



**Legislative Assembly
of Ontario**

First Session, 37th Parliament

**Assemblée législative
de l'Ontario**

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**Official Report
of Debates
(Hansard)**

**Journal
des débats
(Hansard)**

Wednesday 1 December 1999

Mercredi 1^{er} décembre 1999

Speaker
Honourable Gary Carr

Président
L'honorable Gary Carr

Clerk
Claude L. DesRosiers

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Claude L. DesRosiers

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Wednesday 1 December 1999

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Mercredi 1^{er} décembre 1999

*The House met at 1334.
Prayers.*

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

CITY OF TORONTO

Mr Tony Ruprecht (Davenport): There is a movement taking shape to support Mayor Lastman's proposal to create a new province, the province of Toronto. The Toronto Star poll showed 54% of Torontonians as being in favour of this new province. Now there is an organized movement in place which has hired a constitutional lawyer, created a Web site and is raising funds.

Just why would people want to create a new province? Citizens found out that this government will cut another \$309 million, which will directly affect Toronto's poor. These cuts will directly affect student loans, legal aid, social housing, social assistance and child care. Toronto, in short, will be left holding the bag. In his lucid article, Michael Valpy from the Globe and Mail wrote:

"Minister Hodgson said the extra costs being off-loaded on Toronto and other municipalities—but mainly Toronto—will be offset by the savings in reduced welfare caseloads.

"This overlooks the fact that Toronto has been setting aside its savings for items like creating more child care spaces on its own—without provincial help."

We should not be surprised when residents of Toronto are simply fed up and wish to create the new province of Toronto.

FIREFIGHTERS

Mr Dan Newman (Scarborough Southwest): Professional firefighters play a critical role in the safety and well-being of our communities. We take for granted that when a fire occurs, they will be there. Every year, their heroic efforts in dealing with fire situations save countless lives, injuries and untold millions of dollars in property damage. In many cases they must put their own lives in jeopardy in order to serve our citizens. Unfortunately, over the years many have had to make the ultimate sacrifice.

It is important to note that the key role which professional firefighters play in our community does not stop at their actual response to fires. They are essential in educating the public on safety and fire prevention through

ongoing programs and community activities. Every year, their highly visible and selfless efforts on behalf of the Muscular Dystrophy Association of Canada result in steady progress towards the treatment and eventual cure of this hideous disease.

I had the privilege of meeting this morning with Keith Hamilton and Fred LeBlanc of the Ontario Professional Fire Fighters Association to discuss some of their concerns. Like any group within society, professional firefighters and governments do not always agree on every issue. Although we share many common goals and values in our efforts at working together in our communities, it is important to ensure that there is ongoing, open and frank dialogue at all times.

However, there is no disagreement as to the contribution these courageous men and women make to our society each and every day of the year. It is something for which we should all be very grateful and very proud. On behalf of my constituents in Scarborough Southwest, I want to thank them for their tireless efforts on our behalf.

OAK RIDGES MORAINÉ

Mr Mike Colle (Eglinton-Lawrence): I rise in the House today to make the Legislature aware that that the Oak Ridges moraine is being bulldozed as we speak. The government has to stop listening to developers and start listening to local residents and experts.

David Burnett, a planner from the region of Peel, says there are currently 53 development proposals for areas on the moraine which would result in a tripling of the population living on the moraine by the year 2021. He concludes that there is an "urgent need for provincial involvement in a long-term strategy for protection and management of the moraine."

1340

On Monday, when the bulldozers began razing the Jefferson Forest in Richmond Hill, the Richmond Hill Naturalists, led by Gloria Marsh, were there to try and stop the destruction of the moraine. Concerned citizens all over the moraine are asking the government to step in and protect wildlife and nature. This government refused to listen to its own ministry experts, to local residents, to environmentalists and planners who are telling this government that uncontrolled development is going to ruin the Oak Ridges moraine.

Listen to what the government's own report says:

"Urban expansion, with its associated extensions of sewer and water pipelines and development proposals in

sensitive areas, is posing significant threats to the long-term protection of the moraine's important water recharge functions. In particular, approved and proposed development in significant portions of the headwaters ... is creating a real possibility that the potential to maintain clean water will be permanently lost."

The government's own report is saying you're not going to be able to have clean water from Lake Simcoe to Lake Ontario. They're saying, do something. Don't just listen to developers. Protect the moraine.

CANADA HEALTH AND SOCIAL TRANSFER

Mr Ted Arnott (Waterloo-Wellington): Listening to the Treasurer's Economic Outlook yesterday, I was pleased to hear that debt retirement, job creation and a soaring economy will continue for Ontario into the next millennium.

Like the Premier and the Minister of Health, I believe it is crucial—now more than ever—that the federal government resume its historical role in providing investments that are crucial to a better quality of life for all Ontarians.

I specifically refer to the federal government's responsibility to restore the health care funding that was taken away from the people of Ontario and to renew a fairer partnership with the province through the Canada health and social transfer program. The Liberal government in Ottawa has slashed \$6.2 billion from these provincial transfers, which puts undue pressure on our government, especially in light of the \$11-billion deficit we have almost eliminated while at the same time increasing overall spending on health care. Today, the federal contribution towards health in Ontario represents a paltry 11% of the total cost, and it's been estimated that the federal government will enjoy a \$100-billion surplus over the next five years, a surplus that is largely dependent upon Ontario's strong economic performance.

I call upon the Prime Minister of Canada, the federal government and every federal MP to restore the fiscal integrity of federalism, to give back the dollars they have taken away from Ontario's health system and to put in place a funding mechanism that will keep fair pace with the rising cost pressures of the health care system in this province. I would invite our Liberal MPP colleagues across the floor to support us in this endeavour.

SPECIAL EDUCATION

Mr Bruce Crozier (Essex): Minister of Education, special education funding for the intensive support amount grants is inadequate to the point of being a crisis. Let me give you a real, human example of how your lack of resource support is hurting a child in my riding.

Madelaine is a grade 7 student. By the time she was in grade 1, Madelaine was identified as a special-needs child with serious learning and developmental limitations, including sight and hearing difficulties. For a num-

ber of years now, she has had great support and her progress has been moderate.

In the spring of this year the parents were told that the resources, a teaching assistant, available to Madelaine would be reduced due to the needs of others that also have to be serviced with the limited resources available to her school. Since the reduced assistance began in the spring, Madelaine has been left with little chance to succeed. As of her last progress report, Madelaine's progress has all but stopped.

Her parents have done their part to obtain additional support, such as the children's treatment centre for motor skills development and writing skills reinforcement. At home and school, Madelaine's parents have made themselves available to help whenever possible. Madelaine's mémé, who previously taught school, tutors her daily.

Madelaine's parents write: "We require a response and action before time leaves Madelaine stuck at the same level for months and months. Please help us find the resources to meet the special needs of Madelaine and others like her. She needs a full-time teaching assistant now!"

Minister, I join with Madelaine's parents and ask that the needs of these special children be met so they may reach their potential in life. Take responsibility.

MINISTER'S COMMENTS

Ms Marilyn Churley (Broadview-Greenwood): I rise today as a proud Newfoundlander. I was born in Old Perlican, Trinity Bay, on the island and was brought to Happy Valley, Labrador, when I was six weeks old, where I grew up. My parents still live in Newfoundland and I visit them regularly.

Yesterday, the Minister of Consumer and Commercial Relations saw fit to make fun of Newfoundlanders in answer to a question about bar hour extensions for the new millennium celebrations. He referred to Newfoundland keeping their bars open for 48 hours and added, quite unnecessarily, "What else do they have to do in Newfoundland?" The minister then hastily added that he apologized if he offended anybody.

Well, I say to the minister that I and thousands of other Newfoundlanders were and are offended. An apology in this House is not good enough. Having lived my life in Newfoundland, I can assure the minister that Newfoundlanders are some of the hardest-working in this country. They're also the most generous and give more per capita to charity than any other province in Canada.

Newfoundland is sick of being the brunt of mainlander jokes. The minister can partially atone for his insult to Newfoundlanders tonight at the press gallery party. I am donating my beloved Labrador flag as an auction item, and I would suggest to Mr Runciman that he put the highest bid on this flag and proudly display it in his office. I would also ask that the minister apologize once again to the people of Newfoundland for his insult.

VICTIM ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

Mr Bill Murdoch (Bruce-Grey): It's wonderful when a volunteer program helps the community. It's even more wonderful when that program continues to grow and thrive. I'm speaking of the victim assistance program of Grey-Owen Sound. This is a program to be proud of.

The victim assistance program started in 1992 with seed money from Bell Canada in the city of Owen Sound. In 1997, with funding provided by the Solicitor General's office, it was able to expand to service the whole of Grey county.

From only eight volunteers, it now has more than 45 dedicated volunteers, with 11 more sworn in just this week. Seven days a week, 24 hours a day, these volunteers are there to provide emotional support and practical assistance to victims of crime, tragic circumstance or disaster.

Now the program is expanding again, to high schools in the city of Owen Sound, with plans to go to other high schools in Grey county in the future. And it's expanding without requesting additional funding.

Now, for two and a half days a month, volunteers will provide the same support to students in the three city high schools. Working in conjunction with the staff and students of the school, the school board and the children's aid society, the victim assistance program will provide both education and support. The high school program starts today. While my duties here prevent me from attending their kickoff, I extend to them my heartiest congratulations for yet another job well done.

CHILD POVERTY

Mr Richard Patten (Ottawa Centre): Yesterday the Harris government in its economic statement bragged that the province's finances and economy have seen a tremendous improvement and that its active agenda of tax cuts and sound economic and fiscal management has put Ontario back on track. But I ask you today, when is the government going to put children as a priority back on track and back on its agenda?

This morning, Campaign 2000 released its Ontario report card on child poverty. The trends revealed in this report are extremely serious and point in a disturbing direction: a very widespread difference between the haves and the have-nots. The hard work and sacrifice of the past five years may be paying off, but the people of Ontario can now see clearly that they are paying off on the backs of the poor and of children.

Yesterday, the Minister of Finance told us that, "Since mid-1995, Ontario's job growth has consistently outperformed that in the rest of the country."

Today, the Ontario Campaign 2000 Report Card on Child Poverty in Ontario tells us:

"Since 1995, the child poverty rate in Ontario increased 6.3%

"Between 1995 and 1997, the number of poor children increased by 32,000 ... In contrast, the number of poor

children in all of Canada decreased by 75,000 or 5.1%. More striking, since 1995 the number of poor children in the rest of Canada outside of Ontario decreased by 11.1%."

Mr Speaker, I don't think this is your view of Ontario, and it certainly isn't ours.

WOMEN'S INSTITUTES

Mr Garfield Dunlop (Simcoe North): I rise today to comment on the active role that an organization in rural Ontario plays today.

The Ontario Women's Institute celebrated 100 years of service to the province of Ontario in 1997. Over the past few months, I have had the opportunity to attend four major anniversaries of women's institute organizations in my riding of Simcoe North.

As recently as Saturday, I visited the Clowes Women's Institute in the hamlet of Edgar, about 10 miles north of Barrie. We celebrated the 75th anniversary of that institute with a large group of members of other organizations in the area as well.

In rural Ontario, in the small villages, hamlets and townships, the women's institute organizations play a very important role. They do bake sales, fall fair displays and Christmas and special-event bazaars. They fund-raise for community projects. They work to help families in need.

In the county of Simcoe, the women's institutes were instrumental in building the Simcoe County Museum over 40 years ago. To this day, a member of the women's institute sits on the board of directors of the museum, along with other elected and appointed members.

Many members in this assembly, particularly those in urban ridings, may not be familiar with a local women's institute, but I can assure you that this organization is a vital part of the heritage of rural Ontario. As this organization enters existence in a third century this coming January 1, I commend them for their dedication and commitment to the citizens of rural Ontario.

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON JUSTICE AND SOCIAL POLICY

Mr Joseph N. Tascona (Barrie-Simcoe-Bradford): I beg leave to present a report from the standing committee on justice and social policy and move its adoption.

Clerk at the Table (Ms Lisa Freedman): Your committee begs to report the following bill without amendment:

Bill 8, An Act to promote safety in Ontario by prohibiting aggressive solicitation, solicitation of persons in certain places and disposal of dangerous things in certain places, and to amend the Highway Traffic Act to regulate certain activities on roadways / Projet de loi 8, Loi visant

à promouvoir la sécurité en Ontario en interdisant la sollicitation agressive, la sollicitation de personnes dans certains lieux et le rejet de choses dangereuses dans certains lieux, et modifiant le Code de la route afin de réglementer certaines activités sur la chaussée.

The Speaker (Hon Gary Carr): Shall the report be received and adopted?

All those in favour will please say "aye."

All those opposed will please say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

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

The division bells rang from 1351 to 1356.

The Speaker: All those in favour of the motion will please rise to be recognized by the Clerk.

Ayes

Arnott, Ted	Hardeman, Ernie	O'Toole, John
Baird, John R.	Harris, Michael D.	Runciman, Robert W.
Barrett, Toby	Hodgson, Chris	Sampson, Rob
Beaubien, Marcel	Hudak, Tim	Skarica, Toni
Chudleigh, Ted	Jackson, Cameron	Spina, Joseph
Clark, Brad	Johns, Helen	Sterling, Norman W.
Clement, Tony	Klees, Frank	Stockwell, Chris
Coburn, Brian	Marland, Margaret	Tascona, Joseph N.
Cunningham, Dianne	Martiniuk, Gerry	Tilson, David
DeFaria, Carl	Mazzilli, Frank	Turnbull, David
Dunlop, Garfield	Molinari, Tina R.	Wettlaufer, Wayne
Ecker, Janet	Munro, Julia	Wilson, Jim
Elliott, Brenda	Murdoch, Bill	Witmer, Elizabeth
Gilchrist, Steve	Mushinski, Marilyn	Wood, Bob
Gill, Raminder	Newman, Dan	Young, David

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

Nays

Bartolucci, Rick	Duncan, Dwight	Martin, Tony
Boyer, Claudette	Gerretsen, John	McGuinty, Dalton
Brown, Michael A.	Gravelle, Michael	McLeod, Lyn
Bryant, Michael	Hampton, Howard	Parsons, Ernie
Caplan, David	Hoy, Pat	Patten, Richard
Churley, Marilyn	Kormos, Peter	Peters, Steve
Cleary, John C.	Kwinter, Monte	Phillips, Gerry
Crozier, Bruce	Lalonde, Jean-Marc	Pupatello, Sandra
Curling, Alvin	Lankin, Frances	Ruprecht, Tony
Di Cocco, Caroline	Levac, David	Smitherman, George
Dombrowsky, Leona	Marchese, Rosario	

Clerk of the House (Mr Claude L. DesRosiers): The ayes are 45; the nays are 32.

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

Pursuant to the order of the House dated Thursday, November 18, 1999, the bill is ordered for third reading.

Mr Peter Kormos (Niagara Centre): On a point of order, Speaker: I seek unanimous consent to pay tribute to the men and women of the Ontario Professional Fire Fighters Association who are in the gallery today. These firefighters put their lives at risk every time they respond to calls, often not knowing what risks they will face, such as those firefighters who responded to the 1997 Hamilton Plastimet fire. These courageous women and men deserve our support.

The Speaker: Unanimous consent? I'm afraid I heard a no.

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

JUSTICE MINISTERS' MEETING

Hon Michael D. Harris (Premier): Tomorrow the Attorney General of Correctional Services will represent Ontario at the annual federal-provincial-territorial meeting of justice ministers, and on behalf of the people of Ontario they will again demand that the federal government put an end to the discount sentences and quota system that are sending dangerous offenders back to the streets. They will also tell Ottawa the changes to the Young Offenders Act are long overdue.

They have my full support. People know where the government of Ontario stands. We stand on the side of victims, we stand for zero tolerance and we stand for a safer Ontario.

I've met with victims of crime, victims of criminals who were free on parole when they committed new crimes. They told me their stories, they told me what early parole has done to ruin their lives and they urged me to keep pressuring Ottawa for change.

The people of Ontario know that governments can make a difference. Many Ontarians have believed for years that the system was too soft on criminals. Five years ago, 59% of prisoners who wanted provincial parole were returned to our streets. That's astounding and it's unacceptable, so we changed the system. We appointed new members to the Ontario Board of Parole, people who understand that parole is a privilege not a right. Last year the Ontario parole board granted only 34% of parole requests; two thirds were turned down. We're making progress and we're making Ontario streets safer.

But the federal government is moving in the opposite direction. They started a quota system. They actually set a goal of taking half the convicts who are eligible to apply for parole out of the federal penitentiaries and putting them back in the streets. But it gets worse: The federal government has a statutory release program. With these discount sentences, prisoners are allowed on the street after they've served as little as two thirds of their time. It's written directly into the federal government's sentencing guidelines for federal judges: "It is an inmate's legal entitlement to be released into the community at two thirds of the sentence." Ottawa calls this "a right rather than a privilege."

They just don't get it. This is not time off for good behaviour. This is a special law aimed at convicts who do not qualify for parole, and convicts who had been sent back to prison after their parole was revoked. These offenders are being released into our communities without even so much as a parole board hearing. It's automatic, it's dangerous and it's wrong. Canadians deserve better.

On June 29 of this year, 15-year-old Jonathan Wamback took his dog for a walk in a Newmarket park. He

was chased by a group. When they found him, they kicked him in the head repeatedly with steel-toed boots. Jonathan has since emerged from a coma, but the damage is done. No longer fighting for his life, Jonathan now must fight to regain the use of his limbs. How can this happen in Canada? How can it happen in Ontario?

Just last month we were all shocked to hear that a Toronto high school student was brutally beaten to death. The thugs who killed Matti Baranovski are cowards. Reports say they hid behind ski masks, that they hid behind the anonymity of a group. And if they're under 18, they can hide behind the Young Offenders Act.

The people of Ontario are looking for justice. The Young Offenders Act denies this. But what is even more troubling is the message that the Young Offenders Act sends to our youth. In its current form, the Young Offenders Act offends everyone who believes, as I do, that society must pass on values like respect and responsibility to our young people.

The Young Offenders Act, the parole quota and discount sentences all violate a fundamental right of all Canadians: the right to feel safe in their communities; a right that we can no longer take for granted. Too many people are afraid to walk outside at night, but it does not have to be that way.

That's why our Attorney General and our Ministry of Correctional Services are going to send a message to the federal Attorney General that the people of Ontario are ready to take back our streets; that we view parole as a privilege, not a right; that we stand behind victims; that we believe our young people must learn to take responsibility for their actions; and that we demand a change from Ottawa.

Mr Dalton McGuinty (Leader of the Opposition):

We heard some fine-sounding, nicely crafted words written for the Premier today, but I think we should take the opportunity to explore for just a moment the depth of the Premier's commitment to safer streets in Ontario and the very integrity of that commitment.

The Premier's first and greatest priority when it comes to crime in Ontario was, and remains, squeegee kids; those young people armed with hand-held pump-action squeegees who aggressively attack windshields in Ontario. By placing an emphasis on squeegee kids, this Premier is diverting our police from dealing with real issues of crime. He's diverting our police away from robberies, assaults, gang violence, murder and the like. I ask you, Premier, how does this make our streets safer when you divert police away from real crime?

Because you offer no supports to young people who have been reduced to squeegeeing for a living, you are about to drive them into theft, robberies, drug trafficking and prostitution. So again I ask you, Premier, how is it going to make Ontario streets safer when you drive young people from a matter of nuisance into real and serious crime?

Something else you might want to give some thought to is the fact that here in Ontario our probation caseloads are 70% higher than the national average. Our probation

workers simply do not have the resources and the tools they need to supervise probation. Again I ask you, Premier, how does it make Ontario streets safer when those people who have been assigned the very special responsibility to supervise criminals who are on probation simply cannot keep up with their caseloads?

