



**Legislative Assembly
of Ontario**

First Session, 37th Parliament

**Assemblée législative
de l'Ontario**

Première session, 37^e législature

**Official Report
of Debates
(Hansard)**

**Journal
des débats
(Hansard)**

Tuesday 14 December 1999

Mardi 14 décembre 1999

Speaker
Honourable Gary Carr

Président
L'honorable Gary Carr

Clerk
Claude L. DesRosiers

Greffier
Claude L. DesRosiers

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Tuesday 14 December 1999

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Mardi 14 décembre 1999

*The House met at 1330.
Prayers.*

ESTIMATES

Hon Chris Hodgson (Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet): Mr Speaker, I have a message from the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor, signed by her own hand.

The Speaker (Hon Gary Carr): The Lieutenant Governor transmits estimates and supplementary estimates of certain sums required for the services of the province for the year ending 31 March 2000 and recommends them to the Legislative Assembly.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

LONG-TERM CARE

Mrs Marie Bountrogianni (Hamilton Mountain): I want to share with the House excerpts from a letter recently received from one of my constituents, Mr Galen Gannon, a social worker employed by the Hamilton Health Sciences Corp. This letter hopefully puts a real face on the hospital crisis in this province. It focuses on the critical shortage of bed space in long-term-care facilities, LTCFs, and the resulting impact on our most vulnerable citizens, our seniors. Mr Gannon writes:

"Please bear with me while I describe the results of a LTCF bed shortage. Those awaiting placement in a LTCF from the hospital may now expect to wait well over a year before any bed offers come. Many have been waiting up to two years or more. They become more or less permanent residents of the hospital occupying acute care bed space despite the fact that they have no immediate medical concerns. This prevents those who do require acute medical care from gaining admission to the hospital. The media have highlighted numerous occasions where hospital emergency wards have turned ambulances away because they were already full and could not admit anyone upstairs. The lack of LTCFs has backed up the entire health care system. It would make for interesting research to discover what it costs to house people in an acute care setting as opposed to a LTCF. I am sure the waste is staggering. ...

"A great disservice is being rendered to those frail and elderly who await placement in a LTCF from the hospital. Their quality of life is poor.... until the political

leaders of this province choose to allocate the resources necessary ... nothing will change.... I am looking for someone who intends to do something about it."

So am I; so are all the citizens of Ontario.

MILLENNIUM MEMENTO

Mr Doug Galt (Northumberland): I rise in the House today to shed some light on the truth behind the Millennium Memento journal. According to the august paper the Cobourg Daily Star, the Liberals in this House are using students to promote their political agenda. Let's set the record straight.

This government has significantly increased classroom spending and invested hundreds of millions into textbooks. Furthermore, the Millennium Memento journal does not come out of the education budget; it was funded by the Ministry of Citizenship, Culture and Recreation.

Despite this, some misguided students came to my office on Friday and dumped several boxes of millennium books, some defaced with profane language and obscene suggestions. Is this the level of political debate the Liberals are promoting for our young people? Shame on you for using children in such a crass example of political opportunism.

Ironically, as soon as the message got out that copies of the millennium book were available, I received numerous requests from media sources, municipal politicians, senior citizens, teachers and students, all wanting copies. They were gone by Friday night.

The Liberals could learn from Sarah Dell, on page 18 of the Millennium Memento, as she tells us that "attitudes are the real disability." Action in the form of ignorance does not cause change, but merely creates enemies.

I extend my best wishes to the talented youth who contributed to the Millennium Memento journal. They must feel a real sense of great pride to know that their work was published for millions of Ontarians to enjoy for years to come.

Mr Peter Kormos (Niagara Centre): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: I seek unanimous consent to give Mr Galt another 90 seconds to continue to trash the young people in his riding.

The Speaker (Hon Gary Carr): Is there unanimous consent? I heard a no.

