capita basis than Ontario does. Ontario ranks dead last. In the time of a knowledge economy, at a time when investment in education is more important for our economic and social future than ever, the Harris government is headed in the opposite direction: deinvest in education.

It is even more dramatic than that. If you actually compare Ontario with jurisdictions in the United States, Ontario would be next to the bottom there. The only states that would rank below Ontario would be Vermont and New Hampshire, both of which have a lot of private universities and private colleges and therefore they've never fully developed their public post-secondary institutions.

We in Ontario, if you look at it in a North American context, invest so little now in post-secondary education—colleges and universities—that we rank below American states that have chronic literacy problems: Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana. Even Arkansas invests more in post-secondary education, in the future of its workforce, than Ontario does now. That is the imbalance this government has created. That is the education deficit this government has created. Now they want to put that education deficit in stone. They want to make it impossible for governments in the future to address that education imbalance. You know what? The Liberals agree with them. They're prepared to vote for this sham.

We have in this province now a health deficit, an education deficit, an environmental deficit, an infrastructure deficit and a social deficit measured by the terrible shortage of affordable housing that we see happening. This government wants to enshrine in stone those education deficits, health deficits, environmental deficits, infrastructure deficits and social deficits, and the Liberals are going to vote for it. The Liberals are going to support a totally unbalanced situation, that says the government's going to fudge the books to give the appearance of a financial balance and ignore all of these meaningful deficits that impact on the lives of real people. The Liberals are going to vote for that.

We are not going to vote for this sham. We recognize that the issue that touches real people, that has meaning for real families out there, is to have a good health care system, to make the health care investments.

If we're going to prosper in the future and do well in the knowledge economy, we have to address the education deficit.

Ontario has the second-worst environmental record now in North America. If we don't address the environmental deficit, that is going to come back to bite us in a dozen different ways.

If we don't address the issue of homelessness and the fact that there is less and less affordable housing, the costs in terms of social dislocation, the increased costs in the health care system, the costs for families and people are going to grow. We believe we must address those real deficits and not play this financial sham game.

I say it is a financial sham game because there is lots of evidence on the record of how shallow, how hollow, how superficial this legislation is. This legislation is actually based on the Manitoba legislation. A Conservative government was in power in Manitoba for 10½ years. They brought in so-called balanced budget legislation. If you read the clause-by-clause of this legislation, it is almost an exact duplicate of Manitoba's.

1730

Well, the Conservatives were just voted out of government in Manitoba. One of the things the incoming government did is they brought in an accounting firm to look at what the true state of the books was. A private sector accounting firm came in and looked at the state of the finances in the province of Manitoba after the Conservatives were the government, and what do you think they found? There was no balanced budget; there was a deficit in excess of \$300 million. That is with the very legislation that this government says is supposed to protect taxpayers. It didn't do a thing in Manitoba. What it meant was that the Conservative government went around and hid something over there and hid something over there and hid something else over here—the same thing this government is going to do.

The Liberals in Nova Scotia passed this kind of legislation. They passed legislation that is very similar to this legislation. The Liberals have just been voted out as government in Nova Scotia. What did they find now that the Liberals are gone? The Liberals in Nova Scotia, despite passing so-called balanced budget legislation, used several types of financing called off-book financing which in fact leave Nova Scotia with a \$400-million deficit.

Interjections.

Mr Hampton: Some of the Conservatives are laughing, but I don't want you to laugh too hard, because what's the first thing the Conservative government did in Nova Scotia now that they are the new government? They brought in legislation exempting themselves from the balanced budget legislation: phony, shallow, hollow, completely superficial. That's why we can't support this nonsense.

Let me tell you what I think this government should be doing. They should be addressing the real deficits out there. They should be addressing the health care deficit, the education deficit, the environmental deficit, the social deficit—those things which impact so dreadfully on the lives of people. This government should be addressing those.

How serious is this? Let me give you a measurement. What we know from some of the economic studies that have been done is that in the past couple of years inequality has grown worse and worse in this province.