Now we understand that with some of your upcoming cuts, you're going to be cutting rehabilitation programs in our jails. You're going to be cutting back on programs designed to curb criminal tendencies in criminals. You're going to cut back on programs that are designed to make those criminals safer for our streets when they are ultimately released. So I ask you, Premier, how is it making our streets safer when you cut back on programs that are specifically designed to curb criminal tendencies in our criminals?

Premier, we have put forward a number of positive proposals which you have yet to respond to, a number of concrete and very real ways in which you could do something about making Ontario streets safer for all Ontarians.

We've asked you to support tougher penalties for the customers of child prostitutes. We have introduced a bill in connection with that, introduced by Rick Bartolucci, a number of times now and you have failed to move forward on that.

We have also put forward the idea of creating safe school zones so that anybody found inside a school zone, within a number of blocks from a school, who had on their person any drug or weapon would result in automatic stiffer penalties. You have failed to move forward on that, Premier.

1410

We support greater funding for the Ontario Provincial Police Project P in the fight against child pornography. You have failed to move forward on that, Premier.

We support my colleague Richard Patten's amendments to the Mental Health Act, which we believe will go a long way towards making Ontario safer. We think as well that you should be making sure that nobody is released from any of our mental health institutions without ensuring that there is some place for them to go so that they remain under some kind of supervision.

Premier, we have put forward a number of positive policy proposals designed specifically to make Ontario's streets safer. We have not wasted time in puffery directed at the federal government. We put forward concrete proposals.

In addition, I might remind you that your Victims' Bill of Rights was long ago determined by an Ontario judge to be absolutely useless. It is of no real value whatsoever to victims in Ontario. A victim brought this matter before the courts seeking compensation. The judge said: "This is not a law. This is simply a policy statement." It is a slogan. It does nothing of any real value for people who are victims of crime in Ontario.

I remind you, Premier, if you have any real, genuine, pressing and earnest interest in making the streets of Ontario safer, then I suggest, on behalf of Ontarians who might be concerned about crime, that you stop diverting

attention to the federal government and that you begin for the very first time to assume your responsibility to make Ontario's streets safer today for Ontarians.

Mr Howard Hampton (Kenora-Rainy River): I'm actually pleased that the Premier had something to say on these issues today, because these are important issues. I want the Premier to know that I've spent a fair amount of time this fall out there talking with young people about what's going on in their schools, what's going on in their neighbourhoods, what's going on in their communities. They asked me to pass on some advice to you, Premier.

Unlike you—you seem to be focused on punishment; you seem to be focused on what happens after a crime is committed—they are asking why your government doesn't seem to care about the prevention of crime, why resources are being taken away from the prevention of crime. They want to know why they hardly ever see a police officer in their school any more, never mind their classroom. They wonder why they don't see police officers coming into the school and talking to them about how you avoid violence, about how you prevent violence.

I can tell them why we don't see police officers doing that. First of all, you've cut the number of police officers in the province. Even Statistics Canada acknowledges that. Secondly, you think it's more important for those police officers that we have to be out chasing squeegee kids rather than dealing with gang violence, rather than dealing with home invasion against seniors. You're going to focus on 200 or 300 squeegee kids in downtown Toronto. You seem to think that is the serious crime problem in Ontario.

I want to have on record exactly what has happened to policing in the province since the Premier came to power. In 1994, there were 20,737 police officers in the province. In 1998, the number had been cut to 20,454. The natural rate of retirement means that 6,000 more will leave in the next two years. This province, this government, has absolutely no strategy to replace those officers, never mind to provide more police officers to take into account the growth in population in the province.

I want to remind the Premier that when you go out and talk to young people, they want to have a working relationship. They don't like to see violence. They don't like to see youth gangs. But when you never see a police officer in your classroom or your school, when the very people in the schools, such as guidance counsellors, who used to be there to hopefully help deal with some of these situations aren't there either, it means that the resources aren't being put in place to deal with crime prevention. It means that your government really isn't serious about this.

I want to also point out that a number of those young people out there who you seem to want to go after—squeegee kids—are in fact simply taking you up on your advice, your government's direction. They are out there trying to make a living. Adult education has been cut. It's been dramatically cut and we read that it's going to be cut again. Young people who need skills, who need train-

ing, who need education are finding that the opportunities aren't there to get that, so they try to find a job and they'll try to take any job.

It amazes me. When you walk down the street you'll see street vendors who will sell you a hot dog, you'll see street vendors who will sell you flowers, you'll see street vendors who'll sell you ice cream. Those are all services that are provided on the street. We don't try to criminalize them in our society. We try to regulate and control them, so that they're not in some way a threat to public safety, so that they're not a threat against people.

But your government seems now to want to criminalize young people. And at the same time that you're criminalizing them, the real crime problems that are out there, the real crime problems that can be prevented—youth gangs, home invasions of seniors—your government seems to have nothing to say about them, no strategy to deal with them and, what's more, the police officers aren't there to do that work.

Premier, you can't deal with crime prevention by means of press releases. What we've heard from your government is a series of announcements, a series of press releases, that amount to nothing. One day your Crime Control Commission is out there telling people that the Santa Claus Parade in Toronto is a major problem. The next day your Crime Control Commission is out there saying something else. The next day you're making another statement. But the reality is that your government is not doing a thing in terms of crime prevention. In fact, you're making the problems worse.

VISITOR

The Speaker (Hon Gary Carr): In the public gallery west is Trevor Pettit, who is a former member for Hamilton Mountain in the 36th Parliament.

SPEAKER'S RULINGS

Ms Marilyn Churley (Broadview-Greenwood): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: Yesterday afternoon my colleague the member for Trinity-Spadina raised a question in this House about the impact of Mr Stockwell's advocacy for the reduced size of Toronto city council. The member for Trinity-Spadina raised his concern about the possibility of reducing Toronto city council in the context of issues relating to homelessness, rent control, child care, public transportation and other issues.

When he addressed the question to the Minister of Labour, you redirected his question to the Minister of Municipal Affairs, although the Minister of Labour was clearly acting in his capacity—I assume so, anyway—as minister responsible for the GTA. Although I understand that you simply misspoke when you suggested that the standing orders are clear with respect to how a question must be directed for response, I also wonder if you were relying on previous Speakers' rulings for guidance.

Herein lies my point of order, Mr Speaker. You, yourself, made an implicit ruling when on Thursday,

November 25, you allowed the member for Scarborough Centre to put a question to the Minister of Labour about Mayor Lastman's statement about Toronto forming its own province, and again on Monday you allowed the member for Scarborough Southwest to put a question about Mr Stockwell's advocacy for a reduced council size to the Minister of Labour.

Speaker, I hope you can help me and my caucus understand why two Tory questions in support of a reduction of Toronto city councillors may properly be directed to Mr Stockwell while our question in opposition to such a blatant curtailment of democratic rights is out of order.

While I recognize that the member for Scarborough Southwest tried to conceal the real intent of the question behind a pretext of caring about collective bargaining, his supplementary got to the real issues of concern to the Tories, which are tax reduction and service efficiency. Yet when my colleague asked an equally broad question, in which he highlighted some specific issues and then went on to raise, and I quote, "other issues," which of course would include the impact of collective bargaining in the city, you ruled that his question could not be answered by Mr Stockwell.

Mr Stockwell is the minister for the GTA. Two Tory backbenchers' questions were answered by the Minister of Labour. So today I simply seek your guidance in resolving this matter before question period begins so that we are clear on whether the minister responsible for the GTA will answer all questions related to the support of reducing the size of city council, which we know very well he would dearly love to do, or whether he is only responsible for answering such friendly questions when they are asked by a member from the government backbench. We seek your clarification on this, Mr Speaker.

1420

The Speaker (Hon Gary Carr): Thank you very much. I don't believe there is a minister responsible for the GTA. There is not. As you know, and I'll refer you to page 122 of Beauchesne, it's very clear: "Ministers may be questioned only in relation to current portfolios." What I try to do in those questions is listen and see if there is anything relating to labour.

In the case of the question from the member for Scarborough Southwest, on page 888 of the Hansard of that day he specifically talked about "outside workers," and I'm quoting from Hansard now, "recently ratified a new collective agreement," and he phrased the question regarding the first agreement of the newly amalgamated city. That, in my estimation, related to a labour issue, which is the minister's responsibility.

I will say this: In the beginning I'm trying to listen very carefully to see exactly what the question is and there may be some occasions where I will miss something. But it is very clear you have to ask the minister a question that relates to his or her portfolio and I hope that is very clear.

The one from the member for Scarborough Centre: I was listening carefully. I may have missed it, but

certainly in her supplementary she phrased a labour question. In the first question I may have missed the reference to it—I don't have the Hansard in front of me—but what I will attempt to do is listen very carefully. I think all the members are very clear and I would ask all the members, if they are asking questions—obviously the government side would know—to make sure they go to the appropriate minister.

Hopefully we'll clarify the situation. When a question does come, I will attempt to listen as best I can to see if there's anything relating to any of the ministers so that they can answer the question. Of course, as you know, ministers can have the question go to another minister as well.

Hopefully that clarifies it. When the questions come I will try to listen very carefully. There will be some occasions, as in the case of the member for Scarborough Centre, where I may miss things, but I will try my utmost to listen very carefully to the questions.

WORLD AIDS DAY

Mr George Smitherman (Toronto Centre-Rosedale): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: I'd like to ask the House for unanimous consent to recognize World AIDS Day.

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

Mr Smitherman: I rise to recognize the effect of AIDS on the world community. The nature of this disease I think is well known to all members of this House. It's a disease that robs people of their lives and it robs many of those in the prime of their life.

I speak from personal experience on this matter because I have lost too many friends to this insidious disease. I know too many people who today suffer from the effects of this disease that ravages them and I honour their lives by my speech today.

I remember the first time I heard the word "AIDS" and had a discussion about it with my friends. It was in the spring of 1983. So much has transpired since then, much that we have to be proud of as legislators, particularly in a country like Canada. But if anything, this disease has taught us about the kind of community response that is possible. It has taught us that even in the face of extraordinary crisis we can be hopeful.

Earlier today I had the honour to attend an event at Casey House, a hospice founded by June Callwood here in the city of Toronto that has provided extraordinary, dignified care to people suffering the final stages of this terrible disease.

A major corporate presence, Rogers Communications, one of the largest employers in the city of Toronto and in my riding, donated \$20,000 today to Casey House so that they could continue their work. This is just one example of the kind of community-based fundraising that has gone on related to this disease.

Every single week I attend events ranging from those that raise only a few dollars to those like the AIDS walk

in Toronto, on which I had the privilege of previously serving as chair, that raises almost \$1 million.

But the real community-based efforts that I want to speak to are those that come in small numbers, when people gather around and form care teams to provide dignified care for people who are living the final days of their lives, often at home. Community groups and community efforts have raised public awareness. They put pressure on governments and the private sector to fund proper health care, education and research.

Governments in the 1980s responded with public education programs, particularly the city of Toronto, which did such an effective job of working with the gay and lesbian community to address this problem. Research evolved. The government of the day in the 1990s introduced the Trillium drug plan and worked with the Minister of Health to try and address some of the problems in that plan. There continue to be problems, but that plan has allowed people some ability to get government support for the very, very expensive regimen of drugs that fighting this disease requires. With vigilance and determination, we make good efforts and we have some good news, but the challenges remain.

The bad news is that there are very vulnerable communities in our own cities, in our own municipalities, in our own ridings. Immigrants, IV drug users, young people who have heard less about AIDS and who think there are drug regimens that present a cure, often go about activities that endanger their lives. We need to continue our public education efforts, and given that AIDS is an infectious disease, we must commit ourselves to vigilantly fight against its spread.

In a world context AIDS is an even more horrific problem. While we are waging battle at home, the fewer resources that are available in other places have allowed for explosion of this disease. New cases are being diagnosed in Southeast Asia and the African subcontinent at an alarming rate. We have a chance in Toronto and Canada to play a role in addressing these problems as well.

In 2004 Toronto will host the World AIDS Symposium where so much information comes together and so much good can come, but we must pledge to be diligent in continuing the fight.

The evolution of the disease has also led to progress. Research in the medical community can mean that HIV diagnosis is no longer the death sentence it once was. Cocktails of a variety of drugs have meant major improvements for quality of life, longer and healthier lives for people. In some cases, people who had received what they thought was a death sentence, who were on disability, who were in places like Casey House, have been restored to the workforce because of the effect of these new drugs.

We have more to do. We must fight on towards an ultimate goal, and I believe I speak for all members of this House when I reaffirm the commitment of this place that we will continue to work until we find a cure for this terrible disease.

Ms Frances Lankin (Beaches-East York): I rise today not out of great pleasure but out of the grim necessity that we need, on World AIDS Day in particular but at all times, to be addressing our role in response to this disease.

UNAIDS, the United Nations agency charged with combatting the spread of HIV, reported that there will be 5.6 million new infections this year worldwide, bringing the total to 33.6 million people infected. Every minute, and this just makes my stomach clench, five young people between the ages of 10 and 24 around the world are infected.

There are 54,000 Canadians infected with HIV, and in Ontario 16,000 people are diagnosed each year with HIV. While Canada and Ontario have been and remain in the lead in terms of research for a vaccine for HIV/AIDS, there are specific actions that governments must take to remove the barriers to people living with HIV/AIDS.

Effective on January 1, 1999, people using an Ontario drug benefit plan card and those who rely on the Trillium plan were faced with severe restrictions on their access to medication. Their doctors cannot exercise any judgment in recommendations for their drug therapy.

We've spoken to the doctors treating persons with HIV and AIDS. They're overwhelmed with the mountains of additional paperwork and bureaucracy this government has created. You require that they justify many medications and allow pharmacists to vet the diagnosis before releasing the medication.

1430

You keep saying that you're acting on evidence-based recommendations received from experts and this would be laughable if it were not so serious in its consequences. Real experts would never propose that prescription guidelines or evidence-based recommendations outweigh clinical judgments of a doctor who knows the patient's needs.

The fact is that when it comes to people living with HIV and AIDS, this government has a double standard. It is obsessed with reducing red tape for "real Ontarians," but when it comes to people with HIV and AIDS, they've created a mountain of new red tape. Last year, the government introduced a staggered, pro-rated deductible for the Trillium drug program, but unfortunately, you've not addressed the real issue yet again for patients with HIV and AIDS.

Over the years, we have raised here again and again the need for the elimination of the deductible for those people living with AIDS who continue to try to work, who are low-income earners or who are on long-term disability. Long-term disability plan recipients are considered earners, so they continue to pay the deductible for their drugs even if their income is at or below the level it would be if they were on social assistance or the Ontario disability support program. That makes no sense at all, and it is a crisis for the individuals affected.

I also want to talk for a moment about nutritional supplements and the restrictions the government has put in place. The ministry's refusal to fund nutritional supple-

ments unless they are the person's sole source of nutrition is simply not conducive to the health of persons living with HIV and AIDS. We've learned much about the role that this additional support plays in sustaining health and life, yet this government made a choice to enforce a policy that was not intended to apply to people who have a medical need for nutritional supplements. This is just plain stupid. Supplements are that, supplements, and it's no answer to say that people can buy them off the shelf. The costs are prohibitive for many of these people. When this government made their decision to stop funding nutritional supplements, they knew it would have a direct effect on HIV and AIDS patients, but they have refused to change this policy.

I want to now speak about the importance of honouring those people who have acquired HIV or who have full-blown AIDS. As an honorary patron of Voices of Positive Women, I think it's important for all of us to understand, to remember, to stress that this disease is a scourge on all of our communities. We can't turn a blind eye and say it only affects that group or those people. We know the numbers are appalling. We know that prevention is the most important issue, and I can't stress enough our dismay with this government's download of public health services on to municipalities and our concern that some municipalities are now not able to continue the ongoing funding for AIDS prevention programs. And AIDS is a problem for every community. It deserves provincial standards, provincial treatment, provincial application of those standards and those treatments.

We call on you again to honour World AIDS Day by moving to make some real difference in the lives of people living with HIV and AIDS. Bring back the nutritional supplement. Reduce the red tape. We need more than words; we need action.

Hon Elizabeth Witmer (Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): I rise today in the Legislature to speak on this, the 12th annual World AIDS Day, a day that we acknowledge and honour both the people who are living with HIV and AIDS, their friends and their families who share in their pain and their struggle.

It is also a day to reiterate our government's strong commitment to do everything we can to prevent the spread of HIV. Health promotion and disease prevention, including the fight against HIV/AIDS, is a priority for our government. Since the disease was first diagnosed, more than 20,000 people have received this diagnosis in our province. In response, our government has committed more than \$52 million each year on an extensive range of HIV/AIDS services and programs. This includes prevention, outreach and support programs, HIV diagnostic and monitoring programs, HIV ambulatory clinics and special drug programs. The spending on these programs by our province exceeds that of any other level of government in Canada, including federal funding for the Canadian strategy on HIV/AIDS.

Last year on World AIDS Day I was pleased to announce the establishment of the prenatal HIV testing program. When women with HIV do not receive treat-

ment for their HIV during their pregnancy, their infants have a 15% to 30% chance of being infected. However, with treatment, the risk of infection to the baby is reduced significantly, to between 5% and 8%. Under this program, health service providers in Ontario are asked to offer HIV testing to all pregnant women as part of their routine prenatal care.

Education and prevention are important elements in controlling this disease, and in 1998 our government launched the \$10-million Ontario HIV Treatment Network. The network is a not-for-profit organization funded by the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care to ensure the very best care and treatment for people living with HIV in Ontario while at the same time respecting the rights of individuals to choice and confidentiality.

I'm very pleased to tell you that yesterday the Ontario HIV Treatment Network and the University of Toronto announced the establishment of the very first chair in HIV/AIDS research in Ontario through a \$1.5-million endowment from the Ministry of Health through the network's investigator-driven research fund. The chair will be responsible for stimulating innovative research in clinical science, epidemiology, public health and social science to help provide the foundation for developing the best ways to treat and prevent HIV and AIDS.

The creation of this chair further demonstrates the contribution by Ontario's AIDS community, a community of people living with HIV, health service providers, community workers and of course researchers. I would like to express my sincere appreciation and gratitude to these dedicated individuals. It is their work which helps to ensure the very best quality care and treatment for people living with HIV in Ontario.

I want to acknowledge as well the tireless efforts and the excellent advice of the entire Ontario Advisory Committee on HIV/AIDS under the capable and excellent leadership of Mr David Hoe and Dr Don Kilby. Their work is extremely important in the ongoing fight against this condition.

We have by working together accomplished a great deal in this province, and we must continue to accomplish more as we work together. We must continue to fight prejudice in the workplace and the schoolyard about HIV and AIDS. We must reach more young people in our efforts to reduce the spread of HIV. We must support the search for a cure. We must continue to be open to listen, to educate and to communicate with our families, our co-workers, our neighbours and our children. We must, above all else, continue to offer support to our fellow Ontarians who are living with this devastating disease.

VISITOR

The Speaker (Hon Gary Carr): In the members' gallery east is Gary Fox, the former member for Prince Edward-Lennox-South Hastings, a member of the 36th Parliament.

DEFERRED VOTES

MORE TAX CUTS FOR JOBS,
GROWTH AND PROSPERITY ACT, 1999LOI DE 1999 RÉDUISANT DE NOUVEAU
LES IMPÔTS POUR STIMULER L'EMPLOI,
LA CROISSANCE ET LA PROSPÉRITÉ

Deferred vote on the motion for third reading of Bill 14, An Act to implement the 1999 Budget and to make other amendments to various Acts in order to foster an environment for jobs, growth and prosperity in Ontario / Projet de loi 14, Loi visant à mettre en oeuvre le budget de 1999 et à apporter d'autres modifications à diverses lois en vue de favoriser un climat propice à l'emploi, à la croissance et à la prospérité en Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon Gary Carr): Call in the members. This will be a five-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1440 to 1445.