1340

SCHOOL BUS SAFETY

Mr Pat Hoy (Chatham-Kent Essex): I have in my hand a clipping dated December 11, 1999, from the Pembroke Observer. It was sent to me by the C.F. Vaudry Bus Lines company in Pembroke. It refers to the serious problem of drivers who are endangering the lives of innocent children by illegally passing school buses with their lights flashing. It says, "The local OPP are still receiving reports of motorists running the flashing lights of school buses in the area."

Bus drivers tell me they call it "blow-by," and they are helpless to stop it because Mr Turnbull refuses to give the law teeth. Mr Turnbull says he does not want to give bus drivers police powers, but they already have that right if they can identify the face of the driver. Mr Turnbull refuses to give the law the only mechanism that will convict drivers who pass school buses illegally. Raising fines is not enough to protect children. Your government's bill to raise fines only is a failure. There is no deterrent. Police should not have to beg drivers to heed the law. The job of the government is to protect innocent children, not guilty drivers.

Barbara Vaudry says the problem will not be solved by your legislation. She supports my bill. Lives are at stake, Minister. Pass vehicle liability now, for the sake of all our children here in Ontario.

GOVERNMENT'S RECORD

Mr David Young (Willowdale): Since June 1995, our government has cut taxes 69 times and has announced, most recently, 30 additional tax cuts in the spring budget. We have created over 615,000 net new jobs, accounting for more than half of the new job growth in this country. In November, our unemployment rate fell to 5.6%, the lowest unemployment rate since June 1990.

While these numbers are very impressive, the fact is that to the average citizen in this province they are just numbers. What matters most to people is what is happening in their respective communities. I recently had the opportunity to attend the grand reopening of a Shoppers Drug Mart store in my riding. This reopening was the latest in a long list of businesses that have contributed to the development and revitalization of Willowdale's economy. The growth of business in our community, both big and small, has been phenomenal. This grand reopening reflects the vitality of small businesses in Willowdale.

I also had the opportunity of visiting one of the local YMCAs. The effects of our growing economy are being felt by the Y. The YMCA is now able to provide a greater number of services to the community. In fact, membership is up by 112,000 and the number of financially assisted participants in the Y is down by 3,000. The Y's operating revenue has increased significantly, and so has the number of volunteers.

We are entering the new millennium stronger and more competitive than at any other time in our history. The unemployment rate continues to decline, the job market continues to grow, and people are spending more in our shops.

MILLENNIUM MEMENTO

Mr Rick Bartolucci (Sudbury): We've heard the government read letters from Tory hacks in order to justify this government's wasteful expenditure with regard to the millennium book, but let's hear what people across Ontario are saying.

Let's stop in North Bay first. The editorial in the North Bay Nugget states, "We welcome the initiative shown by students who are demonstrating their opposition by sending the books back to their local MPPs."

The Peterborough Examiner editorial says, "Investing more than \$2 million in glitzy diaries that students don't need at a time when schools are having to cut every corner possible shows that someone either forgot their priorities or made an incredibly dumb choice."

The Elliot Lake Standard editor says, "My Ontario Millennium Memento is simply an opportunity for the Ontario government to use children as pawns and, in this case, 'messengers' of their propaganda, proof that this government has no shame."

These are just a few of the editorials that this project generated. Parents, students and all educational partners cannot believe the skewed priorities of this government. In a recent news poll conducted by MCTV in Sudbury, 84% of the people polled said this project was a waste of money.

The debate is over. This has been a public relations disaster for Mike Harris and he should be ashamed of himself.

SPECIAL EDUCATION

Mr David Christopherson (Hamilton West): I rise to bring to the attention of the government that, regardless of the nice things the Minister of Education wants to say about their funding formula, the fact of the matter is that there are still students, certainly in Hamilton and I suspect all across the province, with special needs who are not able to be in the classroom because there's not enough money.