We should expect that. When the government is prepared to give a substantial income tax cut to the well-off but then increases all the user fees, tuition fees, copayment fees for lower- and modest- and middle-income families, we would expect some imbalance. That's exactly what is happening.

There's a study called *The Growing Gap*, and it's by the Centre for Social Justice. This is what the study shows: It finds that the proportion of middle-income families with children fell from 60% of the population to 44% of the population. It found that the incomes of the 10% at the top are now 314 times higher than the 10% at the bottom. It found that in 1973 the incomes of the 10% at the top were only 21 times the incomes of the 10% at the bottom, but they are now 314 times. That inequality can't be allowed to grow. But this government is saying that it wants to not only grow that inequality but cement that inequality by putting in place this kind of legislation.

Mr David Christopherson (Hamilton West): And the Liberals like that idea.

Mr Hampton: And the Liberals are going to support it.

We saw some other tax breaks with this government. We saw two weeks ago the government come forward and say that they're prepared to subsidize millionaire NHL hockey franchises in Ontario. NHL hockey players' salaries have inflated by 480% in the last nine years, and this government is now going to subsidize that. Once again, the Liberals are in favour of that. The Liberals are saying that they would give a tax break for that. That's the kind of thing this government wants to cement in place.

I want to challenge the government. If you believe that, before governments can change taxes and bring balance to the tax system back into place, referenda are necessary, then call a referendum today on giving NHL millionaires a tax break. Hold a referendum today on that.

But again, to show how phony this legislation is, this legislation would not provide for a referendum on giving millionaire NHL hockey players and franchises a tax break, even though we know that if you're going to give NHL franchises a tax break, someone else in the tax system will either have to pick up the tax increase to off-balance it or the government will have to increase the health deficit, the education deficit, the environmental deficit, the social deficit. This government talks a good line, but here they are, and they're going to fork over millions of dollars to people who already have had a 480% increase in their incomes in the last nine years and there's not going to be any referendum on that, no referendum on that tax change.

Mr Christopherson: How do the Liberals feel about that?

Mr Hampton: The Liberals support that. The Liberals, again, think that's a great idea.

If the government wanted to be serious about this issue, they would look at a couple of things that I think are germane to the debate.

We all know that the economy moves in a cycle. You can have periods where the economy booms, and then you will have periods where the economy doesn't boom, with a recession or, worst of all, a depression. We know that those business cycles generally work over about a five-year period—sometimes a little less, sometimes a little more, but generally over a five-year period you'll have an economic cycle.

We also know that when governments try to sustain health care and education and environmental protection during an economic downturn, governments will very likely run into deficits. But on the other side of the equation, we know that when the economy is booming, governments generally take in more tax revenue than they usually expect.

Is the government talking about balancing the budget over an economic cycle? Are they talking about putting in place some balance between the downturn in the economy and the upturn in the economy? No, not at all. They're not interested in trying to balance that economic or business cycle.

I would say to you, if you had some proposals here to balance the budget over the economic cycle, then I would think you're serious. Then I would think you're sincere. Then I would think you are really interested in the interests of taxpayers and the interests of citizens across the province. But you are bringing in the same phony legislation that was flouted in Manitoba by the Conservative government, was flouted by the Liberals in Nova Scotia and is now being flouted by the Conservatives in Nova Scotia. It was phony in those two instances and it's going to be phony here.

If this were a serious debate about this issue, then I would be prepared to offer the government a long list of suggestions about how we might be prepared to deal with this, but it is evident from the comments I've made and the comments some of my colleagues have made that the government is not serious here. This is another propaganda piece by this government, a government that is prepared to offer up the appearance of financial balance while ignoring the education deficit, the health-care deficit, the environmental deficit, the social deficit and the infrastructure deficit that a government which comes after them is going to have to deal with. That is shameful.

This is a government that has created a most unbalanced tax system, has given a tax cut to the well off but has increased every single tax and user fee that impacts on low- or modest- and middle-income families, and now they want to freeze that in place. All of that is shameful, but what is most shameful of all is that Liberals want to support this. Liberals want to go out there and say that they'd be prepared to do something about these problems, but in fact they're preparing to support this sham by the government, this propaganda piece by the government.