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

Ayes

Arnott, Ted	Harris, Michael D.	O'Toole, John
Baird, John R.	Hastings, John	Runciman, Robert W.
Barrett, Toby	Hodgson, Chris	Sampson, Rob
Beaubien, Marcel	Hudak, Tim	Skarica, Toni
Chudleigh, Ted	Jackson, Cameron	Spina, Joseph
Clark, Brad	Johns, Helen	Sterling, Norman W.
Clement, Tony	Kells, Morley	Stockwell, Chris
Coburn, Brian	Klees, Frank	Tascona, Joseph N.
Cunningham, Dianne	Marland, Margaret	Tilson, David
DeFaria, Carl	Martiniuk, Gerry	Turnbull, David
Dunlop, Garfield	Mazzilli, Frank	Wettlaufer, Wayne
Ecker, Janet	Molinari, Tina R.	Wilson, Jim
Elliott, Brenda	Munro, Julia	Witmer, Elizabeth
Gilchrist, Steve	Murdoch, Bill	Wood, Bob
Gill, Raminder	Mushinski, Marilyn	
Hardeman, Ernie	Newman, Dan	

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

Nays

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

Clerk of the House (Mr Claude L. DesRosiers): The ayes are 46; the nays are 39.

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

Be it resolved that the bill do now pass and be entitled as in the motion.

ORAL QUESTIONS

FIRE IN HAMILTON

Mr Dalton McGuinty (Leader of the Opposition):

My question is for the Premier. Today in the gallery we are joined by Ontario's firefighters, brave men and women who, day in and day out, put it on the line to protect our lives and our homes. I believe that we as legislators should be doing everything we possibly can to back up our firefighters to ensure that their jobs are as safe as possible.

Two years ago the Plastimet facility in Hamilton burned for four days. That fire released dioxins at 66 times the so-called acceptable levels. Without the great work of Hamilton's firefighters in beating this fire down, matters would have been much worse.

I think we owe it to these firefighters and those right across Ontario to ensure we don't have another Plastimet anywhere in Ontario. I think the best way we can do that is to call a public inquiry so we can get to the bottom of what happened and come up with recommendations to ensure this is not repeated. On behalf of Ontario's firefighters, Premier, I'm asking you to call an inquiry into the Plastimet fire in Hamilton.

Hon Michael D. Harris (Premier): First of all let me say that I, as Premier, and our caucus and our government share both your concern and your support and praise for Ontario's firefighters. That's why we have supported policies to encourage prevention and public education, and the new Fire Protection and Prevention Act, 1997, makes it mandatory for municipalities to provide fire safety education, and other initiatives in these areas. I think that was the preamble to the question, which took most of the time.

On the specific question, we have indicated, as you know—and there may be more specifics the Minister of the Environment may have to give you—and we've been very clear, we would be fully supportive if the region wishes to call an inquiry.

Mr McGuinty: Premier, that's what you call "passing the buck." The question was to you. You have it fully within your authority to conduct an inquiry into this fire and you refuse to do so.

On the day of the Plastimet fire, some 255 firefighters in the Hamilton area literally put their lives on the line. Fighting fires is a tough enough job without having to worry about whether you're wading into some sea of toxic chemicals. Our firefighters are not asking for very much, just some basic health and safety protections to make their jobs safer.

What they are asking for—and this is the subject of this question now—is an independent provincial agency that will have full authority to investigate fires involving hazardous materials and identify what we can do to deal with fires involving hazardous waste.

Will you now back up our firefighters and will you establish a tough, independent body to safeguard their health and their lives?

Hon Mr Harris: Mr Speaker, the Minister of the Environment may have more information.

Hon Tony Clement (Minister of the Environment, Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing): Again, on behalf of the government, let us put on record the bravery of the firefighters who, as a matter of their job, but they did it so well, contained that fire and ensured that it was not a worse tragedy than it was.

To date, we have spent more than \$2.1 million on debris cleanup and site security over the past two phases of the site cleanup. We've spent considerably more when laboratory costs and staff time are taken into account. These are cleanup actions that were instigated by the province of Ontario because that site was a site that needed that kind of help.

The key here is to learn from these tragedies, learn from these events, and ensure they do not happen again. We are in a position, I think, to say to anyone that if they have suggestions, if they have ideas, if they have ways that can prevent this in the future, we're always open to those kinds of suggestions and ideas.

The Speaker: Supplementary.

Mr Dave Levac (Brant): To the Premier, if he wants to slough it off to the other minister, he can do that.

Three times today, the members on the other side have indicated a true dedication and respect for the firefighters of our province. I want it pointed out that when all-party support was asked for, someone on that side said no.

My question is very simple, Premier. It's been asked twice now, and in the public gallery we have people who are listening very intently to your non-answers: Will you give us the answer to this simple question? Will you create the third-party group, the independent provincial lobby group, to investigate and to deal with these hazardous material fires?

Hon Mr Clement: Again, we are always looking for ideas that can protect the public more efficiently, but we've done more in acting than the opposition have done in terms of their rhetoric. We have acted to clean up the site. We have acted to ensure that the public safety is our top priority. If there are any other ideas out there that can help us with that goal, we're willing to listen to them because the public security, public safety, being able to be in your environment without that risk is our top priority.

SPECIAL EDUCATION

Mr Dalton McGuinty (Leader of the Opposition): I have a question for the Premier. It is now well accepted and generally recognized province-wide that when it comes to special education in Ontario we are in nothing less than a state of crisis. You have frozen the funding for special education for students with the highest needs when the demand itself is skyrocketing. That means, in

very real and practical terms, that our most vulnerable children at school are not having their needs met.

In Hamilton, 23 special-needs students were forced to stay home for two months while their school board scrambled to find money that you refused to give them.

It seems to me that we in this Legislature have a responsibility to ensure that our children who have special learning needs have those needs met. You're not doing that. Will you now stand up and agree to provide the additional funding that is absolutely essential to meet those needs of our special children with special learning needs?

The Speaker (Hon Gary Carr): Premier.

Hon Michael D. Harris (Premier): The Minister of Education.

Hon Janet Ecker (Minister of Education): I really wish the honourable member would check his facts. We know there are changes that need to be made in how we better support children who have special needs. We've said that. We've been taking advice from the boards and the communities about how best to do that.

But I should like to remind the honourable member that we increased special education funding last year. We increased special education funding again this year. We are spending more today—

Interjection.

Hon Mrs Ecker: The critic over there is saying no, we didn't. He was at estimates. He had the opportunity to ask staff about this if he was really interested in the facts. He didn't. I would like to remind them that we are spending more, because we believe it's a very important program to help support special needs students.

Mr McGuinty: Minister, I suggest that you check your own ministry facts. The facts are that in 1998, with your new funding formula, you effectively cut \$106 million out of special education in Ontario. Those are the facts.

Let me tell you about an individual case so that you can better understand the reality of this. Let me tell you about Cody Lacelle. He's seven years of age. His disabilities make it very difficult for him to communicate and to understand what's going on around him. His speech is delayed. He has behavioural problems. Last year, he had a full-time educational assistant in a regular classroom. This year, as a result of your freeze, combined with soaring demand, help for Cody has been cut. He now spends only one hour a day in a regular class that only has a part-time educational assistant.

It seems to me, Minister, that we have a collective responsibility to help Cody and his parents get the best possible education. You're not doing that. Again, will you stand up now and commit to providing the funding that you have cut from special education?

Hon Mrs Ecker: Perhaps the honourable member could have benefited from being at estimates, where we could have talked about where we have increased this money. We have put more money in there. If the honourable member has a magical solution for how we can improve special education he should put it forward,

because there is more money there. One of the challenges that we have with this particular issue is the boards keep saying to us they want more flexibility in how we give them the money. I have just as many parents who are sitting there saying they don't want the boards to have flexibility because in the past they've seen that money for special ed get spent on other things.

On the one hand, boards are saying, "Take the rules off," and I've got parents saying, "No, you need to continue to protect that money." Clearly, there are some changes here that need to be made. We have flagged that. We are working on that. But I would really like to caution the honourable member that there is more money in those boards. In Hamilton, it was an almost 5% increase in the money they got for special education—

The Speaker: Minister's time.

Mr McGuinty: There are 200,000 Ontario children with special education needs whom you are letting down on a consistent basis. Here's what the superintendents from Ontario's public supervisory officials had to say:

"'Seriously flawed' special education funding model puts our children at risk.... 'The government's contention that the special education funding formula provides adequate funds to meet the needs of special education students is simply not true.'"

Minister, I have with me five binders signed by 7,000 people in the Ottawa-Carleton area. We're talking about hundreds and hundreds of families who are looking to you to help them meet the basic learning needs of their children. You are letting them down. You have cut \$106 million out of special education funding in Ontario, and the results are apparent on the front lines. You're letting Ontario families down. I'm going to ask you once again on their behalf: Will you begin now to assume your responsibility and protect the interests of our most vulnerable children in our schools in Ontario?

Hon Mrs Ecker: The honourable member would perhaps be of more assistance in helping us to resolve this issue with parents and boards out there if he tried to put some facts on the table. Maybe he wasn't listening when I told his critic that the figure that they keep saying is a cut is not a cut, it is no such thing, and the supervisory officers never made that claim.

First of all, I would like to say to the supervisory officers, when we went out the door and we said to the boards, "How much do you spend on special education funding?" they gave us a figure. We took that figure and topped it up. So if the number is wrong, perhaps those same supervisory officials would like to tell the ministry why they didn't know what they were spending on special education. Perhaps it could have been of more assistance as we sought to increase the support that special education students need. We understand it's an important support. We increased it this year, we increased it last year, and we're quite prepared to take steps to continue to improve this—

The Speaker: The minister's time is up.

1500

CHILD POVERTY

Mr Howard Hampton (Kenora-Rainy River): I have a question for the Premier. Today Ontario Campaign 2000 released its findings on child poverty and they are staggering. While child poverty has declined in the rest of Canada, it has increased here in Ontario by 6% under your government. Premier, you've called these numbers hogwash. Now that we have study after study that shows that child poverty is increasing faster than ever before in Ontario, is more of a problem than ever before in Ontario, how can you call these studies and numbers hogwash?

Hon Michael D. Harris (Premier): I appreciate the question. Let me first off say that one child in poverty, for whatever reason or whoever's fault, is one child too many. I would say that in this, the best province in the best country in the world in which to live, one child in poverty is a disgrace and we have to do everything we can to solve that problem.

However, your question deals with a report that the United Nations says is hogwash. The United Nations says it is 6%, and this is in the key indicators to the labour market in 1999. Maryanne Webber, director of income statistics at Statistics Canada, says, "To use our statistics in that way is hogwash." It is hogwash, it is false information, it is very misleading to the public, but it does not take away from the fact that we must do everything we can to continue to reduce the number of children living in poverty in—

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

Mr Hampton: Premier, I'm glad you refer to this report, because this report that you cite isn't about child poverty. There is only one page in that whole report that makes any kind of reference to child poverty. It's about labour market issues. That shows the lengths to which your government will go to try to cover up your sorry record. I've looked at that study, and if you take the numbers out of that study, which has nothing to do with child poverty, it says that someone in Ontario should be able to survive on \$600 a month.

I challenge you, Premier. I'll take you up on this challenge. I'll go out and for one month—let's do the month of December—you and I will try to live by the numbers that come out of that report: \$600 a month. If you believe in that report, if you believe that the other studies are hogwash and the numbers that come out of that report are right, then you come with me, we'll go out on the street and we'll try to live on \$600 a month. Are you up to it, Premier?

Hon Mr Harris: Let me say that I think it's a great idea for the leader to take that challenge. I'll chat with him every day and see how he makes out over the month of December. I have no intention of doing that, nor would I expect anybody in Ontario to have any intention of doing that. I intend to stay here in this Legislature, to

continue to fight for the downtrodden, for the poor, for the low-income people of this province, to continue the battle.

The only study that was really attempted was done by Professor Chris Sarlo, who indicates that the number of children in poverty is declining in Ontario.

I intend to continue to fight in cabinet, in caucus, in the Legislature and across the province to continue to improve the lives of all Ontarians, particularly those of low income.

Mr Hampton: I think it's pretty clear we're finally getting to the hogwash here. That report is not about child poverty. That report that you cite has nothing to do with child poverty. It has only one page in it that makes any reference at all to child poverty, and you try to cite that to overcome the evidence that's come out of study after study.

Premier, the fact of the matter is, your government is making child poverty worse in this province. You've killed affordable housing. You've crippled rent controls. You've frozen the minimum wage for five years. You've cut child care. You've cut income supports for the poorest people in the province. You've made child poverty worse.

Premier, you can still come to the Legislature every day, but you put yourself on a \$600 budget for a month, I'll do the same and we'll see if your numbers are true or if they are the real hogwash. I extend the challenge again. If you believe your study, then let's go out there and try to survive on \$600 a month. Put your money where your study is.

Hon Mr Harris: I assume this is a reiteration, that the leader of the New Democratic Party plans to do this for a month. I accept his invitation that he should do it and I will watch with interest. I have told you what I will do. I will continue to cut taxes for low-income Ontarians. I will continue our pro-growth policies that have resulted in more than 615,000 net new jobs. I will continue the proposals that we brought in that saw 650,000 low-income earners pay no personal income tax in this province. I will continue to follow the policies of Professor Chris Sarlo, who prepared the only definitive study, who says child poverty is going down in this province. We intend to continue to do that.

I will check in, as I have indicated, with the leader, who has now unequivocally committed that he will live for the month of December on \$600 a month. It will be an interesting experiment. We look forward to the results.

CANCER TREATMENT

Ms Frances Lankin (Beaches-East York): My question is to the Minister of Health. I want to return to the crisis in cancer care waiting lists. Yesterday I raised concerns contained in a legal opinion to Princess Margaret Hospital. Today I have another legal opinion, this one by the firm of McMillan Binch, commissioned by Cancer Care Ontario in response to the Princess Margaret Hospital legal opinion. Minister, what a crying shame

that you've put the cancer system in the position of having to spend time and money on seeking legal opinions in order to manage the shortage of resources that you have caused.

I asked you three questions yesterday and you refused to answer. Today, I want to ask you to take two specific steps that everyone in the cancer system agrees with. First, and this is set out in both legal opinions, will you work with the partners in the system to immediately develop a standardized package of informed consent for cancer patients? Let them know what the waiting list should be of for weeks, let them know how long it's going to take to get their treatment, let them know how long it'll take if they go elsewhere, tell them if they wait longer that the risk of their condition worsening is very serious. Will you take the lead in developing an informed consent package?

Hon Elizabeth Witmer (Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): I'd like to correct the record from yesterday. The honourable member indicated that this was a leaked document. This was not a leaked document; it wasn't a confidential document. It was actually a document that was discussed at the public board meeting on November 17, 1999. In fact, it has been referred back to a subcommittee for further consideration. So I think it's important to correct the record.

I would also just indicate that we do know that there is a difference of opinion. We have been very supportive in responding to the needs of the hospitals in providing the needed additional funding. I know that they are aggressively recruiting staff and through their efforts there has been an expanded capacity within the system. They are going to continue to aggressively deal with the waiting lists. I know that all of the cancer care hospitals in the province are doing everything they can to provide the best possible care—

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

Ms Lankin: Minister, the question was, will you take the lead in developing an information package for patients so they can truly give informed consent? Pretty simple, everyone's recommending it, that all three partners in the system work towards this. Will you do it?

1510

The second question is with respect to your program to pay for patients who require treatment who travel out of this area; for example, to Buffalo. Currently you have that program in place for patients with breast cancer and prostate cancer. Everyone agrees that if you would open up the criteria and include patients with rectal cancer and ovarian or uterine cancer you would help reduce the waiting list immediately. Until such time as the new radiation therapists come on stream, you could help the system by putting a little bit more money in and helping patients get treatment in a timely fashion. It's a shame that anyone has to go to the States, but you've created the crisis of the shortage of resources. You can help the system manage it instead of going off to get legal opinions about how to manage it.

Will you put together the package and will you increase and expand the criteria for people seeking treatment elsewhere?

1510

Hon Mrs Witmer: The honourable member probably has forgotten the fact that this is an issue that actually has occurred three times in this province during the past 10 years and it is only our government that has indicated that we want to find a long-lasting solution to the whole issue of waiting time. It is our government that has put together a nine-point strategy in order to avoid future problems.

As you know, we have expanded the capacity of the schools to train the radiation therapists; we are increasing the number of oncologists and physicists in the province; we are expanding the provincial capacity; and I know that the honourable member doesn't like to hear this but we have increased spending on reducing the waiting time by \$23.1 million. We have approved funding for radiation services on a cost-per-case basis so that CCO and PMH can expand the capacity without seeking the prior commitment of the ministry—

The Speaker: The minister's time is up.

SPECIAL EDUCATION

Mr Gerard Kennedy (Parkdale-High Park): I have a question for the Premier. I would like to ask you whether you agree with your Minister of Education, because we have documented proof that your provincial government is responsible for creating a crisis for 200,000 Ontario students in special education.

I want to ask you if you agree, because there's a family here today. Danielle is here from Barrie with her mother, and they're here because of your government. Your government has made cuts. Last year Danielle, who has Down's syndrome, had a full-time educational assistant. She needs this educational assistant to reach her potential. She's a delightful girl, Premier. This year all that is offered is half time. This required the family, at one point, to keep Danielle away from school for three weeks because she has a tendency to wander off the school grounds and they were worried for her safety.

That board has received cuts of about 25% of their special education budget. That board has 616 new high-needs students this year that you are giving them no funding for.

Danielle and her mother are here to hear from you. Will your government take responsibility for the cuts they have inflicted on special education and will they—

The Speaker (Hon Gary Carr): Order, Premier?

Hon Michael D. Harris (Premier): I think the original question was, do I agree with my Minister of Education? Given the facts that this member and his party have presented to the Legislature, the mockery, that those in the know have said they pull figures out of the air, there's no relevance to them, it's a very easy choice for me: to agree with you or to agree with one of the finest ministers of education; to agree with the fact that there is more

money for Barrie for special education this year than last year. That's an indisputable fact.

You also raise the issue of a child and her mother who are here today, and we are happy to do everything we can to assist. We do not deliver the programs directly ourselves, but we do fund and we have funded their board with more money, so money is clearly not the problem. If there is another problem and we can assist, we would be glad to do so.

Mr Kennedy: You should really, now that you've decided to, look at this issue in its totality.

Here today also are public supervisory officials, and they have produced figures, Premier. I am going to send you a copy for your benefit. In these figures, they show \$9 million less to the Simcoe board, once your formula came in, than they were spending in 1997.

Interjection: Barrie.

Mr Kennedy: It's not just Barrie. It's \$20 million missing from Ottawa, it's the distress in Windsor and it's \$11 million missing from Durham. There is a crisis across the province.

Today we have with us Gloria Smith. Gloria Smith has been mentioned before, by my colleague from York West, because her son Jonathan is not in school. He's 14 years old. Last year he was in a special education class. This year he's been offered three hours per week only. That's all the support you're willing to give him.

Premier, I want you to stand in your place and tell these families, tell these school board officials who have identified the cuts you've made, that you're going to change things, that you agree that something's wrong, you're going to take responsibility for it, and things will get better for special-needs students in this province, starting today.

Hon Mr Harris: I think it's a matter of record that we have increased funding and we are putting more money into these boards. I would also say that in addition to more money, we have set a minimum amount—no maximum amount with the new money and the more money they get—that must be spent on special education and on special needs. There's been no freezing of money. We've said there is a minimum. For the first time in the history of this province they can't take that money and spend it on other things, but with the more money, if the board officials can't run the board, then resign and we'll run it. We'll make sure that special-needs kids are not the ones who are going to be cut.