The Hamilton-Wentworth public school board, to their credit, went out on a limb and spent over half a million dollars above and beyond their budget, knowing that would place them in serious trouble with this government, because that was the only way to get the majority of the 23 students with special needs who couldn't go into the classroom because there weren't enough educational assistants. There are four of those students who are not in the classroom because that money still wasn't enough.

Yet this minister stands up and says: "Oh, I've given you ample money. Everything's fine. Nothing is wrong."

Well, plenty is wrong. Sean Logan is a young man in my riding, who has Tourette's syndrome, who is not able to be in the classroom because the Mike Harris government will not ensure there's enough money to hire the educational assistants required to allow this student to participate in class the way he deserves. I've met his mother, Karen Logan. She's a teacher in her own right. She's doing everything she can, but at the end of the day this government's got to cough up the money needed for our kids with special needs.

HAYLEY ISAACS

Mrs Tina R. Molinari (Thornhill): I rise today to congratulate Hayley Isaacs, a Thornhill student who has recently been awarded the Harmony Movement post-secondary scholarship. The Harmony scholarship is awarded to graduating high school students for promoting harmony among different cultures and religious groups. The Harmony Movement is to foster understanding and promote integration among all communities through participation by everyone in the social, economic and political life of Canada.

While attending Thornhill Secondary School, Hayley was actively involved with the school's multicultural club, Pax, the Latin word for peace. Under her direction, the club worked hard to generate interest among younger grades for the club's goal to increase students' exposure to people of different ethnic origins.

Hayley, who became president of Pax during her OAC year, was instrumental in organizing an equity conference for high school students at Glendon College. Hayley's responsibilities included arranging for a keynote speaker and setting up workshops. The conference was extremely successful and was a catalyst to Hayley being nominated for this award.

Hayley is currently enrolled in an architectural program at the University of Waterloo. I salute Hayley Isaacs for her work with Pax and being awarded the Harmony scholarship. It is people like Hayley who help make not only Thornhill but Ontario a great place to live.

MILLENNIUM MEMENTO

Ms Caroline Di Cocco (Sarnia-Lambton): Student councils from three high schools who represent about 4,000 students, as well as a number of elementary students, have returned thousands of millennium books to my constituency office. These high school and elementary students have clearly articulated that they believe these books were a misuse of taxpayers' dollars.

The Minister of Culture justifies the millennium book as a document that will help our students realize their hopes and dreams for the future. The students, on the other hand, have told me this: At St Christopher's high school, the communications students have been working on a heritage project regarding historical sites and the history of Sarnia-Lambton. They do not have enough money for needed tapes to complete this project. Another

student from St Clair high school told me the money wasted on these books is badly needed for the arts program in her school. The millennium book will not be helping to realize the dreams of these students.

The arts and heritage community in this province has been brutally slashed by this ministry. The Minister of Culture has chosen to waste money that could have been spent on much-needed arts funding. This booklet serves no educational, arts or heritage purpose. The money wasted on this book could have been used for heritage projects in schools.

The message from students and parents in my riding is: Return to sender. All the opposition members agree with this message.

Interruption.

1350

The Speaker (Hon Gary Carr): Order. I will ask all members—this is the second time this has happened. It's very disruptive.

Interjections.

The Speaker: Order. I'll handle this, thank you.

This is the second time it's happened. I'm not going to allow it again. This is a disruption of the House. It takes time while the pages move it out. The first time, I wasn't here when it happened. This is the second time. I will not allow it to happen again, and I would ask all members to please co-operate in this regard. We will now wait while we clean it up.

Interjections.

The Speaker: Order. While we're waiting, I would appreciate it as well if the members don't shout at each other.

Interjections.

The Speaker: Order, the member for Windsor-St Clair. The member for Windsor-St Clair, come to order while we clean up the mess, please. The member for Willowdale is not helpful in yelling across as well.

Mr Doug Galt (Northumberland): Point of order, Mr Speaker: All of these books have been defaced. It's very unfortunate.