1740

I want to draw to your attention the comments that some others have made about this sham the government

is putting forward. I want to refer to the Kitchener-Waterloo Record of December 16, 1998, where they say, "Premier Mike Harris can say he means well by introducing his taxpayer protection bill, but he is using what should be an unnecessary tool in a democracy." That's the Kitchener-Waterloo Record.

Then the London Free Press, December 20, 1998, when this was first introduced, "On examination, it is little more than political smoke and mirrors."

Then there's the Toronto Star, December 16, 1998:

"The next government and all subsequent governments should be entitled to the same flexibility that Harris's government has enjoyed. There was no law preventing him from cutting taxes at a time when the provincial deficit was at an all-time high.

"If the man wants a statue, let the party faithful build one. But it's wrong for him to try to enshrine himself forever in our provincial law."

There's Professor Brian Tanguay of Wilfrid Laurier University: "It creates a patchwork system where you have some areas doing just fine and other areas in dire straits. You can see that's what will happen—it will further widen the gap between the haves and have-nots."

Then there's Ted Carmichael, senior economist at J.P. Morgan Securities, quoted in the Globe and Mail, December 30, 1998:

"I think it's wrong for Canada to say now that we can never go back into deficit This is suggesting we should take a reasonable approach to fiscal policy. We've gained ourselves some leeway. We can run a modest fiscal deficit if we believe the economy is coming under some fairly heavy downward pressure." But what this government is doing makes that impossible.

Then there's Steve Murphy, economist for the Institute for Policy Analysis, quoted in the Globe and Mail, December 30, 1998:

"You can't continually run deficits, but the idea is that in bad times you run a deficit, while in good times you run a surplus You think back to the Great Depression, when there was this idea that you cut back on spending when times are bad. If some world event happens and all hell breaks loose and growth slumps off the table, you can now envisage people in power saying, 'We have to cut spending, because we don't want to run a deficit.'" To quote Mr Steve Murphy, "That's what's scary."

To sum up, this legislation isn't balanced at all; it is most unbalanced. It deals with the budget deficit but says nothing to make the government eliminate the health deficit, the education deficit, the environment deficit, the deficit in our services in our communities. It certainly won't stop the Harris government from continuing to increase user fees, copayment fees, administrative fees, continuing to jack up tuition. All of these are taxes, and all of those taxes impact the most on lower-, modest- and middle-income families.

We all agree that governments should live within their means, but this legislation would mean the next bad recession in Ontario, whenever it comes, could devastate health care, education and other important public necessi-

ties, even more than this government has devastated them already.

For this reason, we will not be supporting this legislation, and we say shame on Conservatives and Liberals for supporting legislation which has been proven in Nova Scotia and proven in Manitoba to be hollow, to be shallow, to be superficial and to provide absolutely no protection to taxpayers and no protection for the services of health care and education and public necessities and a clean environment that people need. We will be opposing, and we insist that what people want is legislation that deals with all of the deficits, not just some superficial treatment of a financial deficit.

Mr Christopherson: Just to add to the comments of my leader, further evidence that this bill is not going to do at all what the government purports is clearly found by looking at the language that's in the legislation. You reserve for yourself the right to decide, for instance, what the language would be around a referendum question, and you go so far as to include that under no condition can anyone or any entity take the decision of the government to any court or any tribunal for any kind of review.

Come on, give us a break. My leader has pointed out that this is a sham. If anything it substantiates that alone, that language, in my opinion would do it. Not only that, but I have some serious doubts about what the real intent is here. My leader, Howard Hampton, has clearly pointed out what the experience is in other provinces. I can share with this House that there are studies I've referred to in second reading debate that show that American states have made a cottage industry out of finding ways around their own balanced budget legislation. Why? Because of the very cycles that the previous speaker talked about and the fact that there are those trends. You cannot just, no matter how much some of you in this House may think it's OK, one day suddenly send out an edict that says, "Chop \$700 million, \$800 million, \$1 billion out of health care, education, environmental protection, social services" and not expect that's going to cause severe damage to those systems.