DOCTOR SHORTAGE

Mr Toby Barrett (Haldimand-Norfolk-Brant): My question is for the Minister of Northern Development and Mines. My riding of Haldimand-Norfolk-Brant is largely a rural riding, which presents certain challenges to the government in terms of providing services to residents of sparsely populated areas. Many of the issues my constituents face are shared by those you represent in your role as minister responsible for northern Ontario.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon Gary Carr): Order. I cannot hear the question. When the member is down at the other end, I need order so I can hear the question.

Mr Barrett: Thank you, Speaker. As I was wanting to explain, many of the issues that my constituents face are shared by those you represent in your role as minister responsible for northern Ontario.

One of these issues is the provision of health care services and the recruitment and retention of medical professionals. In 1997, the University of Toronto published a report on physician distribution in Ontario, and they published their findings in the *Canadian Family Physician*. I think the results of this study served as a wake-up call to many. The U of T report found that Haldimand-Norfolk was the second most underserved area in the province for family physicians, behind only Sudbury district. Attracting a sufficient number of nurses, nurse practitioners, family physicians and specialists is a challenge that northern communities have been facing for decades as we—

The Speaker: I'm sorry. I extended the member's time. Minister.

Hon Tim Hudak (Minister of Northern Development and Mines): I appreciate the comments and the question from the member for Haldimand-Norfolk-Brant. I want to commend him for his leadership in his riding on the rural health care issue. I appreciate his interest similarly in health care in northern Ontario.

To get to the point of the matter, yes, my ministry is working to support the work of Minister Witmer and the Ministry of Health in providing access to health care services in northern Ontario. We're trying to build upon the good work in the rural and northern Ontario health framework.

For example, my ministry supports and funds the annual health professionals recruitment tour. We recently announced funding for Think North, a "made in the north, by the north, for the north" solution for CD-ROMs and Web sites that we have funded that's getting good press in northern Ontario.

As well, I had the opportunity—

Mr Rick Bartolucci (Sudbury): Why don't you fund it completely? Tell the truth.

Interjections.

The Speaker: Would the member take his seat.

I would ask the member to withdraw that, please.

Mr Bartolucci: To "tell the truth"?

The Speaker: I'm sorry. Please withdraw it.

Mr Bartolucci: I withdraw it.

Hon Mr Hudak: Thank you, Mr Speaker. As well, to confer with Dr McKendry—

Mr Bartolucci: Tell the truth.

The Speaker: Take a seat. Last warning for the member for Sudbury. I will have to name him if he shouts out like that again. Last warning.

Minister?

Hon Mr Hudak: Thank you, Mr Speaker. As well, the opportunity to convey what I've heard from northerners to Dr McKendry, the minister's fact-finder on this

issue and, very important, to the Northern Ontario Heritage Fund Corp, a program to support small community health care on the capital side, and we will continue to make announcements in that vein as well.

1520

Mr Barrett: I think we agree that all Ontarians, regardless of where they live, deserve to have access to top-quality health care services close to home. Many of my constituents have expressed their support for the government's approach to ensuring that rural health care needs are met. Recognizing the unique needs of these communities was a first step in providing appropriate facilities and services in small towns throughout Ontario. The changes the government is implementing have not always been easy, but the new direction the government has taken is a welcome and long-overdue change for rural Ontarians.

Minister, I have a question. What role have you as Minister of Northern Development played in ensuring that the health care needs of northerners are met?

Hon Mr Hudak: To answer to the member's question, in addition to the point that I mentioned earlier, we have announced \$5 million to date for 60 small health facilities across northern Ontario. I was in Kenora just over a week ago where I announced \$3.2 million in funding for 38 different health facilities in the Kenora-Fort Frances area. I was in Timmins just last week to announce \$1.2 million in support of 12 facilities in north-eastern Ontario, and as well most recently in announcing \$1 million in assistance for eight health facilities in the Algoma district.

To answer the member's question to name a few, in Wawa, for example, our government provided \$230,000 for an enhanced ultrasound system and other new medical equipment for the Lady Dunn Hospital and \$50,000 to improve energy efficiency at the Wawa Medical Centre. The St Joseph's Health Centre in Blind River will receive \$350,000 for renovations, and finally, the Thessalon Hospital and Algoma Manor will be renovated and improved thanks to \$100,000 in funding through the heritage fund of this government. That is our continuing dedication to improving access to health care in northern Ontario.

SPECIAL EDUCATION

Mr David Caplan (Don Valley East): I have a question for the Minister of Education. Bernadette MacNeil is a grade 3 student in my riding. She has a neurological disorder and requires a full-time educational assistant. You see, that's what her medical assessment says. In the past she has received that support, but this year you placed a cap on ISA grant funding for special education. This year, her classroom assistance was cut in half. Her parents acknowledged that the board of education has done all that it can do, but they know that you have taken control of education funding and all matters in education under infamous Bill 160.

My question for you, Minister, is simply this: Your decision to freeze special education has made things worse for the kids in our classrooms. Bernadette's classroom support has been cut in half. Will you stop making excuses, will you stop giving us spin, will you stop trying to blame others and will you commit today to restore full funding and full support for Bernadette and for her education?

Hon Janet Ecker (Minister of Education): I must confess to being a tad confused about why the honourable member would think spending \$1.2 billion on special education is spin. I would also like to say again that we started with what the board told us they needed for special education. We then topped up last year by \$127 million, this year by an additional—maybe they don't know how to add, but an additional \$32 million, because we recognize that these supports are very important.

I can point to all kinds of boards that have had increases as high as 100% in their special education funding. If they can't take that money and put it where it needs to be put—with the students—perhaps we should give them assistance to do that. Perhaps the parents should ask what happened to that money.

We know there are challenges with this program. We've said that we're working with the boards to try and do a better job. If changes need to be made, we're prepared to make changes. We've said that time and again. But as I've said to the honourable member, they're not bringing forward any solutions here. All they keep doing is—

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

Mrs Lyn McLeod (Thunder Bay-Atikokan): Keith and Spencer and Stephen and Kyle and Matthew and Michael and Ian and Thomas and Christopher and Brenda are just 10 of the students who are receiving special education support in Thunder Bay. Their parents, along with many others, have written to express their concern that the support for their children will be lost at the end of this month unless you do something about special education funding.

You are providing funding for only half the children in the Lakehead separate school board who need support. These are children that your ministry has agreed need support. They fit into even the restrictive criteria that you put in place for them to be eligible for funding. But you froze this board's funding, so these students lose out.

The board has been providing support to these students out of their reserve funds, but the board's reserve funds run out at the end of December. This is one of 64 out of 72 boards that have a shortfall in their special education funding.

Minister, will you tell the parents of Keith and Spencer and Stephen and Kyle and Matthew and Michael and Ian and Thomas and Christopher and Brenda that you will provide the support you promised to them?

Hon Mrs Ecker: I appreciate that the honourable members have some special guests in the gallery that they want to get these questions on the record for.

I would like to say to the honourable member that the Lakehead board received almost 40% more in special education funding. We have given this board more money for special education. We understand there are changes that may well need to be necessary. We were told that we needed to protect funding and that we needed to have layers of funding so that children with more needs got more money. We did that. We were told there needed to be more money. We did that as well. Twice we did that, I would like to remind the honourable member.

We remain committed to working with all the boards to try and improve the special education supports that our children get, and we stand by that commitment.

ASSISTANCE TO FARMERS

Mr Garfield Dunlop (Simcoe North): My question is for the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs. Minister, recently the federal government announced \$170 million in assistance for farmers. However, there have been accusations by some that those dollars are not finding their way into the hands of Ontario farmers. For example, the member for Elgin-Middlesex-London stated on November 17 that "Millions of dollars are waiting in Ottawa to be distributed to Ontario farmers ... and the money is ready to go."

Minister, is this true? Could you set the record straight for Ontario's hard-working farm families?

Hon Ernie Hardeman (Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs): I'd like to thank my friend and colleague from Simcoe North for the question and for providing me with the opportunity to indeed set the record straight. I want to assure the member, all members of this Legislature and all the hard-working farmers of Ontario that the province is not holding any money. In fact, the province is dedicated to making sure that Ontario farmers receive their fair share of the federal funding as quickly as possible.

We are presently negotiating with the federal government and discussing with farm leaders the best possible way that we can implement the changes that were announced by the federal minister in the whole farm relief program that he suggested would be funded through that \$170 million.

The federal government is presently not in the position to flow any of the money that was announced. Moreover, we were informed by federal officials that the federal minister has not yet received Treasury Board approval to fund any of this money for any of the farmers in Ontario.

Mr Dunlop: Thank you for the clarification. I'm sure the member for Elgin-Middlesex-London will be pleased to hear that Ontario is not holding up federal payments to Ontario farmers.

Minister, I understand you will be attending a meeting of provincial and federal agriculture ministers next week

here in Toronto. Could you inform the House what our government's priority will be at that meeting?

Hon Mr Hardeman: Indeed we are meeting with all our provincial colleagues and the federal minister next week to discuss the agreement that we have with the federal government as it relates to farm safety nets. I want to reiterate that our government has consistently stated that the time has come for the federal government to give Ontario farmers their fair share of the federal safety net program.

Ontario presently produces 23% of the farm product and receives 16% of the farm safety net program. We do not deem that appropriate or fair for Ontario's farmers.

I also want to state that Ontario is on record and will continue to fund 40 cents of every dollar that the safety net program provides. Again, we are committed to funding the 40-60 split for the farmers of Ontario.

Hopefully we all can iron something out very quickly so we can get that program in place for Ontario's hard-pressed farmers.

1530

TORONTO COUNCIL

Mr Howard Hampton (Kenora-Rainy River): My question is for the Premier. Is the Premier going to be here?

The Speaker (Hon Gary Carr): The Premier is coming.

Mr Hampton: Premier, this summer your former Minister of Municipal Affairs, Mr Gilchrist, was asked if your government intended to set the number of city councillors for the city of Toronto. He replied, this summer, that it was up to the city to make that decision. Thousands of taxpayers and citizens in the city itself took your government at your word. They went through the OMB process to set the number of wards. A lot of money was expended on that process. The OMB responded and said there should be 58 wards. Yet we find that your government is now going to totally ignore the OMB process and totally ignore what your minister said.

How do you justify putting the city of Toronto, the citizens of Toronto, the taxpayers of Toronto, and the Ontario Municipal Board through a long and considered process, and now your government says: "We don't care what they think; we don't care what they say. We're simply going to wipe this out"? How do you justify that, Premier?

Hon Michael D. Harris (Premier): The same way that the mayor of the city of Toronto, Mel Lastman, said this morning on CFRB: "We'll do it. We'll go to 44. Let us do it."

Mr Hampton: This is not about Mayor Lastman. This is about the citizens of this province, the citizens of this city, who took your government at their word. They went to the Ontario Municipal Board. Many of them invested many hours and a lot of their own money. It's about the city, which also went there to work through with the

Ontario Municipal Board a process where these issues would be arrived at after due consideration.

Now your government comes along and says: "We don't care what we said in July. We don't care about all the people who worked so hard on this. We don't care about the people who went to the municipal board. We don't care about the municipal board decision."

Premier, if you're going to simply override all of the legal process, if you're going to simply override all of the democratic process, if you believe your government knows absolutely the truth and what should be done, then why don't you put your decision up for public hearings? You've got a week, a week and a half. You can hold public hearings. Why not let the people have a say before you simply go along and ignore all the work that's been done?

Hon Mr Harris: It is my understanding, not having seen the OMB ruling, that they ruled not on the number of ridings but on boundaries.

Mel Lastman today on CFRB said, "We know the public would prefer 44 to 58." He said, "I think they'd prefer 30." I think 22 sounds pretty good myself and is probably more than enough to run the city of Toronto.

That's why we are consulting with the city of Toronto. The minister has written a letter to seek input. It has provoked a very vigorous and interesting debate. The good news in the debate is that it's all for fewer politicians and less cost to the taxpayers, and I think they're in favour of that.

FIREFIGHTERS

Mrs Sandra Papatello (Windsor West): My question is for the Premier of Ontario. This question is in regard to a fire from 1987. It was a horticultural fire where 69 firefighters from Kitchener, out of a force of 200, fought this fire.

Since that time, six people involved with that fire have died of cancer. Since that time, we've read reports that spoke about the flames they fought, "smoke and flame that was the colour of every rainbow." It obviously meant that it was toxic. Since that fire, four babies were born with birth defects to people who were involved with that fire. Since that time, 16 claims were made to the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board, claims for the firefighters or for their widows.

Premier, in light of the fact that not one of the claims was accepted, I'd like to know what you feel your responsibility is to firefighters, to the people who put their lives at risk every day for all Ontarians. How do you feel that you as the Premier are responsible to these individuals?

Hon Michael D. Harris (Premier): My responsibility is to ask the minister responsible to respond.

Hon Chris Stockwell (Minister of Labour): Thank you for the question. I met with the association yesterday, as a matter of fact. I was there for about an hour and we had a long and, I think, in-depth discussion on the issue. The question was put to me with respect to the issue you

speaking about. We at the Ministry of Labour and the WSIB have given them the undertaking to review the situation, as we had since this situation was brought to our attention. There has been a committee struck and they're reviewing the recommendations that were brought forth. It is a slow process, I agree. It's difficult, and in the meantime the issues are being dealt with on a case-by-case basis. I appreciate the concerns the firefighters brought to my attention. I dealt with the issues very directly and told them that as soon as we can we will make the appropriate decisions. You understand it's a binding decision that locks you in for virtually eternity. It's a very difficult decision. We don't underestimate the great things the firefighters do in this province, but you have to understand, you have to appreciate the issue and the substance. We accept their report and we will be reporting back soon.

Interjection.

Hon Mr Stockwell: It wasn't 10 years. This report was commissioned, I think, in 1997. That's when the report began.

Mrs Pupatello: All of those studies and the length of time that you appreciate it takes to go through all of this is great. Minister, let me tell you (a) we're disappointed that the Premier doesn't want to stand up and say what he feels his responsibility is as the Premier of Ontario, and (b) let me just quote from a report. This was written by a member of the board of directors of this same Workplace Safety and Insurance Board, but it was submitted to you in September 1998. It's been in your hands for some time and it says: "Mortality among those present at the horticultural technology fire was higher than the provincial average. This equates to a cancer rate 10 times higher than the provincial average."

Minister, it's fine for you to be kind and give reasoned and assuring words; what these individuals—16 claimants—are looking forward to, what the widows are looking forward to is to have you stand up in the House today and say, "We think it's worth it that they put their lives at risk for us every day and we will take care of people who are beset by cancer because they are fighting for us."

Hon Mr Stockwell: Clearly anyone on this side of the House would be happy and joyful to stand up and meet the commitments and criteria you make. We have an obligation to the firefighters who were fighting that fire. We appreciate the fact that there's a very serious issue at hand here. No one is slowing this process down for anything less than compassionate reasons. No one has cornered the market with respect to the firefighters, those people who work for us and what a debilitating and difficult job they have, particularly in these circumstances. I would never be party to any process that would slow down payments to widows and children of firefighters.

With the greatest of respect, you may take a slight at the Premier in your original question. We have tried to deal with it. It has been a long-term issue. I have given you my undertaking that we will deal with this as quickly as we possibly can. I'm telling you, we will deal with it. If I could stand up and wave a magic wand and fix it, of

course I would. We can't. We give you our undertaking. We will report back as soon as humanly possible.

1540

TRUCKING INDUSTRY

Mr John O'Toole (Durham): My question is to the Minister of Transportation. Minister, you would know from the economic statement yesterday that the Ontario economy is hot. Many small businesses are expanding because of export activities, and of course export activities put pressure on the trucking industry. You know that many jurisdictions in the United States are putting pressure on you and Ontario to join the international registration plan. I know that many states are threatening to remove the reciprocal agreements that allow the free trade of truckers and free movement within the United States.

Minister, would you stand in your place today and tell the people of Ontario what efforts you and our government are taking to join as quickly as possible the international registration plan.

Hon David Turnbull (Minister of Transportation): My colleague asks an important question. Indeed, as I am sure he is aware, the Legislature is currently considering amendments to the Highway Traffic Act, through the Red Tape Reduction Act. This will allow Ontario to apply for membership in the international registration plan. If this legislation is passed, the red tape bill will allow us to join through a ballot application to the IRP for membership. The effective date would be November 1, 2000.

This would be very advantageous to the Ontario economy. IRP membership will allow Ontario commercial motor vehicles unrestricted access to all North American jurisdictions. We will ensure the continuity of Ontario-US trading relationships and the competitiveness of carriers. IRP membership meets the government's key priorities to eliminate—

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

Mr O'Toole: Thank you very much for that comprehensive response, Minister. I'm pleased that Bill 11 is being discussed. I'm speaking on it this afternoon and I'll be sure to follow up on your remarks. This is very important. In fact I might say, Minister, this is a very critical issue, as you know. For Ontario's economy to remain competitive, we need swift and decisive action and I know we can count on you. Could you tell me and reassure the competitiveness of our trucking industry?

Hon Mr Turnbull: An equally good follow-up question. We're working to improve the competitiveness of Ontario, competitiveness that the opposition parties wouldn't understand. We have currently two major initiatives. One, the MTO is working closely with industry and the Quebec government—

Interjections.

The Speaker: The member for Windsor West, come to order, please.

Hon Mr Turnbull: We're working with the Quebec government to develop a proposal for comparable vehicle

weights and dimensions standards. Quebec is a key trading partner with Ontario. Resolution of this will allow the industry to make decisions in terms of truck purchasing equipment.

The second initiative we are participating in is the automated vehicle identification program called Avion. This is a pilot program with the US which allows us to electronically clear vehicles. After one stop in the day, they are cleared all through North America for the balance of that day. It helps to ensure our competitiveness and it makes us more cost competitive and improves our—

The Speaker: The Minister's time is up.

CHILD POVERTY

Mr Richard Patten (Ottawa Centre): My question is to the Premier. Last week when the report card on child poverty was released, you called it "hogwash" and said it was based on false data. I'm sure your staff have advised you that today there was a report that more specifically addresses the situation of child poverty in Ontario. The facts and figures and the statements in this are quite distressing.

I would point out that one in five children now in Ontario lives in poverty. In addition, since 1989 the number of poor children has increased by 118%. The number of children in poor working families has increased by 142%. The number of poor children in families with full-time, full-year employment has increased by 105%. The number of children in families experiencing long-term unemployment has increased by 81%. The number of children in families with total incomes less than \$20,000 has increased by 137%.

Premier, I believe your policies are directly responsible for this situation. When are you going to do something significant to stop the trend of increasing child poverty in Ontario?

Hon Michael D. Harris (Premier): The report today is based on the same hogwash statistics, which could not be applied to child poverty. They come from Statistics Canada, and Statistics Canada says to use these statistics—the word "poverty" or any relation to poverty is incorrect. It says there is no official definition of "poverty."

It goes on to say that in spite of efforts of different interest groups, there is still no internationally accepted definition of "poverty." There have been some attempts internationally, such as the United Nations which presents a very different picture of some 6% across Canada and declining.

There has been an attempt by Professor Sarlo to look at real poverty. In his *Canadian Living Standards: 1998 Report*, published by the Fraser Institute, "I was pleased to report that, using income as an indicator, the incidence of child poverty has decreased." You see, when I said the report was hogwash, it's based on hogwash statistics.

Mr Patten: You can use any definition you want. You can challenge, perhaps, the benchmark, but the fact is it is

a benchmark. It's comparative year by year and it also looked at the other provinces in the rest of Canada. The fact remains that there is a growth in child poverty. You may not agree with the particular benchmark used. It happens to be that families with children with \$20,000 worth of income have increased, those families in the lower areas. That means that we have more children who are suffering.