The Speaker: Order. We're trying to clean up the mess. I would appreciate it if everybody just remained quiet while we do it. You don't need to start anything going back and forth on either side.

Again, I will warn the members, this is the last time. It takes time. The poor pages actually did a great job. They were quicker cleaning up than the members were dropping it. I thank the pages for their extra work, but we can't allow this to continue. It's the second time and it will be the last time.

TOBERMORY

Mr Bill Murdoch (Bruce-Grey): I rise today to tell you about a jewel at the tip of the Bruce Peninsula.

Tobermory is the head of trails for the Bruce Trail, one of the province's most treasured geological features. This harbour town is also known as home of the Big Tub Harbour, the deepest natural harbour on the Great Lakes.

Tobermory shares a strong connection with the Great Lakes. In Big Tub Harbour there are two 19th century shipwrecks which visitors from all over the world can see, either through a diver's mask, through a glass underwater viewing boat, or over the side of a cruise boat.

Tobermory is also the home of the headquarters for the Fathom Five national marine park, which covers and protects all the shipwrecks and islands sprinkled around the top of the Bruce Peninsula. Ships and the great sweetwater seas have played such a key role in the spirit of Tobermory that every year the Bruce Peninsula national park and Fathom Five put on a marine heritage weekend in August.

Little Tub Harbour meanwhile bustles with activity with the ChiCheemaun ferry travelling back and forth between Tobermory and Manitoulin Island, bringing visitors and tourists and providing an important method of transportation during the shipping season.

In Tobermory itself, an exciting array of art galleries, nautical shops, restaurants, pubs and parlours, outfitters and a fish store dot the streets.

Tobermory, a little town with a great marine history.

I just wanted to add something nice to this House because before this, it's been pretty rough.

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 (Mr Todd Decker): Your committee begs to report the following bill without amendment:

Bill 22, An Act in memory of Sergeant Rick McDonald to amend the Highway Traffic Act in respect of suspect apprehension pursuits / *Projet de loi 22, Loi commémorant le sergent Rick McDonald et modifiant le Code de la route en ce qui concerne les poursuites en vue d'appréhender des suspects.*

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

The bill is therefore ordered for third reading.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

MUNICIPALITY OF KINCARDINE ACT, 1999

Mr Murdoch moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill Pr15, An Act to change the name of The Corporation of the Township of Kincardine-Bruce-Tiverton to The Corporation of the Municipality of Kincardine.

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

FRANCHISE DISCLOSURE ACT, 1999

LOI DE 1999 SUR LA DIVULGATION RELATIVE AUX FRANCHISES

Mr Runciman moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 33, An Act to require fair dealing between parties to franchise agreements, to ensure that franchisees have the right to associate and to impose disclosure obligations on franchisors / *Projet de loi 33, Loi obligeant les parties aux contrats de franchisage à agir équitablement, garantissant le droit d'association aux franchisés et imposant des obligations en matière de divulgation aux franchiseurs.*

The Speaker (Hon Gary Carr): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? There was a no.

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 1358 to 1403.