Yet, that's exactly what's going to happen, because the only escape clause you've put in there is where there's a 5% reduction in year-over-year revenue in Ontario. The last time that happened, and the only time in the modern economic era that has happened, was in the midst of the deep recession of the early 1990s—to be specific, 1992. That's the only year. That would mean that if you took this legislation and superimposed it on to that time period, which by the way is the worst economic recession North America has ever seen since the Depression of the 1930s, in every other year except 1992 you would have been slashing and burning at a higher rate than you already have in this term of office to bring that budget into balance, as you call it, totally wreaking havoc in our health care system and in our education system, further havoc than you've already caused.

Either way, Ontarians lose. Either this thing is a total sham and you're going to find a way around it because it

doesn't make any common sense—I remind you of those words—or you're going to use it as a shield, and when you want to make more cuts but can't find the political reason to do it, you've got it built into this legislation.

It is quite disconcerting to see that the official opposition in the name of the Liberals feels that somehow this is good legislation and therefore they're going to support it. The fact is that they think they're on to a populist position because that's the way they see you having looked at this. I say with all sincerity that the only ones who are looking at the long-term economic, health, education and public services impacts are the nine New Democrats. Again, that is why we strongly reject this legislation and we intend to put our vote on the record by forcing a divided vote and ensuring that both the government and the Liberals, those who bother to show up for this one, who have the courage of their convictions to be here and vote, are on the record that they thought it was a good idea, because we know the day is going to come when the Liberals will rue supporting the Tories on this. This is bad legislation for the people of Ontario.

The Acting Speaker: Further debate?

Pursuant to the order of the House dated November 17, 1999, I am required to interrupt the proceedings and put the question on the motion.

Mr Klees has moved third reading of Bill 7. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour will say "aye."

All those opposed will say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

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

I would read the following:

"Dear Mr Speaker:

"Pursuant to standing order 28(h), I would like to request that the vote on Bill 7 be deferred until November 23, 1999.

"Thank you for your assistance in this matter."

Accordingly, the vote will be deferred.

It being close to 6 of the clock, this House stands adjourned until 6:45.

The House adjourned at 1751.

Evening meeting reported in volume B.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO
ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