I look at some of the other factors of—or you stand up and you tell me that there is less child poverty today and share what your benchmark is. The fact is you cut welfare rates. It's more difficult for many families to find affordable rental housing. You've gotten out of the social housing business. We now have a major problem in this particular province. You cut education by \$1.2 billion and that has affected a lot of kids, especially children with special needs.

I ask you again, when will you do something significant to change the trend of having more and more children move into child poverty in Ontario?

Hon Mr Harris: The statistic that is being used and was used by the group today in fact measures the exact opposite. What it measures is, if a jurisdiction grows the middle class, if you're creating more jobs, more wealth, if people are better off today, if working Ontarians are better off, then the statistics will show that there are more who are below that median average. What the statistics actually show is tremendous growth of net wealth of the middle class, exactly as we said we would do.

When you have any objective measure, it shows the number of children living in poverty in this province declining, declining vis-à-vis the rest of Canada and declining vis-à-vis last year and the year before. Having said that, one child living in poverty, by anybody's definition, is one child too many, which is why we must continue to be vigilant and do even more in the future.

WORKFARE

Mr Dan Newman (Scarborough Southwest): My question is to the Minister of Community and Social Services. I'd like to ask you a question that is of great interest to my constituents in Scarborough Southwest. I read with interest your announcement of a workfare action plan fulfilling one more of our government's Blueprint commitments. I'm pleased to see that you're moving to increase community placements in municipalities across the province. By giving people of Ontario on welfare the opportunity to gain invaluable skills, experience and contacts through community placements, you help to move them towards a paying job.

I know that welfare reform is a challenging process. It's my understanding that you are actually rewarding municipalities that exceed their targets for workfare placements. I want to know what you are going to do to support municipalities to help them reach those goals.

Hon John R. Baird (Minister of Community and Social Services, minister responsible for francophone affairs): Helping people move from welfare to work is a

tremendous priority for this government. We couldn't have achieved the outstanding results that we have across Ontario without the support of our delivery agents, the municipalities around the province. More than 450,000 people have been able to break the cycle of welfare dependency. That's a tremendous benefit of hope and opportunity for these people.

I can see, though, our friends in the Liberal Party don't like work for welfare because their welfare reform policies were written by an insurance adjuster. They just want to write people off. They don't care about helping people move from welfare to work. What they care about is cottagesfare. Cottagesfare is no fair to the hard-working taxpayers of this province.

PETITIONS

FIREFIGHTERS

Mr Rick Bartolucci (Sudbury): It's nice to be able to talk again. This petition was signed by several people known as the Friends of Sudbury Firefighters. It's to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas firefighters risk their lives to protect the lives and property of their neighbours;

"Whereas firefighters and the citizens of Ontario have a right to be assured that their provincial government is doing all it can to protect them;

"Whereas local investigations of workplace hazards can be marred by a conflict of interest and are often less than conclusive nor impartial;

"Whereas the ability to enforce safety and health requirements is essential to protect firefighters, other workers and the citizens of Ontario; and

"Whereas a provincial agency, backed by full investigative authority, will produce more useful and more credible analysis;

"Therefore, we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to support the establishment of a provincial agency to investigate hazardous work sites and workplace safety rules similar to the powers given to agencies in the United States."

I have affixed my signature to this large petition as I am in complete agreement with it.

1550

OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH AND SAFETY

Mr David Christopherson (Hamilton West): I have a petition that reads as follows:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas this year 130,000 Canadians will contract cancer and there are at minimum 17 funerals every day for Canadian workers who died from cancer caused by workplace exposure to cancer-causing substances (carcinogens)" like those that our firefighters faced on the Plastimet site;

"Whereas the World Health Organization estimates that 80% of all cancers have environmental causes and the International Labour Organization estimates that one million workers globally have cancer because of exposure at work to carcinogens;

"Whereas most cancers can be beaten if government had the political will to make industry replace toxic substances with non-toxic substances in the workplace;

"Whereas very few health organizations study the link between occupations and cancer, even though more study of this link is an important step to defeating this dreadful disease;

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

"That it become a legal requirement that occupational history be recorded on a standard form when a patient presents at a physician for diagnosis or treatment of cancer and that the diagnosis and occupational history be forwarded to a central cancer registry for analysis as to the link between cancer and occupation."

I continue to support the petitioners who are calling on the government to take this action.

ABORTION

Mr Marcel Beaubien (Lambton-Kent-Middlesex): I have a certified petition which reads as follows:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH AND SAFETY

Mr David Christopherson (Hamilton West): I have a petition that reads as follows:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the community of Sarnia is witnessing many women developing mesothelioma and asbestosis as a result of the asbestos brought home on their husbands' work clothing; and

"Whereas similar cases are occurring in other areas of the province;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, ask the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to amend the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act to allow compensation for family members

who develop occupational illness as a result of workplace toxins inadvertently brought home.”

I add my name to those of these petitioners.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

TIME ALLOCATION

ATTRIBUTION DE TEMPS

Hon Robert W. Runciman (Minister of Consumer and Commercial Relations): Pursuant to standing order 46 and notwithstanding any other standing order or special order of the House relating to Bill 11, An Act to reduce red tape, to promote good government through better management of Ministries and agencies and to improve customer service by amending or repealing certain Acts and by enacting four new Acts, the standing committee on general government shall be authorized to meet at 6:45 pm on Monday, December 6, 1999 for the purpose of considering the bill;

That, at such time, the Chair shall put every question necessary to dispose of this stage of the bill without further debate or amendment and that any divisions required shall be deferred until all remaining questions have been put and taken in succession with one 20-minute waiting period allowed pursuant to standing order 127(a);

That the committee shall report the bill to the House not later than the first sessional day that reports from committees may be received following the completion of clause-by-clause consideration and not later than December 7, 1999. In the event that the committee fails to report the bill on that day, the bill shall be deemed to be passed by the committee and shall be deemed to be reported to and received by the House;

That, upon receiving the report of the standing committee on general government, the Speaker shall put the question for adoption of the report forthwith, and at such time the bill shall be ordered for third reading;

That, when the order for third reading is called, the remainder of the sessional day shall be allotted to the third reading stage of the bill. At the end of the sessional day, the Speaker shall interrupt the proceedings and shall put every question necessary to dispose of this stage of the bill without further debate or amendment;

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

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

Mr John O’Toole (Durham): It’s my pleasure to rise in the House in support. The minister has just moved the minute with respect to the time allocation motion and the importance of dealing with red tape as urgently as possible. As you would know, Mr Speaker, Bill 11, the act to reduce red tape, is indeed a central part to the plan of our

government to eliminate barriers to growth and opportunity for the hard-working people of Ontario.

I would ask all members to reflect on the importance of this to small business. The more barriers you create, the more you block people from having opportunities to complete their own self-reliance and their own support systems. It may be in some people’s interest to create the bureaucracy and create the red tape, to keep the old system going that really blocks people out, small independent people who really need an opportunity.

So I see this whole bill as a story about jobs and hope and opportunity, and I know this is shared by the member from Scarborough Southwest, who’s with me today and paying some attention, although he is reading right now, but also the member from Brampton Centre, who I know has worked tirelessly in his riding for economic development. I can’t say enough about him. In fact, if he gave me some notes, I’d probably read them on the record for him.

But I think it’s just one in a series of initiatives that the government has committed to in the Blueprint plan. And you know, it’s a rigorous and most difficult challenge.

Why do I say that? As I look around my riding of Durham, I know that there are many new small businesses. I met this morning with Linda Zeisner from the Ministry of Economic Development and Trade, and she told me the work she’s doing with the small tourism operators and the people in my riding of Durham. She’s up in Tyrone talking to people and she’s in Enniskillen and Blackstock and Crooked Creek, to name but four.

I feel that working together is how we can move forward in a new economy, a new order in this province, and I think of our Premier as being a person with the conviction and a vision and determination to examine the concerns that are brought to his attention, but to move forward, always moving forward to give people hope and raise that flag on the mountaintop for the people to look forward to. Every once in a while we all need to be refreshed and restimulated, encouraged and refocused.

1600

It was an inspiration to me yesterday to listen to our Minister of Finance, the Honourable Ernie Eves, a man with great control oratorically and financially, you might say, bring a report to the people of Ontario, an update, if you will, a report card about the status of where we are. I wasn’t surprised. There was some trepidation but I wasn’t surprised to hear that it was genuinely good news. I would question anyone in the House here today, although there are only three on the opposition side, which is good because they can’t stand and ring the bells—there have to be five of them. I would say, though, that the numbers speak for themselves. This isn’t politics. It’s like the public accounts auditor, Erik Peters. His report card is a very important barometer, although it lags somewhat behind the actual activities of the day.

The report card that we get and monitor all the time is Statistics Canada. It’s a scientific tool or measurement of prosperity, really. They report the GDP in Ontario at 5%, the highest growth not just in Canada but in the G7.

Mr David Christopherson (Hamilton West): Is that projected or over the year?

Mr O'Toole: That's the actual current reporting mechanism. Let's not try to make it more difficult for the people of Ontario. That is more of the red tape and bureaucracy that this whole bill is trying to address, to eliminate those ambiguous things that have been a bureaucratic problem for the last—

Interjection: A barrier.

Mr O'Toole: It's a barrier, I agree.

I want to report for the record the important picture of where we've come. It's like *A Tale of Two Cities*. It's a tale of some woe but there is light at the end of the tunnel.

You've always got to justify the motive here. When we started in 1995, we were spending \$1 million an hour more than we were taking in as revenue. Don't ever forget where we came from. Don't ever forget the poverty that Ontario and its citizens were moving towards. It really saddens me.

I think of my five children. If I may, for the record, I'll name them. Erin, who lives in Halifax, got engaged yesterday. A great kid; congratulations. My next daughter, Rebecca, is married and lives in Australia. Her husband is a CF18 pilot and very proud of her. He's involved in East Timor. This may not be relevant to this particular bill, but it's relevant to me. It's my life. This is my life; this is your life. Then Marnie, who's in teachers' college at Lakehead University, actually teaching now for the first time. She loves it. She thinks it's wonderful. A lot of work, yes, but she loves it, though, and it's the love that is driving her to do it. Andrew and Rochelle are both at university, one at the University of Windsor and one at Brock University, and I'm looking forward to them being home for Christmas.

The point is, I think about them. When I think about the economy, I think about their future. It's important, when we report the opportunities for young people, and if you want to tie this whole dialogue or monologue together, you can see that in 1995 hope and opportunity were gone, in 1999-2000 hope and opportunity are returning. It's been very difficult. It takes tough leadership to make some of the tough decisions, but the light is there.

Mr Eves reported yesterday that the deficit is way ahead of target. You will be pleased to know that the deficit itself is—I'm reading this because I should never depend on my memory—\$1 billion ahead of where it had been forecast in our budget. There is increased revenue. Why is there increased revenue? It's part of the very important economic model that our Premier and ministry have set up: that reducing taxes actually increases revenue, kind of the Robin Hood theory. It's here. It's right in the public accounts record here, the Ontario finance quarterly report. That's when I draw it back. In 1995, bad news, \$1 million an hour more than we were taking in. The choice on the other side was to increase taxes. That's what they did for 10 years. Increasing taxes reduces

revenue; bigger deficits; higher debt. It's an endless spiral.

I've got to address the issue. The issue is clear. The results are here, the numbers. All the politics and all those things—at the end of the day I'm confident that we're on the right track and there's more to be done. We're not there yet but we've almost planted the flag on top of Hiroshima. You know what I'm saying, it's kind of the quest. But it takes determination. Leadership is about setting goals and sticking to them, and so clearly we're there.

Again, I think for the public they should know the numbers specifically. Our revenue has actually moved up. Taxes down, revenue up. You remember those lines? It's critical to the whole model that I'm trying to define for you here.

Actual revenue in 1995-96 was \$49.4 billion; 1999-2000 outlook, \$59 billion—up \$10 billion. Remember the equation here: reduced taxes, increased revenue. You want to draw a parallel line here or at least a complementary line—it's kind of like a regression analysis we're doing here, but the deficit has moved from \$11 billion down to \$1.026 billion. Do you see the correlation here?

This is very fundamental to the whole new economy model that we're trying to address, and the opposition and third party, as our Premier said today, just don't get it. The solutions are just not there in their policies. But the people of Ontario can't be fooled. They spoke out rather effectively—certainly I can only address my riding—in June 1999. They said: "Mr Premier, your job's not done. There's a mandate to continue the job patiently and with compassion." That's exactly what I see happening across all the ministries. Taking that second look, making sure that the issues are being correctly addressed, whether it's special education, funding of education, the funding of health care. It's coming together and I'm confident. It's not just numbers; it's having a model that looks after people's needs and priorities.

That's what the Red Tape Bill is all about. When I come back and try to withdraw the number argument, and I think of some of the small business obstacles and barriers—if they want to create, for instance, a small pizza shop and they go in and get the building permit and the permit to operate, we've reduced the regulations for business registration from months to minutes. We as a government have done that, and I could outline a number of other issues that would address just that one sector. But the theme is demonstrated in what I just told you in almost every one—of course it's a very large, comprehensive bill, but we're dealing with thousands of regulations and there's a lot more to be done.

I expect that although this will involve that they will have to read and participate in our policy and plan, they will support this bill. If they don't then they're voting against small business. That's the record that has to stand. We can all argue at the micro level, the small, little, itchy-bitsy things that aren't solved, that we have to look at the whole policy, but we are moving forward by removing the regulations that I just mentioned.

I think though that if I am still looking at the theory is that tax cuts create economy, which creates jobs, which cuts down on the social costs of government, that's it in a nutshell. I'm not trying to oversimplify it. Please allow me the permission to sketch the picture here for the people who may be listening this afternoon.

Our Premier, Mike Harris, is a leader with courage and vision, and I can assure you he is a man of passion and commitment as well. I'm not so sure though on the other side. It's this ambiguous response during question period, picking up on every little group that yells and wiggles. They jump to their side one day. The opposition and third party don't seem to have a policy.

Mr Dan Newman (Scarborough Southwest): They're wishy-washy.

Mr O'Toole: They're wishy-washy. I can tell you, I've got a copy of their plan, the 20/20. I always felt that hindsight was 20/20. Imagine that the name of their plan was 20/20. Even in question period today, asking questions about issues that are eight years old—look to the future, look to the new economy and let's move forward. Of course all governments have made mistakes. We refer to it as the lost decade. Let's move forward.

I know that today the Premier, speaking about the state of our justice system and the state of the system of making criminals accountable for their actions, was rather disdainfully received by the third party and the opposition. They seem to be saying that they agree with the Young Offenders Act. Clearly, our government doesn't. We believe that criminals should pay the price and we believe that the victims should be defended.

1610

They're going to be talking to Anne McLellan and Allan Rock, and I don't think they're going to be listening. In fact, I heard Attorney General Flaherty this morning on the radio. He said it's just the Young Offenders Act; all they put on it was a new cover. That may be true. I haven't read the particular amendments.

But there is a very interesting article that I think I want on the record about what the federal government is doing. They still haven't got it. This is being quoted from Maclean's magazine, November 29, 1999. So it's the most current issue. The article is entitled, "Taxing Times in Ottawa." I would recommend that all constituents call my constituency office if you want a copy, because I don't want to burden you with the cost of buying one.

Interjection: What's the number?

Mr O'Toole: My number at the constituency office is 697-1501, area code 905. We would definitely get you a copy of this article because it's a balanced article. This article says, "Payroll deductions are on their way up, not down."

Every Premier and leader of any description in Ontario, and indeed Canada, is calling on Paul Martin to cut taxes. We all heard the debate, if you were watching some of the information on television recently, about the huge—the Auditor General of Canada yesterday mentioned it in his report—surplus in the EI fund. It's almost disgusting. That employment insurance surplus is

actually hard-working taxpayers' money. They're taking it into general revenue, and what are they doing with it? They're overtaxing people at all levels. That's just one example that the auditor happened to mention that I picked up on.

But here's what the article by Mary Janigan states. For instance, she said a senior research associate at the Canadian Tax Foundation talked about "the take-home pay of a single taxpayer earning \$39,000 per year when the clock chimes midnight at New Year's." What is the impact on their actual take-home disposable income? Guess what? The big changes announced come to \$31.41 a year. A \$31.41-a-year reduction is not acceptable.

In fact, the article goes on to say that this shell game that's going on federally is because as the Canada pension plan premiums actually go up, there's more of a tax burden on the middle-class working family. So they don't get it. If you give people back their money, those people will actually generate the economy. It goes back to Bill 11.

I suspect there will be other people who want to speak on this bill. I'm just trying to find out exactly who they are. These people would want to speak on the bill, I know, but I have a few more things to say.

As I said, the bill actually amends, I believe, 11 different acts. The AgriCorp Act is amended. The Bees Act is amended. Many of these are old, outdated acts. The Crop Insurance Act, 1996, is amended. The Farm Implements Act is amended or changes are made. This is the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs. It repeals the schedule of the Artificial Insemination of Livestock Act, for instance.

Schedule B has amendments proposed by the Ministry of the Attorney General. As I said, almost every ministry has participated in this business-plan approach to reducing barriers to opportunities.

I'm the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Consumer and Commercial Relations, and schedule F has amendments proposed by that particular ministry. I think the Business Corporations Act is long overdue, the Collection Agencies Act, the Consumer Protection Act. I pay particular attention to that because I see the Ministry of Consumer and Commercial Relations in sort of a model that looks like this. I see on the one side myself as a consumer. I see the consumer, the person who needs protection, who needs to make sure that there's some assurance of quality and cost and service to a product. On the other side of that scale, I see the provider of a service or product. The consumer ministry must be the balance to find a balance between those two competing objectives: the vendor and the purchaser of service or goods.

That ministry—and I paid particularly close attention to that role—I think is finding a balance, which is what you're always looking for, and fairness. At the end of the day we can all look at the challenges to the consumer today. But again, this bill, in its broadest sense, addresses many outdated arguments that needed to be addressed: land titles; the Liquor Licence Act—streamlining appears

there; the Marriage Act; the Registry Act; and I could go on.

I think there's a total of, as I said—yes, there it is. It's just about the end here. Schedule R is the last schedule, so S corrects errors in French versions of the Archives Act. It's cleaning up the legislative calendar, it's cleaning up the legislative statutes and making amendments with respect to various applications and processes. Again, it does come back to eliminating barriers, eliminating unnecessary loopholes and red tape, and streamlining the process, which is part of making it a more competitive way of doing business in the province.

The province of Ontario represents about 30% of the population of Canada, but it also represents about 60% of the economy of Canada. So as Canada goes, it's sort of a reflection of how Ontario is going. If Ontario is going into a slump, then of course Canada gets dragged down into that.

I'm pleased that there are many issues that will be brought up by the opposition and the third party, but I think it's important for the viewer and consumer today to realize that many of these changes are needed to be competitive in a new global economy and to make services work for people. I'm all in support of it.

There are other members who want to share the time, but I go back to the member for Scarborough Southwest and the member from Brant centre. I know how hard he's worked with respect to small business in his community. There are members in the House on all sides who work with their communities and small business to try and make sure that they are responsive and providing information to consumers and to business people alike.

The member for Etobicoke North was recently in my riding dealing with small business issues with Transportation. He was there trying to listen to the concerns brought to him in his role as the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Transportation about small business in that trucking or transportation industry and what he could do to improve their access to the economy of Ontario, and indeed North America. I would say that's important.

The member is probably waiting to speak. If the member for Carleton-Gloucester is prepared to take on the role of leading forward, then I'll stop at this time and share the time.

I gather the NDP should respond to this immediately. With that, Mr Speaker, I'll conclude my remarks.

Mr Tony Martin (Sault Ste Marie): I'm asking for unanimous consent that I would speak now and then the Liberals will speak after me and then we move to the Tories, all of us using our equal time.

The Acting Speaker (Mr Michael A. Brown): Mr Martin has requested unanimous consent. Agreed.