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

Ayes

Agostino, Dominic	Gill, Raminder	Newman, Dan
Arnott, Ted	Gravelle, Michael	O'Toole, John
Baird, John R.	Guzzo, Garry J.	Ouellette, Jerry J.
Barrett, Toby	Hampton, Howard	Palladini, Al
Bartolucci, Rick	Hardeman, Ernie	Parsons, Ernie
Bountrogianni, Marie	Harris, Michael D.	Patten, Richard
Boyer, Claudette	Hodgson, Chris	Peters, Steve
Bradley, James J.	Hoy, Pat	Phillips, Gerry
Brown, Michael A.	Hudak, Tim	Pupatello, Sandra
Christopherson, David	Jackson, Cameron	Ramsay, David
Churley, Marilyn	Johns, Helen	Runciman, Robert W.
Clark, Brad	Johnson, Bert	Ruprecht, Tony
Cleary, John C.	Kennedy, Gerard	Sampson, Rob
Clement, Tony	Klees, Frank	Sergio, Mario
Coburn, Brian	Kormos, Peter	Smitherman, George
Colle, Mike	Kwinter, Monte	Snobelen, John
Conway, Sean G.	Lalonde, Jean-Marc	Spina, Joseph
Cordiano, Joseph	Levac, David	Sterling, Norman W.
Crozier, Bruce	Marchese, Rosario	Stewart, R. Gary
Cunningham, Dianne	Marland, Margaret	Stockwell, Chris
Curling, Alvin	Martel, Shelley	Tascona, Joseph N.
Di Cocco, Caroline	Martin, Tony	Tilson, David
Dombrowsky, Leona	Martiniuk, Gerry	Tsubouchi, David H.
Duncan, Dwight	Maves, Bart	Turnbull, David
Dunlop, Garfield	McLeod, Lyn	Wettlaufer, Wayne
Ecker, Janet	Molinari, Tina R.	Wilson, Jim
Elliott, Brenda	Munro, Julia	Witmer, Elizabeth
Flaherty, Jim	Murdoch, Bill	Wood, Bob
Galt, Doug	Mushinski, Marilyn	Young, David
Gerretsen, John		

The Speaker: All those opposed to the motion will please rise one at a time to be recognized by the Clerk.

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

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

The minister for a short statement.

Hon Robert W. Runciman (Minister of Consumer and Commercial Relations): Franchising is important to the men and women who see a franchise as a way to achieve their dreams of a better tomorrow. This legislation is a result of extensive consultation and will at the end of the day help small business investors make more informed decisions and encourage marketplace fairness. I urge the support of all members of the assembly.

DANGEROUS GOODS
TRANSPORTATION AMENDMENT ACT
(NUCLEAR MATERIAL), 1999

LOI DE 1999 AMENDANT LA LOI
SUR LE TRANSPORT
DE MATIÈRES DANGEREUSES
(MATIÈRES NUCLÉAIRES)

Ms Churley moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 34, An Act to amend the Dangerous Goods Transportation Act to prohibit the transportation of Nuclear Material / Projet de loi 34, Loi pour amender la Loi sur le transport de matières dangereuses pour interdire le transport de matières nucléaires.

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

All those in favour of the motion will please say "aye."

All those opposed will please say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

The member for a short explanation.

Ms Marilyn Churley (Broadview-Greenwood): The purpose of this bill is to prevent weapons-grade plutonium in the form of mixed oxide fuel, also known as MOX, and taken from American nuclear bombs, from being transported without notice along the highways of Ontario. If passed, this bill will give the Ontario government legislative authority to stop those shipments, authority they say they don't have.

I would ask for unanimous consent to do second and third reading of this bill today so that we will have this authority.

The Speaker: Is there unanimous consent? I heard a no.

1410

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

Mr David Christopherson (Hamilton West): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: I appreciate the opportunity to make this point of order. You know that both opposition parties have raised with you over this session the trend that the government is less and less providing ministerial statements when they introduce important pieces of legislation. It would be because they don't like the idea that the opposition each has five minutes in order to respond.

I'm rising today to point out to you the absurd point that we've reached in this façade. The standing orders provide under 35,

"(a) A minister of the crown may make a short factual statement relating to government policy, ministry action or other similar matters of which the House should be informed."

It says under standing order 35,

"Opposition comments

"(e) Following ministerial statements a representative or representatives of each of the recognized opposition parties in the House may comment for up to a total of five minutes for each party commencing with the official opposition."

When I arrived in the House today, there was an envelope from the Ministry of Consumer and Commercial Relations addressed to me as House leader in accordance with the standing orders that there are two copies provided to each of the parties. Inside were these statements of the minister regarding the Franchise Disclosure Act, an act, I would point out, that the minister asked and to date, at least to this point, has received unanimous support of this House.