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Constituency Circonscription	Member/Party Député(e) / Parti	Constituency Circonscription	Member/Party Député(e) / Parti
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Barrie-Simcoe-Bradford	Tascona, Joseph N. (PC)	Hamilton East / -Est	Agostino, Dominic (L)
Beaches-East York	Lankin, Frances (ND)	Hamilton Mountain	Bountrogianni, Marie (L)
Bramalea-Gore-Malton-Springdale	Gill, Raminder (PC)	Hamilton West / -Ouest	Christopherson, David (ND)
Brampton Centre / -Centre	Spina, Joseph (PC)	Hastings-Frontenac-Lennox and Addington	Dombrowsky, Leona (L)
Brampton West-Mississauga / Brampton-Ouest-Mississauga	Clement, Hon / L'hon Tony (PC) Minister of the Environment, Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing / ministre de l'Environnement, ministre des Affaires municipales et du Logement	Huron-Bruce	Johns, Hon / L'hon Helen (PC) Minister of Citizenship, Culture and Recreation, minister responsible for seniors and women / ministre des Affaires civiques, de la Culture et des Loisirs, ministre déléguée aux Affaires des personnes âgées et à la Condition féminine
Brant	Levac, Dave (L)	Kenora-Rainy River	Hampton, Howard (ND) Leader of the New Democratic Party / chef du Nouveau Parti démocratique
Broadview-Greenwood	Churley, Marilyn (ND)	Kingston and the Islands / Kingston et les îles	Gerretsen, John (L)
Bruce-Grey	Murdoch, Bill (PC)	Kitchener Centre / -Centre	Wettlaufer, Wayne (PC)
Burlington	Jackson, Hon / L'hon Cameron (PC) Minister of Tourism / ministre du Tourisme	Kitchener-Waterloo	Witmer, Hon / L'hon Elizabeth (PC) Minister of Health and Long-Term Care / ministre de la Santé et des Soins de longue durée
Cambridge	Martiniuk, Gerry (PC)	Lambton-Kent-Middlesex	Beaubien, Marcel (PC)
Carleton-Gloucester	Coburn, Brian (PC)	Lanark-Carleton	Sterling, Hon / L'hon Norman W. (PC) Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, government House leader / ministre des Affaires intergouvernementales, leader parlementaire du gouvernement
Chatham-Kent Essex	Hoy, Pat (L)	Leeds-Grenville	Runciman, Hon / L'hon Robert W. (PC) Minister of Consumer and Com- mercial Relations / ministre de la Consommation et du Commerce
Davenport	Ruprecht, Tony (L)	London North Centre / London-Centre-Nord	Cunningham, Hon / L'hon Dianne (PC) Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities / ministre de la Formation et des Collèges et Universités
Don Valley East / -Est	Caplan, David (L)	London West / -Ouest	Wood, Bob (PC)
Don Valley West / -Ouest	Turnbull, Hon / L'hon David (PC) Minister of Transportation / ministre des Transports	London-Fanshawe	Mazzilli, Frank (PC)
Dufferin-Peel-Wellington-Grey	Tilson, David (PC)	Markham	Tsubouchi, Hon / L'hon David H. (PC) Solicitor General / solliciteur général
Durham	O'Toole, John R. (PC)	Mississauga Centre / -Centre	Sampson, Hon / L'hon Rob (PC) Minister of Correctional Services / ministre des Services correctionnels
Eglinton-Lawrence	Colle, Mike (L)	Mississauga East / -Est	DeFaria, Carl (PC)
Elgin-Middlesex-London	Peters, Steve (L)	Mississauga South / -Sud	Marland, Hon / L'hon Margaret (PC) Minister without Portfolio (Children) / ministre sans portefeuille (Enfance)
Erie-Lincoln	Hudak, Hon / L'hon Tim (PC) Minister of Northern Development and Mines / ministre du Développement du Nord et des Mines		
Essex	Crozier, Bruce (L)		
Etobicoke Centre / -Centre	Stockwell, Hon / L'hon Chris (PC) Minister of Labour / ministre du Travail		
Etobicoke North / -Nord	Hastings, John (PC)		
Etobicoke-Lakeshore	Kells, Morley (PC)		
Glengarry-Prescott-Russell	Lalonde, Jean-Marc (L)		
Guelph-Wellington	Elliott, Brenda (PC)		
Haldimand-Norfolk-Brant	Barrett, Toby (PC)		
Haliburton-Victoria-Brock	Hodgson, Hon / L'hon Chris (PC) Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet / président du Conseil de gestion		