Mr Martin: I'm really happy to once again be able to rise and speak on this red tape bill, first of all recognizing that this is a time allocation motion once again. This is the fourth time I've risen in the last four days in this House to speak on a time allocation motion, which speaks to the level of respect that this government has for the process that's in place here that allows people to

participate fully and in a wholesome way on all things that we pass that affect the citizens of each of our constituencies.

1620

We are now again, as Christmas comes upon us, being rushed into this, having to speak in a rather rapid fashion, getting as much as we can on the record so at the end of the day, when somebody comes back to say, "Where were you when this happened to us?" we can at least say that we got up, we said our piece, we challenged the government on the hurry, on the change in rules, on the continual application of time allocation, and made our concern and our disfavour known.

Interjection.

Mr Martin: Not very democratic. Nevertheless, I said when I spoke on the red tape bill last week—it was time-allocated as well because it was at second reading, and now we're at third reading—that this is very much a Trojan Horse. This is not about helping the broader population of the province. This is not about making access to government easier for the ordinary constituent who lives in all of our ridings. In fact, this really isn't about small business either, because the environment that's being created in this province is as destructive to small business as it is to workers as it is to ordinary families and communities.

If this government wanted to really do something about small business, to give small business a hand up, and to help them out and to respond to some of the concerns that small businesses themselves are raising, they would bring forward a franchise act that I have tabled twice now in this House and that I propose to table again, probably next week, that creates a level playing field for the franchisee in this province as they relate to the franchisor.

People who are losing their jobs because of the economy that we're into in Ontario, people who are being moved from jobs that had some long-term viability attached to them and are being pushed out into the private sector with severance packages, are looking for someplace to invest and are buying into a franchise operation, only to find that there is no possibility or opportunity for them in that realm to actually make some money and put aside a little bit for their retirement and to pay back families who often bankroll these ventures, and that in the fact the franchisor holds all the cards.

The franchisor, in not disclosing information sometimes presents an image that is wrong. The franchisor, by way of gag orders and other rules that he puts into the contract, stops these people from getting together and speaking publicly about the things that are confronting them. At the end of the day, if they find that all is lost, they have no recourse but to go to court. They have, in a lot of cases, lost all their money and have no money left, actually, to afford the kind of legal help they need to be successful there, so they're finished before they start. If this government is interested at all in helping small business, it will move post-haste to bring in a fair franchising act that will do that.

I want to talk here today just ever so briefly about what's really going on in this province. We get a red tape bill here that pretends to do some things, pretends to make government work more fluidly and readily for people, but in fact it doesn't, because what this government has done up to this point is reduce its ability to be helpful.

Let's just look at one area that people have heard me speak about over the last number of years rather often in this place and with great passion. Let's look at what they've done to children and families and communities.

Social welfare cuts: Social assistance rates were cut by 22% in October 1995. This took food off the table for half a million children across this province.

Welfare diet: David Tsubouchi, when he was the minister, issued a welfare diet for a single person with \$90 a month total for food. That's \$3 a day. Can you imagine any of us being asked to feed our families on \$3 a day? If this was a diet for prisoners of war, it would be a war crime under the Geneva Convention.

Despite Harris's promise not to touch the disabled, the papers are full of stories about welfare cuts to single moms caring for disabled children. We all know what's happened to the ODSP in this province. We've been talking about it here for the last couple of months. It's horrendous.

Special relief to municipalities with extra-high welfare case loads was terminated, shifting the full load onto the property tax. Some \$46 million in JobLink training for young people was cut from the social service ministry's budget, and it gets worse.

The 13,000 social service agencies which depend on Community and Social Services for funding had their grants cut by 5% in October 1995, a hit of some \$44 million. This affected children's aid, child abuse services, English-as-a-second-language programs for new Canadians, job training and thousands of other services across the province. A \$2.6-million cut to the budgets of Ontario's shelters for battered women has put abused women at risk of being stalked or injured or even killed. This is what's happening in Ontario, to the folks out there in the towns and communities and cities across this province.

Eliminating counselling services for perpetrators of domestic assault saves for this government another \$1.1 million but puts women in this province at greater risk of being hurt again. Funding for the Ontario Association of Interval and Transition Houses, the women's shelters, was terminated on the first day of Wife Assault Prevention Month in 1995.

The spouse-in-the-house rule was reinstated to cut single moms off family benefits if it is alleged they are living with a man, even though the law requires a three-year residency to establish a common-law spousal relationship. Welfare workers can cut off separated women if there is deemed to be a possibility of reconciliation. A three-month wait for welfare was imposed as a penalty for quitting a job or being fired, and it's gotten worse since then. Youth welfare was restricted, throwing young

people out on to the street. Fraud snitch lines were set up to scapegoat the poor.

The family support plan: We all know the history of the family support plan. The members for Nickel Belt and Niagara Centre have been front and centre pointing out the shortfalls in that program and how they're affecting families and children across this province. Millions of dollars worth of child support payments have gone unpaid and continue to go unpaid as a result of the Tory destruction of the family support plan. I was talking to my constituency worker about an hour ago and she was telling me about half a dozen phone calls that she got today, all on the Family Responsibility Office, one woman in tears because she hasn't had a cheque in over 40 days. This government will at some point, I am sure, have to answer for some of this. Over 200 family support workers were fired, leaving the program a total shambles.

Workfare, the hallmark of this government, has turned out to be quite the joke. It has been introduced for all able-bodied welfare recipients, even single moms, raising the question of whose jobs will now be done for welfare-level wages. Anyone who refuses a workfare job is severely penalized: three months' loss of benefits for the first refusal, six months for subsequent refusals. The first workfare project started in the fall of 1996. Some municipalities have refused to participate because—surprise—there are no jobs.

Do you know what? They've passed legislation now to say that people on welfare who are caught not revealing everything that they're getting in terms of income, even a hamper from their family, could stand the chance of being cut off welfare for life—forever. Following that, they've passed a piece of legislation now that will put those people in jail if they go on the street to panhandle and they're deemed to be too aggressive. This is just a small sampling of what's happened to the people of this province.

If this government is interested in red tape, let's cut the red tape for these folks, for families, for communities and for poor people across this province, I suggest.

Mrs Sandra Pupatello (Windsor West): I am very pleased to be speaking today to a time allocation motion on this red tape bill, because as the people in Windsor are well aware, this government, on a repeated basis, wants to shut down debate on issues that are very significant to the people in my riding. This is just one more example of us not being able to get answers from a government on very significant issues, issues that affect us every day.

We've only been in the House since the end of October, a very short period of time. The government decided to take a very extended holiday in terms of when the House was going to sit at all, and when we got here we learned that the highlight of the session was going to be a squeegee bill. Now, I know that the people of Windsor West needed to hear about 200 kids in Toronto who are really concerned about squeegees. How does that affect 11 million people in Ontario? How does that bill that became the priority to call the House back affect the people of Windsor West, this being the same riding that

lost two emergency rooms under the PC government, with no reinvestment in the community before that happened, that caused lineup after lineup in my riding at the remaining two sites of emergency rooms? How can you rationalize deciding today that you're going to have a closure motion on a red tape bill because you don't have time to talk about issues that are relevant to 11 million people?

1630

Just for the interests of the people at home, this is an omnibus bill. They just threw everything and the kitchen sink into this bill, threw it all together. For example, the Forest Fires Prevention Act: The people in Windsor West don't have all that many forests. We have a lot of great trees in my riding. But people should know that they're talking about strengthening authority for the MNR, the Ministry of Natural Resources, to better fight forest fires. But what the government doesn't tell us and what we realize is that they've cut 40% of the budget. You say you're going to give them more authority to do more work, but you've taken half of their people away, for heaven's sake. How do you expect them to do their work?

The same is true for hospitals. You go on this bent of a hospital health restructuring system, throw everything including the kitchen sink into this commission, give it all the powers in the world to change the way we deliver health in Ontario, and in the same breath you cut dollar after dollar out of the budgets of our hospitals, the very groups and institutions that need to deliver service while all this change is going on, with no reinvestment in community. Then you think you're going to have a good outcome.

The Provincial Auditor told us differently, didn't he? In fact, last week Erik Peters produced his report, which he does on an annual basis. That is the Provincial Auditor's report. He highlights the most significant crises that face the Ontario government. What did he choose to highlight in this case? That the entire Health Services Restructuring Commission and its work is in crisis and in complete chaos. They acknowledge, in fact, that the formula that was used in the adjustment of hospital budgets doesn't take into account patient need. We could have told the auditor that a long time ago. We've been telling the minister that for the last four years.

Now this gang, into its fifth year of power in this government, has the full responsibility for the canary in the coal mine, being Windsor's health services and why we have lineups in our ERs. I had the great misfortune over the last several months to be walking through that emergency ward almost on a daily basis. There was not a visit that I made through that emergency room when I did not find a waiting line, when I did not find people who don't have doctors in my community and the only choice they have is to go to the emergency wards. Why? Because our riding has the dubious distinction of being the first to apply for the northern rural designation for underservice of physicians for the city of Windsor and Essex county,

the most southern urban community you're going to find in Ontario.

Does that make any sense, and why were we forced to do that? Because the Minister of Health at the time, who is most notable for comments such as, "Our pregnant women can pop across the river to have their babies," during the OB crisis of 1997—these are the kinds of things we remember from the Minister of Health. That was the old Minister of Health. He also told us that we had no right to discuss underserviced designations for doctors, that we were even underserved, because we hadn't applied with an application form. So when we called and said, "OK, give us the application form," we get faxed over this form that says, "Northern rural community designation program." Boy, this makes a lot of sense for us. The truth is that the government, in particular the Ministry of Health, has been very neglectful in the collection of its own data. We have doctors who have been dead and buried for years that were still listed as serving their communities. Of course the numbers were all wrong, so the ministry couldn't say that we didn't have enough doctors. We knew, because we have people in our emergency rooms who are costing us more money than required because they don't have a family doctor. This stuff is so basic you just need to walk down Oak Avenue on the west side of Windsor, go to the door and ask them, "Do you have a doctor?" You have a huge chance that they're going to say no.

It's not just Windsor. Windsor was the first, but it was followed closely by Cambridge, and then by Kitchener-Waterloo. Who would believe all those communities in southwestern Ontario don't have enough doctors? We could have told you that in 1997, had you listened. This government is so intent on their own mission that they want to shut down debate, shut down every effort to have to give answers to the public of Ontario. This is one more example of that.

Today we're talking about time allocation. For the people of Windsor West that means closure of debate on these issues of the bills they choose to present in the House. What does that mean to us? That means more closure of debate on the things that are significant.

That same Provincial Auditor also remarked in the report last week that the ministry is no longer going to collect data for readmission rates of patients in hospitals. That same week that Minister of Health—this new one who's going to be known for all kinds of things but mostly for the complete failure of this commission and its health services restructuring process—went off to the Ontario Hospital Association and said, "Don't you worry, we're coming up with a new funding formula." Boy, cute words from this government. Every time you talk about a funding formula, it's an absolute disaster. Every school in Ontario is well aware of that. That should be enough to make us fearful of a funding formula for hospitals.

She said they are going to now fund hospitals based on efficiency. What does "efficiency" mean? Does that mean fiscal efficiency because they balance their books? Does that mean the 50% of hospitals in Ontario that

aren't in debt are considered efficient and therefore they are going to get funding under the funding formula? Does that mean the 50% of hospitals that are currently in debt in Ontario are going to be punished in how they're funded because they're in debt, like both the remaining hospitals in my community because the boards of directors of those hospitals took a very responsible decision and said, "We cannot cut these services"? Why couldn't they cut the services, even though we had the best-laid plans in terms of restructuring our health care? They could not cut services because this government did not come through in reinvesting in our community.

At the same time you closed our emergency rooms, you did not have certain beds made available in nursing homes, rehabilitative beds, chronic care beds. They were not up and running in other institutions before you shut down our emergency ward. Why were they backed up in the emergency ward? Because the patients that were going to be admitted to hospital were being admitted to beds where there were already patients that belonged in the chronic care beds, in the rehabilitative beds, in the nursing home beds, but they didn't exist in the community.

This, to me, does not sound like science. The pages who are working in the House today could go through the perfect logic of having to place those items in the community before you stop the services in a hospital. If this sounds like a broken record, it's because we've been talking about it since 1995.

I would ask every one of those researchers, the Tory staffers over there, who are supposed to provide all those briefing notes for the ministers, to put the truth in their briefing notes, to say, "Yes, we have made major errors in how we've done this." All those \$100,000 paid political staffers who work in the Premier's office: What did they get? They got a 30% increase in their salaries in this year, just since 1999. Is that because the Minister of Finance stands up yesterday and lauds this fabulous boom of the economy in Ontario? Oh, that's great because now they can take all of that bonus surplus they're finding all of a sudden and they can double the staff in the Premier's office. They can give 30% increases to all these fancy suits that are sitting behind the counter on the government side over there.

I want to go back to Oak Street in my riding and say: "Yes, we're underserved and you don't have doctors; yes, you're still waiting in emergency lineups in our hospitals; yes, they have not invested in our community, not in chronic care beds, not in rehab beds, not in nursing homes certainly and that is way behind in terms of the time schedule. But yes, the government did find money for their increase in political staff salaries; yes, they did find money to double the size of the Premier's office; yes, they found money to draw up a fancy new book that is in the hands of 2.2 million children in the school system.

It's a book that looks kind of like this. It's called *The Millennium Book*. Guess what it has in it? It has a picture of the Premier, in the hand of every child of Ontario.

That's what they found money for. That's what they were able to zoom through the system for. They found money and time to do that, but they couldn't find money and time to take care of the real needs of Ontario. That's what I'm in this House to talk about. That's why I don't want to see closure on any of these bills, time allocation or otherwise, because this government has a responsibility to every single Ontarian.

In the case of Windsor West, certainly in the case of health care, they have done wrong by us. You have failed us on every score. You have made a mockery of all the best-laid plans that very good, tireless volunteers took the time, over six and seven years, to plan the best way to deliver health care. So while the fancy suits are sitting there with their fancy fat-cat salaries and 30% increases—I hope the length of time you are forced to sit there means that you are one of the 30% increases.

1640

The truth is, what is really important in the end—it is about priorities; it's about where the government chooses to spend its money. We can see what he did with the Alcohol and Gaming Commission. All this fancy talk by the Management Board chair: "Oh, we've merged the commission. We gave them new-found responsibilities." He gave them a 35% increase in his salary; that's what he did. And you have the balance of the OPSEU workers out on strike because they're asking for—what? Some measly increase somewhere along the line.

It's about priorities. It's about what Mike Harris thinks is good for himself. We are finding example after example after example that where it's convenient for the government, for their little messaging, for their core group of supporters who keep writing the cheques to all the fundraisers—where are all those donors today? Why, I think they're at the Cornerstone Club this afternoon. Isn't there a big meeting going on? I'm surprised there are any members on the Tory side in the House at all. Shouldn't you be lollygagging around your donors this afternoon? Isn't that where it's happening? So if you pay the modest amount of—what is it? Is it \$500 or is it \$1,000?

Interjection: It's \$500.

Mrs Papatello: For \$500 you get to have special time with the ministers. You know what for? You get to discuss policy. That's right: money into the Tory party; policy out of the Tory party. Do you see how this government works? That is why Dalton McGuinty increased his vote in the last election. That is why we are going to go door to door in every corner, in every town, in every city in Ontario for the next four years. It is proof positive today that what we said was happening over the last four years is coming home to roost now.

Suits aside, we have a message that we will bring in to this House, despite the suits, despite the advertising, despite 2.2 million books in the hand of every child in the school system that they managed to create in time before the millennium hit. But in my community they could not find the time or the money to deliver emergency care money, chronic care beds, rehab beds, nursing home

beds. Those were the priorities for us and that is what we will continue to bring in to this House.

Mr Bob Wood (London West): It's my pleasure to rise to support this motion today because it's very important that this bill get passed in an expeditious manner. I'd like to remind the House what the Red Tape Commission's definition of red tape is. It is "a procedure or paperwork not needed to achieve any identified government objective." That can be in the form of legislation, regulations, licences, permits, approvals and a number of other forms.

Cutting red tape, I would remind the House, does not compromise public health and safety or the environment. Why is cutting red tape important? It's important because it attracts jobs, investment and provides better customer service. Other jurisdictions have already learned the importance of this. We need only to look, for example, at Quebec, New York state, the United Kingdom, even the socialist government of France, to name only a few.

Cutting red tape is going to be an important competitive advantage for the future of this province. What has been accomplished to date? The previous Red Tape Commission listened and took action. In 1997, it produced a report called Cutting the Red Tape Barriers to Jobs and Better Government. The report contained 132 general and specific recommendations to eliminate red tape. Many of these recommendations have been implemented and reflect just plain common sense. For example, we've allowed the restocking of mini-bars in hotels and motels 24 hours a day. We've developed a user-friendly information package for employers in understanding the Pay Equity Act. We've worked with other provinces towards establishing common submission requirements for pharmaceutical and economic information. We have removed requirements for minimum room sizes in buildings except where requirements are necessary for health and safety reasons.

We continue to listen and to take action in eliminating red tape. Since 1995 this government has passed 11 red tape reduction bills. These bills have repealed 28 outdated acts and have amended another 149 others. We've eliminated over 1,300 outdated and unnecessary regulations.

The red tape bill currently before the Legislature represents another important step in our effort to eliminate red tape. This bill, like the others before it, is based on correcting problems that businesses and individuals have brought to the government's attention. For example, it will allow for the increased use of electronic technologies for companies to hold meetings by a teleconference or interactively over the Internet. This will save businesses valuable time and money and takes advantage of current technology. The bill will improve consumer protection by increasing the cooling-off period for contracts signed in consumers' homes to days from the current two days. This will help prevent consumer fraud and save consumers money and inconvenience in the future.

We're also taking action to prevent red tape before it can become a problem. The Red Tape Commission has

created a regulatory impact and competitive test to screen new legislative and regulatory proposals. This test is going to be improved and refined as the work of the commission continues. Consistent with our Blueprint commitment in the last election, we are looking at ways to improve that test and will be creating the new business impact test. It's going to be applied to all new government regulations to ensure that they are not standing in the way of new jobs or threatening existing ones.

This bill gets rid of five outdated statutes: the Stock Yards Act, the Artificial Insemination of Livestock Act, the Technology Centres Act, the Ontario Telephone Development Corporation Act, the Massey-Ferguson Limited Act, 1981. By the way, Massey-Ferguson has not been with us for over 10 years yet the statute is still on the books.

This is a good bill. The commission hopes that there will be regular red tape bills every year and that red tape bills are going to be a major asset in fighting red tape.

I would invite all members of the House to join the government in what I think is a very worthy cause, and that cause is making Ontario the best place in the world for regulatory excellence. Investors today are highly sophisticated. They understand whether or not a government understands their problems and is prepared to respond to them, and where they see a lack of understanding and a lack of response they're going to seek investment opportunities elsewhere.

This bill is an important step forward and I would urge all members to support the bill and all members to support this motion.

Mr John Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands): I am very pleased to speak on this bill because I'm a great believer in reducing as much red tape as possible in a lot of different areas that government's involved in. I think we want to make sure that the standards that we've developed in this province over the years in so many different areas, as are outlined in the different statutes that we're dealing with in this bill, are adhered to because we certainly don't want to lower standards. But I'm a great believer in the notion that people have a right to know where they stand, organizations have a right to know where they stand, with all levels of government as quickly as possible, because time delay, more often than not, costs money and the consumer ends up paying for that in the long run. But you've got to make sure the standards are maintained.