The statement is exactly what was expected to be read. It's here in both languages. I have every reason to believe it has already been circulated to the media. A few moments ago, literally minutes ago, the government House leader stood in front of my desk and said: "The minister's statement is off. It's not going to happen." When I asked him why, his answer to me was, "Why should we?"

My point of order is this: By virtue of the fact that this statement has been issued—it's been labelled as such, it's been handed out to the media, to the best of my knowledge—I am suggesting to you that under 35(a), given the fact that every step except the actual words has been followed by the government for issuing a statement upon introduction of a piece of legislation, that de facto that statement has been made.

I'm asking you, Speaker, to rule and to recognize that that statement has been made. At the very least, it should have been, and the fact that it's here means that it has been. I would ask that you allow the opposition parties an opportunity to respond in kind, as outlined in the standing orders.

The Speaker (Hon Gary Carr): Government House leader on the same point of order.

Hon Norman W. Sterling (Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, Government House Leader): The proposed statement that members of the opposition had was a very brief statement. It probably would have taken 60 seconds. Later this afternoon, we're going to be debating the municipal restructuring bill. Many members of this Legislature want to speak on that bill. I thought it was in the best interests of members of this Legislature that we spend the 10 or 15 minutes in meaningful debate rather than have people rant in opposition for five minutes on a statement which would have taken 60 seconds,

and use our time usefully that way. As well, Mr Speaker—

Interjections.

The Speaker: Order. During the points of order, I appreciate it—I cannot hear. Everybody was very quiet for the member for Hamilton West. I'd appreciate if you'd give that courtesy to the government House leader as well so I can hear him.

Hon Mr Sterling: As well, Mr Speaker, as you know, we've already had a demonstration by the opposition which occupied another 10 minutes of time here in the Legislature, taking away from the debate we're going to have later this afternoon.

I thought it was in the best interests of our people that we do that.

Getting to the specifics, as the member opposite has said, "A minister of the crown may make," so it is of course the choice of the minister whether or not he makes that statement. Also, the ability of the opposition to respond to a statement is contained in 35(e), which says, "Following ministerial statements," and there has been no statement made.

The Speaker: The member for Windsor-St Clair.

Mr Dwight Duncan (Windsor-St Clair): I stand in support of what my colleague from Hamilton West has said.

What's particularly troubling about this is again, as he pointed out, we were given a statement and it was treated as a statement. It's part of a larger pattern that we have raised on points of order: first of all, the lack of ministerial statements, which is designed to effectively prevent us from speaking; omnibus bills, which make it difficult for anybody to vote in true conscience on any number of statutes, whether it's Bill 25, Bill 27.

It wasn't long ago that the rules of this House prevented introducing a bill in the last week of sittings in order to allow the opposition, but more importantly the people of the province, to understand what the government is attempting to do. Mr Speaker, we call upon you once again to try and protect this House from a majority government that is bound, bent and determined that the people of the province won't be heard on substantive matters of the day.

The Speaker: I thank all the members for the point of order. As you know, the Speaker cannot decide when a minister will or will not make a statement. I will say, however, it is the end of the session. It is my recollection from being here nine years that the way this House works best is when there's give and take on both sides, when there is some give, when there is some take. When we get in entrenched positions, we end up like we are today, with a long period of time dealing with points of order. Up to now it's worked reasonably well, and I would encourage all members, particularly the House leaders, to try to work together over these issues. But it is not a point of order.

ORAL QUESTIONS

LIQUOR CONTROL BOARD OF ONTARIO

Mrs Sandra Pupatello (Windsor West): My question is for the Premier of Ontario. Yesterday your Minister of Consumer and Commercial Relations defended the behaviour, the work, the pro bono work for a select few, of the chair of the LCBO. His phone number is 864-2519. Apparently this phone number is—

The Speaker (Hon Gary Carr): Order. I would ask the member not to show the phone number. It is a demonstration.