Constituency Circonscription	Member/Party Député(e) / Parti	Constituency Circonscription	Member/Party Député(e) / Parti
Mississauga West / -Ouest	Snobelen, Hon / L'hon John (PC) Minister of Natural Resources / ministre des Richesses naturelles	Scarborough Centre / -Centre	Mushinski, Marilyn (PC)
Nepean-Carleton	Baird, Hon / L'hon John R. (PC) Minister of Community and Social Services, minister responsible for francophone affairs / ministre des Services sociaux et communautaires, ministre délégué aux Affaires francophones	Scarborough East / -Est	Gilchrist, Steve (PC)
Niagara Centre / -Centre	Kormos, Peter (ND)	Scarborough Southwest / -Sud-Ouest	Newman, Dan (PC)
Niagara Falls	Maves, Bart (PC)	Scarborough-Agincourt	Phillips, Gerry (L)
Nickel Belt	Martel, Shelley (ND)	Scarborough-Rouge River	Curling, Alvin (L)
Nipissing	Harris, Hon / L'hon Michael D. (PC) Premier and President of the Executive Council / premier ministre et président du Conseil exécutif	Simcoe North / -Nord	Dunlop, Garfield (PC)
Northumberland	Galt, Doug (PC)	Simcoe-Grey	Wilson, Hon / L'hon Jim (PC) Minister of Energy, Science and Technology / ministre de l'Énergie, des Sciences et de la Technologie
Oak Ridges	Klees, Hon / L'hon Frank (PC) Minister without Portfolio / ministre sans portefeuille	St Catharines	Bradley, James J. (L)
Oakville	Carr, Hon / L'hon Gary (PC) Speaker / Président	St Paul's	Bryant, Michael (L)
Oshawa	Ouellette, Jerry J. (PC)	Stoney Creek	Clark, Brad (PC)
Ottawa Centre / -Centre	Patten, Richard (L)	Stormont-Dundas- Charlottenburgh	Cleary, John C. (L)
Ottawa South / -Sud	McGuinty, Dalton (L) Leader of the Opposition / chef de l'opposition	Sudbury	Bartolucci, Rick (L)
Ottawa West-Nepean / Ottawa-Ouest-Nepean	Guzzo, Garry J. (PC)	Thornhill	Molinari, Tina R. (PC)
Ottawa-Vanier	Boyer, Claudette (L)	Thunder Bay-Atikokan	McLeod, Lyn (L)
Oxford	Hardeman, Hon / L'hon Ernie (PC) Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs / ministre de l'Agriculture, de l'Alimentation et des Affaires rurales	Thunder Bay- Superior North / -Nord	Gravelle, Michael (L)
Parkdale-High Park	Kennedy, Gerard (L)	Timiskaming-Cochrane	Ramsay, David (L)
Parry Sound-Muskoka	Eves, Hon / L'hon Ernie L. (PC) Deputy Premier, Minister of Finance / vice-premier ministre, ministre des Finances	Timmins-James Bay / Timmins-Baie James	Bisson, Gilles (ND)
Perth-Middlesex	Johnson, Bert (PC)	Toronto Centre-Rosedale / Toronto-Centre-Rosedale	Smitherman, George (L)
Peterborough	Stewart, R. Gary (PC)	Trinity-Spadina	Marchese, Rosario (ND)
Pickering-Ajax-Uxbridge	Ecker, Hon / L'hon Janet (PC) Minister of Education / ministre de l'Éducation	Vaughan-King-Aurora	Palladini, Hon / L'hon Al (PC) Minister of Economic Development and Trade / ministre du Développement économique et du Commerce
Prince Edward-Hastings	Parsons, Ernie (L)	Waterloo-Wellington	Arnott, Ted (PC)
Renfrew-Nipissing- Pembroke	Conway, Sean G. (L)	Wentworth-Burlington	Skarica, Toni (PC)
Sarnia-Lambton	Di Cocco, Caroline (L)	Whitby-Ajax	Flaherty, Hon / L'hon Jim (PC) Attorney General, minister responsible for native affairs / procureur général, ministre délégué aux Affaires autochtones
Sault Ste Marie	Martin, Tony (ND)	Willowdale	Young, David (PC)
		Windsor West / -Ouest	Pupatello, Sandra (L)
		Windsor-St Clair	Duncan, Dwight (L)
		York Centre / -Centre	Kwinter, Monte (L)
		York North / -Nord	Munro, Julia (PC)
		York South-Weston / York-Sud-Weston	Cordiano, Joseph (L)
		York West / -Ouest	Sergio, Mario (L)

A list arranged by members' surnames and including all responsibilities of each member appears in the first and last issues of each session and on the first Monday of each month.

Une liste alphabétique des noms des députés, comprenant toutes les responsabilités de chaque député, figure dans les premier et dernier numéros de chaque session et le premier lundi de chaque mois.

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Jean-Marc Lalonde, Jerry J. Ouellette, R. Gary Stewart, Joseph N.
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**Regulations and private bills /
Règlements et projets de loi privés**

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Vice-Chair / Vice-Président: Garfield Dunlop
Gilles Bisson, Claudette Boyer, Brian Coburn,
Garfield Dunlop, Raminder Gill, Pat Hoy,
Frances Lankin, David Young
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