The whole notion of a red tape reduction bill is a good idea; however, this government has been championing this kind of legislation ever since it came to power in 1995. Yet I would like somebody on the government side to get up and explain the statement that the Minister of Finance made here yesterday in his economic outlook where he basically said to the people of Ontario that we are going to start our own income tax system in Ontario. I can't think of a more regressive step. Just think about it. For the last 30 or 40 years the people of Ontario have at least known that when it comes to determining what your taxable income is there's one set of rules and regulations,

and we all know that those sets of rules and regulations are like 10,000 pages thick. We may disagree with the interpretation from time to time, and there are tribunals and courts that one can go to in order to get those disputes resolved, but at least there was one constant thing in the whole situation, and that is that there was basically one Income Tax Act that applied both at the federal and provincial levels.

1650

The Minister of Finance yesterday said to the people of Ontario: "We don't like that any more because if the federal government starts to decrease taxes, the way the system is set up, we may not be given credit for that and the people of Ontario will not know whether it's a federal income tax cut or a provincial income tax cut. Therefore, we are going to set up our own income tax system." This must come as quite a surprise to the people of Ontario.

You could probably say, "What's this got to do with red tape?" I'll tell you what this has to do with red tape. Those two single paragraphs in his statement yesterday are probably going to create more red tape than has ever been created in the province, because we're going to duplicate everything. We're going to duplicate all the income tax statutes that are out there federally already and that have been applied at the provincial level. We're going to duplicate that all at the provincial level. I can't think of a worst kind of situation for the business people of Ontario and for the individual taxpayers of Ontario than to, in effect, have two separate rules apply as to what is taxable income. Let me just read to you what he said.

"The federal government has required that provincial personal income tax systems use the federal definition of taxable income. This limits our flexibility in designing tax systems to meet the specific needs of Ontario taxpayers." These are his words. "Ontario is no longer willing to accept federally imposed constraints"—I assume he means the present government, because I haven't heard a lot of people talk about this issue out there in Ontario—"constraints from an earlier era of federal dominance in federal-provincial relations.

"Ontario will move to a 'tax on income' system"—rather than a taxable income system. I'm sure the people out there are already confused: "What's this man talking about?" I would say to Mr Eves, what are you talking about?"—"in which Ontario's personal income tax will no longer be linked to federal tax and subject to hidden tax increases in the federal system. A 'tax on income' system would preserve the benefits Ontario taxpayers have gained from this government's tax cuts."

I say to you, Mr Speaker, and to the members of this Legislature and to the people of Ontario, if we in this province set up an income tax system parallel to that of the federal government, businesses and individuals are going to be subjected to twice the red tape they are currently already subjected to. You will have different definitions as to what taxable income is for federal purposes and for provincial purposes, and you could just go on and on.

There already is a method by which you can deal with this kind of situation, and that is for the ministers of finance, provincially and federally, to get together and resolve some of these issues. But for goodness' sake, let us not set up another system purely for the reason that somehow this government, or whichever government may be in place here, can then take credit for whatever happens in the province. That's not what government should be all about. Government should be all about serving people, but not whether or not at the end of the day they could take credit for a particular measure.

I say to the government, yes, there may be some good measures in this bill and, yes, there were some other red tape reduction acts passed before which dealt with a lot of meaningless stuff. As you heard the member here today say, he thinks it's very meaningful that five acts that haven't really applied to our economic and social circumstances in Ontario for the last 40 or 50 years are going to be taken off the books. OK, fine. That's a step in some direction. They weren't bothering anybody anyway. Why did you need to get rid of them? But OK, we'll give you that one. That's a good idea. But you're going to undo all of that in one fell swoop by just making it more difficult for the people of Ontario to understand our already totally complicated tax system by imposing another system of taxation in the province.

We haven't even talked about the cost. We always hear this government railing against the cost of programs. I've no idea what it's going to cost to set up a new parallel income tax system, but I can imagine it's going to be quite expensive. Who is going to pay for that? The poor taxpayers of Ontario, when there's absolutely no need for it at all.

I would ask the member from Gloucester, whom I recognize to be an honourable gentleman—he's a former mayor of a municipality—to talk to the Minister of Finance and say to him, "Does this really make any sense at all?" This isn't about taking credit for something or not getting credit for something. What we should really be doing is trying to make the system as simplified as possible for the people of the province. Isn't that what the Common Sense Revolution is all about? Isn't that what all these red tape reduction bills are all about? I ask him and the other honourable members who are here—there are a couple of cabinet ministers currently in the House—to talk to the Minister of Finance, because it doesn't make any sense at all.

The other issue that I very quickly want to raise is this whole idea of, "Here we go again, another closure motion." It's interesting, we don't hear that terminology in the House any more, but at one time it was a highly unusual step for a government to actually invoke closure, to say there will be no more debate on an issue. In this House itself, we've gone from unlimited time that you can speak on a matter to 60 minutes, to 20 minutes, and now in many cases, after a certain number of hours of debate—I believe it's six or seven hours—we're going to 10-minute debate.

Nobody says that the parliamentary system is necessarily the most efficient system that we have, but let's at least make sure it's the most democratic system that we have and allow people to have their say, which is basically being shut off with this kind of closure motion.

It seems to me that just about every bill that comes to this House, the government, after a day or so of debate, maybe two days of debate—and when we say two days, we have to be careful as well, because the general public may get the idea that when you're talking about a day's debate, it's an eight-hour debate. We're usually only talking about two hours. Most of our orders of the day don't start until about 4 o'clock, and by 6 o'clock in the afternoon it's usually finished for that session. Then we go on to another two-and-a-half-hour session in the evening, usually on a completely different topic or matter. So when we talk about a sessional day on a particular bill, we're only talking about two hours or, at most, two and a half hours.

This government in the last House, and on just about every bill they've introduced so far in this House, has said: "We don't want debate. We want to cut it off. We want to invoke closure." Closure is basically the limiting of the democratic right of the members to speak as long as they want, as long as they have something meaningful to contribute on a particular bill or piece of legislation.

Interjections.

Mr Gerretsen: They're laughing. You're talking about a bill here that is how thick? It's about 170 pages, if I recall correctly. There it is. Let's see.

Ms Shelley Martel (Nickel Belt): It's 225.

Mr Gerretsen: This is a bill of 225 pages, and most members will get, at most, about 10 minutes to speak on this bill. Then it may go to committee, like we saw happen with the squeegee bill that went to committee the other day. It went there for a couple of days, and then, as soon as the last delegation was there to make their presentation, the government invoked the rule whereby basically, within 10 minutes, everything had to be passed, and if it wasn't passed, it was deemed to have passed.

I ask the former mayor of Gloucester, is that a democratic way to run a province, to cut off debate, to not allow the opposition any opportunity to present meaningful amendments to the process, to make the decisions on all of these various laws, even before the delegations have been heard after second reading of many of these bills? It's a sham, it's an absolute sham. It is somehow allowing the people in the public of Ontario the idea that they can contribute something to the process, and in most if not all cases the government has already totally decided what it's going to do, totally decided what amendments it's going to allow, and usually the only amendments that are allowed are their own drafting errors that have to be corrected.

1700

I think you'll remember it well, Speaker; remember all those property tax bills that were passed last year. There were seven different property tax bills. Do you know why there were seven different property tax bills?

Because they got it wrong every time. Every time they had to fix something or there was something that was wrong in the last bill.

As a matter of fact, today I read with great interest in one of the clippings that most municipalities have only just recently sent out their 1999 final commercial and industrial property tax bill. And we're on December 1. It used to be that the tax bills for most municipalities went out no later than May or June at the latest, or even April.

I'd like the former mayor of Gloucester to explain. How do you explain to people the fact that a lot of these industrial and commercial property owners actually got a break last year? Their taxes were reduced. They got a bill earlier this year that basically said: "I'm sorry, we're going to have to charge you more. There has been a new bill passed by the Legislature on December 15, 1998, in which the fairness concept of market value had to be not only redefined but had to be undone because some people's taxes were simply rising too much and therefore whatever break that you think you got we'll have to claw back from you."

So I say to this government, and I know my time is limited, invoking closure on a bill of this nature is wrong. Invoking closure except in the most unusual circumstances is wrong. You're doing it, you're getting away with it, and I hope the people of Ontario will understand. Perhaps they didn't collectively get it the first time around with the Harris government, but they will have to understand this time around that we are dealing here with a bully government that basically is going to impose its way on the people of Ontario come hell or high water.

To even be talking about reducing red tape in a bill like this, when at the same time you're talking about setting up a provincial income tax system that is completely separate and apart from the federal income tax system, that will make it more confusing for the people of Ontario and for the many businesses, particularly small businesses in Ontario, is totally unacceptable. I would invite the general public to write their members, irrespective of what side of the House they're on, about this issue. It's unacceptable to have an income tax system that is different from the federal income tax system started in this province.

So I say no to closure, and I say yes to democracy and no to a province-wide new income tax system.

Ms Martel: I was thinking back about how many days we have sat in this session, and so far there have been 20 calendar days. The government has had us sit at night, so there have probably been 30 sessional days. I suspect at least five of those 20 calendar days, if you look back, would have been taken up with the throne speech debate. So no business of the Legislature was done, no pieces of legislation were dealt with. I suspect of the 15 that would be left, three at least were opposition days, so we're working our way down. Now I look back and reflect that this is the third time that I have been in this House for a closure motion by this government in this session. So we are probably down to about 12 calendar days where we have actually sat and done some legislation here in this

place, and we are now on the fourth closure motion for legislation. That says something about how concerned, or how unconcerned, this government is with the democratic process.

I don't care if they don't particularly like my point of view or the point of view that's being expressed by members of the New Democratic Party, and I don't particularly care if the government doesn't like the point of view being expressed by members of the Liberal Party. But what the government fails to recognize, and it becomes clearer as we look at the short number of hours for debate and the repeated use of closure motions, is that the government shows disdain for the people we in the opposition have the honour of representing. We are elected here too, whether the government likes it or not, and enough people in the ridings we represent liked our point of view, liked what we had to say and were encouraged by the direction that we put out for people in our party platforms during the election. So we represent not an insignificant number of voters in this province too, who liked and wanted a perspective that was different than the Conservatives.

It shows complete contempt, disdain, for all those people when the government uses its majority, as it is wont to do, as it has surely done in the few calendar days that we have sat so far this fall, solely to shut down debate because they don't like to hear what the opposition has to say. That's what's happening here again today. I am offended by this process. I am offended by a government that shows such contempt and disdain for the people we have been elected to serve, and I am offended that in the small amount of time that we have sat this fall—because the government brought this House back at least three, if not four, weeks later than if we had followed the calendar—20 calendar days, and probably only 12 of those actually used for legislation, we are now on our fourth closure motion to shut down legitimate debate.

It's not just a matter of having a closure motion so that we would move directly to third reading. I want to spend just a moment reminding people about what the motion says today, because in fact it is a motion to shut down debate at committee as well.

This bill passed on second reading, even though members of the opposition voted against it. But what we did do, as is our right under the standing orders that still exist in this place, was to stand, eight members, so that we could have this red tape bill sent to a committee of this Legislature. We still have a right to do that. I suspect if the government had its way, that right would be taken too. But for the moment we still have that right, and we legitimately stood our eight members here last week, or it might have been at the beginning of this week, whenever the vote on second reading was taken, and we asked for this bill to be sent to committee.

Why did we do that? We did that because this is a bill that is 225 pages long, that has schedules that affect virtually every ministry in this government, that has changes to any number of pieces of legislation that many people would have an interest in, and because the time

allocated to us for debate was already severely restricted. So we wanted the bill to go to committee so that we could have at least some form of a public hearing—public airing—of what appears in these schedules so that people would have an idea of what the government is or is not doing or is mistakenly doing, as I will get to later on.

What did the House leader do? He got in a little snit about us having the audacity to stand up and use eight members to send this to committee. He gets into a little snit, and instead of allowing the committee to sit, as it should, for some hearings next week, the government is using the motion before us today to ensure that the committee will never sit next week. There will never be one single presenter who can come and have their say on anything in this bill. There will be not one single moment of debate by members in that committee about the principles of the bill, about what amendments should be made, about what changes should be made, about what mistakes the government is making.

The House leader, because he was mad, because he didn't have his way, came here today with a resolution that says the general government committee will sit next Monday at 6:45 pm, and from the moment they start to sit the Chair will put every question necessary to dispose of this stage of the bill without any further debate, without any amendments. That shows contempt and disdain again for the people we have the honour and privilege of coming here to represent. The people, I remind the government, wanted a different point of view than theirs when we were elected.

1710

So the committee will sit only because we had the audacity to stand eight members, and the moment it starts, the Chair—I don't know who the Chair is and I don't really care; it doesn't matter—will then be forced, by virtue of this motion, to put every question to dispose of the bill. There will be no debate, no one coming to talk about it, no opportunity for public input.

I guess part of the reason the House leader did this was not only because he was mad because we had the audacity to stand up and actually force it to committee, but because the government got beat up badly in the justice committee this week with respect to its squeegee kids bill—badly. I wasn't there. I only saw on TV some of the folks who came, some of the folks who will be directly affected when the police want to take the human garbage off the street and throw them in jail.

I understand that of the 12 people who made representations that day on this government's squeegee kids bill, only two were supportive of the government position. The government got beat up badly this week in the justice committee, when they could only find two presenters to come in and prop up what is a really lousy piece of legislation, mean-spirited, because all it does is attack the poorest of the poor. That's all it does: Get them off the street so the tourists don't have to see them when they come to Toronto.

The government doesn't want any more public hearings. It doesn't want to run the risk again that they will have a committee hearing in this place—or maybe, if we get very lucky, in some other community in Ontario—and people will come and they will not support the government point of view; they will oppose it. They'll oppose it vociferously, as they did in some cases in that committee on Monday.

I think that's also what's behind the reason that today we are dealing with a resolution that shows such contempt and disdain for people who voted for us as opposition members and for the democratic process in this province as a whole.

I regret that because clearly, as the government uses its majority today to ram through this motion, the government will use more motions like this to make sure that even if we do have the audacity again to stand eight members and try to send a bill to committee for some kind of public input and some kind of public hearings, this is the kind of resolution we're going to get: a slap in the face, because we decided to get up and try to do something about a bill we disagree with.

I have no doubt that we'll see more of the same and that what you will see happening is very few committees sitting in this place any more, because the government doesn't want to be bothered with public input, because the government doesn't want to hear from the any opposition from the public or get beat up in the same way they got beat up on Monday in the justice committee. I think that is a bad way to do business. It really shows contempt for all the voters in this province who had a different point of view when they voted for the opposition members on this side. I think it's a bad process in terms of what we're doing to the democratic process that we're supposed to operate under when we come to this place.

I suppose there are some reasons the government really doesn't want to hear from the public with respect to this bill. I think part of the reason is that if people really had an opportunity to look at it, they would be concerned about a number of pieces of it. If people had any kind of opportunity to get through the 225 pages, they might very well want to come and express their concerns.

Even if you go to the government Web site, which is supposed to give the public some information about the bill, there are errors about what this bill does or doesn't contain. That's just on the Web site. Imagine if you had a chance to carefully go through, section by section, all of the schedules for the various ministries to see what the net effect of the changes is.

Let me give you an example. I raised this when I spoke on this bill on second reading last Thursday. It's so effective as a red tape bill that the government doesn't know what's on it; that's clear when you take a look at the Web site. Now, maybe the Web site has been corrected since I spoke about the mistakes that were on it last week. But up until last week, and I haven't had the chance to check recently, the backgrounder said clearly, "The Red Tape Reduction Act, 1999, if passed, will

repeal the Oleomargarine Act, the Abandoned Orchards Act, the Fur Farm Act and the Policy and Priorities Board of Cabinet Act."

The fact of the matter is, if you take a look at the schedules and take a look at the bill, none of these pieces of legislation, none of these changes is in the bill. They don't appear anywhere. The truth is that there is no Policy and Priorities Board of Cabinet Act. It was in fact repealed by this government last December 1998. It's not a part of this any more, even though it still appears on the Web site as being part of this bill.

If the government can't figure out what's not in the bill, how do you expect Ontarians to figure that out? Or do you care? Or is that the reason why we had such a short debate on second reading and why the government effectively is going to guarantee that there are no public hearings on this bill next Monday?

Just very briefly in terms of some of the things that the bill contains: The bill contains a whole schedule under the Ministry of Natural Resources, probably four or five pieces of legislation that will change. One that would probably not have a great deal of interest to most people here today is called the Fish Inspection Act. It will allow an inspector to "arrest without warrant a person that he or she believes on reasonable grounds is committing, has committed or is preparing to commit an offence under subsection (1)." It is important because it has everything to do with how we manage our resources in this province: fish, wildlife, aggregate, forestry resources. So I approve of the changes that are going to be made to allow a conservation officer under the Ministry of Natural Resources to take some immediate steps to conserve the fish resource in the province.

But what the government doesn't tell people and what must be stated here is that the likelihood of a conservation officer being able to give effect to this section is completely unlikely. Under this government, the Ministry of Natural Resources has seen a cut in its staff of almost half, of almost 50%. The people who we hope are out there protecting resources that belong to all of us—fish, game, aggregate, forestry—aren't there any more. They aren't there any more because they're replacing the other staff at desk jobs who have now lost their jobs under this government.

It's worth going back to an audit that the Provincial Auditor made public last year in his annual report when he looked at the fish and wildlife branch of the Ministry of Natural Resources. He talked about conservation officers in particular, and those are the people who I am sure this schedule speaks to. He made it very clear that although the government had a number of badges that were attached to the Ministry of Natural Resources, a number of badges for conservation officers—and they use that figure publicly and continue to say that the number of badges of conservation officers has never been reduced—the fact of the matter is that probably a quarter of those badges were not in use. There were no live bodies using those badges out protecting the resources in the province. They were people who were sitting at desk jobs

because they were replacing people who had been fired, and they weren't out dealing with all of those important issues that should be dealt with, and that should be dealt with as a result of the change in this act.

He also said that because of cuts to the same Ministry of Natural Resources, even in MNR districts where there were conservation officers, by the end of the calendar year—which is not the end of the fiscal year, so another three months to go—many of those same districts were not in a position to do any enforcement whatsoever with respect to fish and game, aggregate or forestry, because their budgets had run out. They didn't even have money for gas to patrol their conservation area.

We saw that happen again last spring, early in January, in northwestern Ontario, Red Lake district—out of money completely. They had staff from the Ministry of Natural Resources on CBC talking about what they were going to try and do about that, but the fact is they had no money left to patrol.

So you look at a change like this, which you might like to agree with, and you know that there is absolutely no way under the sun that the Ministry of Natural Resources is going to be able to do anything to give effect to this change.

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I look at the changes that are made under the Attorney General with respect to finally making a change at the lottery corporation to allow the lottery corporation to take the winnings if the person who won was someone who was in arrears with the Family Responsibility Office. This was a change that this House adopted over three years ago, in the fall of 1996, when the government brought in Bill 82. That was one of the 10 changes that the government talked about making then in order to increase the enforcement tools, in order to be able to get money back from people who owed to recipients, to women and children, predominantly. Here we are three years later, finally, in one of the schedules in this bill, giving effect to an enforcement tool that the government has publicly said has been in place, that the government publicly said was passed. It was passed, but I guess one of the changes that had to be made, one of the minor amendments that the government forgot about three years ago, is only now finally being made.

Contrast that, the change that's happening now, three years later, with what the auditor just said in his report that was released about a month ago, and that is that the enforcement tools at the disposal of staff at the Family Responsibility Office are not being used, except in rare and exceptional circumstances; that the suspension of drivers licenses or the garnishments of bank accounts or the suspending of a passport were only being used in the rarest of circumstances to try and collect money owed from payers who don't want to pay.