Mrs Pupatello: Premier, I have to ask you, your minister defended the behaviour of the chair of the LCBO. We know that one of the things that is apparently within the job description of that chair and the secretary of the chair is to take orders for the rarest of wines that come into Ontario in a very limited quantity. Out of that office, a very select few are allowed to call, to use a credit card and order those wines so those people can get them on time. I'd like to know from you if that number should be distributed to all Ontarians so we can all have access to those rarest of wines.

Hon Michael D. Harris (Premier): I'm sure the minister can respond.

Hon Robert W. Runciman (Minister of Consumer and Commercial Relations): I indicated yesterday with respect to the allegations made by the leader of the official opposition that we had conducted an internal investigation through the ministry, through the deputy minister and an ADM who was personally involved. An internal audit committee has also reviewed the travel of the chair of the board. The ministry could find nothing inappropriate. With respect to the telephone calls to the chair's office, I share the view that that was inappropriate and I've conveyed that to the chair.

Mrs Pupatello: We were hoping for an answer from the Premier, because yesterday the minister defended the behaviour. This is the minister of wine and cheese. I want to talk to the Premier about this. What I am asking the Premier is, this is the code of conduct for the LCBO. In the code of conduct it says very specifically—

Interjections.

The Speaker: Will the member take her seat.

The member may continue now.

Mrs Pupatello: It is laughable, but unfortunately we're talking about a \$2-billion organization that is your crown corporation. This is the code of conduct. In the code of conduct it says, "LCBO employees"—that would include the chair—"no gifts, no gratuities from any suppliers." That's what this says. This was written in 1998. Unless this has been changed since then, those are the rules.

I want to know, Premier, if you consider a trip to southern Italy so we can "find out if the product is safe for drinking" is considered a gift. If you don't think that's

a gift, I want to be on your Christmas list, Premier. I want to hear what you have to say about the code of conduct.

Hon Mr Runciman: The Minister of Consumer and Commercial Relations is responsible for the Ontario wine industry and I think I can recognize whining when I hear it. I'd just say that the Liquor Control Board of Ontario is a \$2-billion-plus operation in this province, I think the largest of its kind in the world. Certainly travel has always been part of the chair's role in this particular crown corporation.

Mr Brandt has done an outstanding job during his tenure. During Mr Brandt's time in office, the LCBO has outperformed all other Canadian jurisdictions for growth and sales and they've decreased operating costs consistently. Yet they have still challenged nearly 835,000 would-be customers who were thought to be intoxicated or underage, a 22% increase from the year before. He has done an outstanding job and he should be complimented by the official opposition.

1420

Mrs Pupatello: He's charming, he's witty and he'd make a great salesman. That's the point. The LCBO does not sell products; it buys products. He does not need to have his trips paid for. The whole point of the matter is that the LCBO is the largest buyer of products in the world. If that organization is as profitable as you suggest it is, which it is, it needs to have the appearance of not having a conflict of interest with its suppliers. It needs to have the perception out there that people don't get their product on the list because they wine and dine the chair. You may think it's funny, and it may be cute, but the truth of the matter is that you have a code of conduct in place and the code of conduct was broken.

What, very specifically, will you, on behalf of your Premier, do to ensure that this is done appropriately in this province?

Hon Mr Runciman: The member talks about a perception of favouritism. I indicated in the House yesterday, quoting from a number of letters, that there is indeed no perception of favouritism other than among perhaps the editorial writers in the Toronto Star and the official opposition. Even the former Premier of this province, the leader of the Liberal Party of Ontario, indicated his strong confidence in the integrity of Mr Brandt, a man who served this province in an outstanding fashion for over 30 years.

It is indeed unfortunate that the Liberal Party of Ontario and some of their friends will participate in the politics of mudslinging, trying to damage the character of an outstanding resident of this province.