You would think the government would have used this Red Tape bill in a manner to put into effect some serious enforcement tools that might be used by staff at the FRO to try and reclaim money that is owed to predominantly women and children right across this province. It was

quite a condemnation of what is happening under this Attorney General's watch at the Family Responsibility Office. In fact, the auditor said that in 75% of the cases registered at the FRO now, there are arrears, there is money owing to families—75% of the cases on file. And under this government's watch, the amount of arrears owing, the amount of money that payers owe families out there has now risen to \$1.2 billion—almost doubled under this government.

Clearly, the enforcement tools aren't working. I think that speaks volumes to the cuts that the former Attorney General made in 1996 when he closed the regional offices, laid off 290 staff overnight and tried to centralize in an office at Downsview that wasn't up and running and still isn't running well.

The auditor also made a comment that the computer system that the FRO paid some \$2.3 million for still isn't working properly, still goes down on a regular basis, still is not able to get, by virtue of the fact of making inquiries to staff, payers and recipients the information they need.

So here we are three years later, the government finally making an amendment that would put into effect something we thought we passed three years ago and at the same time we have an overwhelming, serious, continuing problem at the Family Responsibility Office that this government seems to have no interest whatsoever in trying to address.

If the government wanted to get serious about red tape, I could make two suggestions. Before I do that, I think it's also important to note that in the bill itself, as you go through it and you look at the schedules, you'll see that in at least 17 different sections we have changes being made to correct errors in previous pieces of legislation. Some 17 different subsections are here only to correct errors in other bills. I think that speaks volumes as to the reason why we shouldn't be using omnibus bills to try and pass so much legislation, because inevitably, invariably, we have all kinds of mistakes being made because the government is in such of a heck of a hurry to get it done, to get it passed and to not have any public input or public look at what's going on.

If the government wanted to be serious about red tape, there are two things I would bring to their attention in the time remaining. This goes back to the auditor's report as well, that was released about a month ago: The auditor did a review of the Ontario substance abuse branch, which is the branch of the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care that deals primarily with all those thousands and thousands of community agencies that provide drug and alcohol treatment programs to Ontarians. The auditor made it clear that the accountability framework between the government and those agencies was sadly lacking.

Part of the reason there was a problem in terms of money being flowed, how it was being flowed, was it being used, was there some kind of positive result coming back, was that the bureau itself has to sign a service agreement with all those many community agencies. It's interesting that a draft service agreement was developed by the bureau in late 1996, but it could not be finalized

until approved by the Red Tape Commission. We had one of the members of the Red Tape Commission talking earlier this afternoon—I believe he was a member of the Red Tape Commission; he certainly made reference to it. The bureau submitted the draft agreement to the Red Tape Commission in early 1997. At the time of our audit, which was in the fall of 1998, the bureau was still waiting for a response from the Red Tape Commission. Accordingly, no agreements were in place and as the auditor told the committee a couple of weeks ago, still no agreements are in place, because nothing has been done with respect to work submitted to the Red Tape Commission at least two years ago. So maybe the government and the Red Tape Commission should take another look at that to ensure that the draft agreements become approved and finalized and can be used by the bureau and the thousands of agencies that it funds.

I'll look at a second bit of business that was just recently introduced in this House. Now we have a situation where a government member, who I assume supports the government trying to get rid of red tape, put forward a bill that will dramatically increase the red tape that people will have to deal with, people who are doing some of the most important work in our communities, meeting a need that governments don't seem to want to meet. Now, if this bill is ever passed, he would put an obligation and a responsibility onto them which would exceed anyone's belief about how incredibly stupid the red tape itself would be. It's the private member's bill that has been put forward by Mr Spina: An Act to ensure that food banks account for donations. I won't spend a lot of time talking about how nasty and mean-spirited and disgusting the point of the bill is, because it really is. I've had a chance to review it and I've had a chance to forward it to a number of our food banks in our communities to get their reaction. They are as offended by it as I am. If the government members were smart they would get away from this thing as fast as they possibly could.

Setting aside what the bill does—which is essentially to assume that any staff person who works in a food bank is a criminal who wants to sell food on the side—setting aside what appears to be what he's trying to get at, the fact of the bill is that the member now wants to say that larger food banks would have to be incorporated as a corporation without share capital. So now larger food banks, that by and large are spending their time responding to the needs of the poor and the hungry in our community, be they seniors, be they people who live in our poorer neighbourhoods, by they students—because at Laurentian University in Sudbury right now we have two food banks in place to help feed the students—now he wants larger food banks to get incorporated under the Corporations Act.

We called the Ministry of Consumer and Commercial Relations and asked what volunteers at a food bank would have to do to meet the requirements of this act, if this bill is passed. The ministry sends us this information: "There are two ways to apply for letters patent to incorporate a charity in Ontario. You can apply directly to the

companies branch of the Ministry of Consumer and Commercial Relations, or you can apply through the public guardian and trustee using objects specifically drafted for your charity."

You have to do the following to qualify as a charitable not-for-profit organization, which is what the bill will force larger food banks to do if it's passed: You have to provide the name and must indicate the charitable purposes of the corporation, the object or purposes of the corporation, the special provisions that must be included in the application for incorporation. You have to go through a search and you have to pay for a search to make sure your name is not a name that's being used by anyone else. You can look in the Yellow Pages to have this search done and you have to complete a particular form to do that. I don't know what the fee is for the search. I do know the other fees that are involved.

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You can do two things. The public guardian and trustee has what they call pre-approved object clauses. They have set them up for a number of institutions that would have similar interests that would become a charity: religious institutions, health institutions etc. I looked carefully through it. I didn't see anything that would relate, as a matter of fact, to a food bank. So it seems to me they now have to go through two processes. They have to get approval from the public guardian and trustee that they are a charitable organization and have their charitable clauses approved, and they pay a fee of \$150 for that. Then the public guardian and trustee will send that application, if approved, after the \$150 fee is paid, to the Ministry of Consumer and Commercial Relations. The ministry will then go through the documents you've provided, one from the public guardian, the name search, letters patent etc, and you have the privilege of paying another \$155 for the Ministry of Consumer and Commercial Relations to do their song and dance to allow you to be incorporated.

You've got to deal with two ministries. You've got to pay two sets of fees, one \$155, the other \$150. You've got to set out what all your objectives are. You have to pay, I assume, to do the name search, and I don't know what that fee is but let's just say \$50. By the time we're finished, volunteers who are filling a serious need in our community are going to have to pay a whack of money to comply with this stupid bill, and then they've got to do a whole bunch of work, a whole bunch of bureaucratic red tape they have to cut through, just so they can continue to have the privilege of trying to feed the poor and serve those in our communities.

I said earlier that I think the whole purpose of it is disgusting, but the bureaucratic red tape that a member of the government who supposedly is concerned about red tape wants these volunteers to go through is ridiculous. I say to the government members, if you care anything about red tape, get away from this bill as far and as fast as you can. It is a bill that should never see the light of day, and hopefully it won't.

Mr Brian Coburn (Carleton-Gloucester): I appreciate having an opportunity to speak on this issue, although I certainly don't have the eloquence or the oratorical skills of my colleague from Durham—that is certainly a hard act to follow—or of some of the members opposite. Of course the content is a little bit lacking from the members opposite.

The people of Ontario know this government is committed to eliminating red tape to open up our provincial economy. When Mike Harris and part of the team went around Ontario prior to 1995, this was one of the things they heard from residents of Ontario: red tape. In my former life as a municipal politician—those who were in municipal politics before they arrived here would recognize that one of the most aggravating, infuriating parts of local governance was the red tape that prevented people from doing things. Similarly at the provincial level.

We recognize that tying business people up in needless administrative knots serves nobody's interest and actually hinders business start-ups, job creation and new investment, not to mention the wear and tear and the increase in the stress level of the individual trying to get something done.

When we were elected in 1995, and when we were re-elected earlier this year, there were certainly no surprised faces when we moved quickly to eliminate the unnecessary paperwork and the needless bureaucratic requirements and burdens facing business people and consumers.

In 1995, very shortly after coming to office, this government established the Red Tape Commission to remove red tape and remove the barriers to job creation, economic growth and better government. The commission was co-chaired by my colleague the member for London West, Bob Wood, and by Mr Frank Sheehan, a former member of this place in the last government.

One of the commission's first tasks was to provide a useful definition for the term "red tape." I suppose everybody has a unique definition of red tape. For these purposes, it refers to any government measure that negatively affects Ontario's economic competitiveness by adding unnecessary requirements, costs or delays to normal activities of business and institutions.

Red tape is not just legislation and regulations. It comes in many different forms and includes licences, permits, approvals, standards and registration requirements. It can also include filing and certification requirements, guidelines, paperwork, enforcement practices. Some of the never-ending irritants, of course, are voice mail, the inability to reach a human being at the other end of the telephone, unanswered letters, and attitude.

It is important to recognize that red tape does not include measures that directly protect public health and safety and environmental quality. They are legitimate instances of government's responsibility to protect the public interest.

I should add that the commission has worked with all ministries and agencies as part of the government-wide effort to improve customer service. Our perseverance is

paying off with steady improvements in both attitude and performance of customer service. There is a growing understanding in the public service that how we treat customers has a direct impact on Ontario's economic well-being. When we provide timely and efficient information and services, Ontarians are more able to get on with their lives in starting businesses, working, investing, studying, acquiring new job skills and taking care of their families and giving back to our communities.

Interestingly enough, a study of 500 Ontario businesses, undertaken for the commission, found that regulatory burdens accounted for an average of 7% of a company's operating costs. You can well understand the impact on business today when the profit margin, the bottom line, has shrunk considerably. Part of this government's goal is to increase that economic return to those investors in Ontario.

It was also found that 71% of companies surveyed said they'd be more likely to invest in a province if red tape were reduced. We have taken concrete action—

Mr Gerretsen: On a point of order, Speaker: Would the member agree that setting up a provincial income tax system would in effect increase the red tape in this province?

The Acting Speaker (Mr Tony Martin): It's not a point of order. Member for Carleton-Gloucester.

Mr Coburn: We have taken concrete action in this direction and, like many other areas, this government has listened. We have listened to the comments of regular Ontarians who are trying to get on with their lives, increase their lot in life and get a return on their investment.

The Red Tape Reduction Act constitutes this government's third legislative initiative to cut down on red tape. Already we have made some striking accomplishments. Just to cite a few examples, the commission has assisted with the passage of 11 red tape reduction bills that repealed 28 acts and amended 149 others. We have revoked more than 1,300 redundant or outdated regulations. In other areas, it used to take some six weeks to register a new business. That time now has been cut down to an average of 20 minutes. We have eliminated more than 1,000 licences, permits and reports required in the farm and food processing business. We have helped the hospitality industry improve cash flow by allowing bars and restaurants to use credit cards for liquor purchases. We have met with industry groups and made 130 recommendations for cuts in red tape to stimulate business activity and encourage job creation. As well, we developed a test designed to ensure that new legislation and regulations don't add new layers of red tape. A permanent red tape watchdog will be set up with an expanded mandate that will include subjecting all new regulations to a strict business impact test.

As parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, I'd like to talk a little bit about what my own ministry has accomplished to get rid of red tape. At the time this government took office in 1995, getting through the planning approval process took too

long and cost too much. Actually the planning approval process was a real aging process in this province. Planners had to wade through more than 600 pages of provincial guidelines. A simple official plan amendment could easily take 405 days.

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We were determined to change that. We wanted to offer a system that was less bureaucratic, that people could understand and that delivered an answer more quickly. We have addressed all these issues and our new planning system has been very successful. The new Planning Act has greatly improved the efficiency of the approval process. Official plans that used to average about two years to be processed can now be approved in as little as three months.

Back in 1995 it took an average of 1,000 days—almost three years out of your life—trying to approve plans for a subdivision. This year it averaged 190 days. It used to take about 400 days to process an official plan amendment, and that now averages 106 days. Consents have gone from nine months to three and a half.

We have delegated more decision-making down to the local level, into the hands closest to the people. As a result of these improvements, the ministry's planning approval activities have been reduced by more than 75%. Through our one-window approval process, nearly 60% of all decisions have been made within our ministry, without the need to consult any of the other seven ministries with a stake in land use planning.

We are very pleased with the success of our reforms, and our ministry continues to work with municipalities, planning boards, the public and all proponents to make sure Ontario's land use planning system works for all Ontarians in the best possible way.

We have also made changes to allow for a streamlined process for restructuring local governments. Through the Savings and Restructuring Act, 1996, the province amended the Municipal Act to give municipalities more flexibility to build local restructuring solutions. Quite recently, with the special advisers' reports in, there will be additional savings in the very near future for other areas of this province.

The Red Tape Reduction Act currently before us for second reading builds on the successes this government has already achieved. As the Minister of Consumer and Commercial Relations told the Legislature earlier this month, this bill continues the government's fight against unnecessary rules and regulations that impede business activity and good public service.

This government has already made great strides in cutting red tape, but much work remains to be done. By one estimate, government bureaucracy still imposes 40,000 official forms. Some 40% of small business owners say they spend more than six hours a week on government paperwork. That explains the necessity of moving forward with the Red Tape Reduction Act that is before us.

This certainly will improve the process in a number of areas for businesses in this province.

M^{me} Claudette Boyer (Ottawa-Vanier) : Le projet de loi déposé par le gouvernement a pour but, si je comprends bien, de réduire les formalités administratives et améliorer le service à la clientèle. Mais pour qui ? Cette loi vise à réduire les formalités administratives pour le gouvernement peut-être, mais non pour le citoyen ou la citoyenne.

In fact this omnibus act touches on several areas, including proposing amendments to the Ambulance Act. It even sets out the conditions that will complete the downloading of ambulance services to municipalities. But this government also intends to introduce legislation for the restructuring of certain urban areas such as Ottawa-Carleton municipalities. So if ambulance services are downloaded to municipalities, exactly what body will be responsible for the provision of those services in Ottawa-Carleton? How will this government ensure the provision of quality of services to the citizens in Ottawa-Carleton when the municipal government is in the midst of being restructured? We know, of course, that it is the taxpayers who will suffer from any disruption in the provision of this service.

Nous savons tous que la population de la province vieillit. Dans Ottawa-Vanier, j'ai une population importante de personnes âgées. Une population vieillissante, vous le savez tous, dépend de plus en plus sur le système de santé. Ce système doit donc s'adapter à une augmentation certaine des besoins. Les services ambulanciers font partie de ce système de santé, et le gouvernement propose dans ce projet de loi de gérer ces services, qui seront offerts par tierces parties, par le biais d'un règlement.

Regulations will take time to put in place. People are at risk during the upheaval that will be caused by the downloading of these services. This bill isn't about reducing red tape at all. It is about a government ministry abdicating its responsibilities when it comes to the provision of emergency services to vulnerable Ontarians.

Mr James J. Bradley (St Catharines): I heard reference made to municipal restructuring and saw some of the members who have been up. I've been waiting for questions from the other side, as you probably have as well.

My good friend Toni Skarica I thought would be allowed on the docket today to ask a question on municipal restructuring in Hamilton-Wentworth, and my friend Brad Clark. Mr Coburn, the former mayor of Gloucester, I thought would be speaking on that today, and the Minister of Community and Social Services, because it's such an interesting topic, I must say.

My friend from Fort Erie and Port Colborne, my friend from Fort Erie, Mr Hudak, the minister, I know will be standing shoulder to shoulder with me to save municipalities such as Fort Erie, Port Colborne, Wainfleet, West Lincoln and Lincoln, the heart of rural and small-town Ontario. He, I know, will be working with me in Niagara to preserve those individual municipalities and not allow them to be gobbled up by one huge region which would be imposed from here in Toronto. I'm

really encouraged by the fact that there is a member who came from one of those municipalities and knows what it's like to see them trampled on. He will be fighting in the cabinet, I know, against this, as will my friend Mr Maves from Niagara Falls, because he has Niagara-on-the-Lake in his community. His mayor doesn't want to see one big region either.

So we're not so worried in the Niagara region, despite what the St Catharines Standard says, and you know who owns that, ultimately.

Mrs Brenda Elliott (Guelph-Wellington): Conrad Black?

Mr Bradley: Conrad Black. The member for Etobicoke North wanted me to mention Conrad Black. That's who owns the Standard. They're pushing this, because what can happen is they can then eliminate all the other newspapers in the Niagara region and just have the Niagara Standard. We won't have a nice Port Colborne paper or a Fort Erie paper or a West Lincoln paper or a Lincoln paper. They'll be wiped out by the huge conglomerate which is the Conrad Black empire in our area.

Here is something interesting that the government members should notice. I have now calculated—I'm more updated than my friend from Kingston and the Islands—698 tax increases under this government. You say: "Well, I don't remember seeing those in the budget. How could there be?"

I remember that when Mike Harris was in opposition, and I believed him then, he said, "A fee increase, a user fee, is a tax." So every time I see a tax increase or a new user fee, as this bill calls for the possibility of new user fees, I calculate that as a new tax. I'm up to 698. There are probably far more. The member from Scarborough had a sheet in the committee this morning that the government had given him about some detailed matters. You were there at the committee, Mr Speaker. I hope he can help us out and provide for this House how many increases there have been. I've only reached 698; Mr Newman will know there are more. He had some excellent research this morning; I know he'll help us out.

People are concerned about the changes to the Day Nurseries Act to give municipalities, reflecting their downloaded administrative responsibilities for child care—that's why those changes are there. They've downloaded to those municipalities.

This afternoon many of the firefighters were here. The member for Niagara Centre, who was in the House this afternoon, asked for the unanimous consent of this House to pay tribute to them. He wanted to cut through the red tape. He ran into red tape. He wanted to pay tribute to the firefighters who were here today, who put their lives on the line when they go out to fight fires and carry out other activities under the jurisdiction of their responsibilities. He asked for unanimous consent this afternoon. The

Liberals said, "Sure, let's have unanimous consent to pay tribute to our firefighters," the NDP agreed with it, and there were voices from the government side which denied the opportunity to pay tribute to these public servants who serve us only so well. They've come to speak to us today about many of their issues, and I must say their positions on those issues were very supportable.

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

Mr Runciman has moved government notice of motion number 14.

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. This will be a 10-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1753 to 1803.

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

Ayes

Arnott, Ted	Gill, Raminder	Mushinski, Marilyn
Baird, John R.	Hardeman, Ernie	Newman, Dan
Barrett, Toby	Hastings, John	O'Toole, John
Beaubien, Marcel	Hudak, Tim	Ouellette, Jerry J.
Chudleigh, Ted	Jackson, Cameron	Runciman, Robert W.
Clark, Brad	Johns, Helen	Spina, Joseph
Clement, Tony	Johnson, Bert	Sterling, Norman W.
Coburn, Brian	Kells, Morley	Stockwell, Chris
Cunningham, Dianne	Klees, Frank	Tascona, Joseph N.
DeFaria, Carl	Marland, Margaret	Turnbull, David
Dunlop, Garfield	Martiniuk, Gerry	Wettlaufer, Wayne
Ecker, Janet	Mazzilli, Frank	Wilson, Jim
Elliott, Brenda	Molinari, Tina R.	Witmer, Elizabeth
Galt, Doug	Munro, Julia	Wood, Bob
Gilchrist, Steve	Murdoch, Bill	Young, David

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

Nays

Agostino, Dominic	Colle, Mike	Levac, David
Bartolucci, Rick	Crozier, Bruce	Marchese, Rosario
Bisson, Gilles	Curling, Alvin	Martel, Shelley
Bountrogianni, Marie	Duncan, Dwight	McGuinty, Dalton
Boyer, Claudette	Gerretsen, John	Parsons, Ernie
Bradley, James J.	Gravelle, Michael	Peters, Steve
Caplan, David	Kennedy, Gerard	Pupatello, Sandra
Christopherson, David	Kormos, Peter	Ruprecht, Tony
Churley, Marilyn	Lalonde, Jean-Marc	

Clerk of the House (Mr Claude L. DesRosiers): The ayes are 45; the nays are 26.

The Acting Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

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

The House adjourned at 1806.

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