ONTARIO REALTY CORP

Mr Dominic Agostino (Hamilton East): My question is to the Chair of the Management Board. I want to bring to your attention another sweetheart deal approved by your friend Tony Miele and the Ontario Realty Corp.

A company called All City Storage recently purchased a property at 145 Eastern Avenue in Toronto. The

government had purchased this property for \$11 million 10 years ago. You approved the resale of this property, Minister, in March for \$5 million. The deal was not tendered. The laws in regard to the Expropriations Act were broken. The property was undersold. We know that because the Ontario Realty Corp, among other things, put a clause in the contract that does not allow this property to be resold for 24 months.

Clearly, "undersold" is a common practice in the real estate industry. We know that other companies wanted to pay a significantly higher price for this property, and their bids and approaches were ignored.

In view of all this, Minister, can you tell me why you approved such a sweetheart deal that lost the taxpayers of Ontario \$6 million, and why this property was not tendered in the public market?

Hon Chris Hodgson (Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet): Once again we're witnessing the Liberals' politics of mudslinging. You're using the newspapers to do your research for you and once again you're wrong. It's not true what you said. It was the Liberal government, I'd like to remind this House and any viewers who might be watching this, that got us into this mess in 1988. They made a sweetheart deal with the city of Toronto, guaranteeing over \$300 million needed to expropriate these lands for a housing project that never got built. They guaranteed this money without ever checking the condition of the lands. When it was finally discovered that the lands required flood-proofing and major soil contamination remediation work, the city bailed out, leaving the taxpayers of Ontario on the hook for this fiscal mess.

Contrary to the Globe's article and contrary to your question, the entire property was widely marketed by J.J. Barnicke. It was advertised in a number of newspapers, including the Globe and Mail. J.J. Barnicke undertook a direct-mail campaign involving over 1,500 recipients and sent packages out to any party who expressed an interest in this property. In 1996, the tender period closed and the deal was accepted.

Mr Agostino: Minister, let me inform you. You signed this deal through order in council in March 1998 for \$5 million, \$6 million less than it was purchased for—not in 1996. You signed it a few months back. Let me help you with some of the reasons why. We know that this company, All City Storage, through one of its directors and through another control company that they own, donated over \$10,000 to your party. We also know, through a document from the Ministry of Consumer and Commercial Relations, that your good friend, top fundraiser Jeff Lyons, was a founding director and a first treasurer of this company that purchased this deal.

When all this comes together, Minister, do you not understand the public perception problem that is here? Do you not understand that a deal that was not properly tendered and the taxpayers lost \$6 million—that you as minister have a responsibility not to accept this deal? But you went ahead and signed the order in council to approve this deal, which lost taxpayers \$6 million.

Minister, the ORC is out of control. Again, let me ask you: Why would you sign such a deal that so lowballed and undervalued this property, and why did you sign in 1999 without the property being tendered before it was approved?

Hon Mr Hodgson: Well, I'm not sure which part the member of the opposition didn't listen to, but the property was tendered. It went out in numerous newspapers in 1996. The reason it didn't close for a long time is because it was conditional on a severance that had to be granted from the city of Toronto. If you had done any kind of research, you would have realized the property was tendered, it was appraised, it was sold to the existing tenant. I could go into details on all the factual errors in the article, and if your research department had done any kind of investigation it would have spotted that as well.

You're maligning the reputation of a number of reputable people in this province, not the least of which is J.J. Barnicke, that marketed this property; not the least of which was the appraisal company that did the appraisal, Rajesky and Associates. This campaign of mudslinging is truly beneath the role of opposition in this province.

Mr Agostino: This is now the third deal that we're aware of involving the Ontario Realty Corp, the ORC, in deals that have gone bad. There are two lawsuits in the courts right now. You're aware of that. What the ORC has become is a private club for your friends. This deal, let me repeat, cost the taxpayers \$6 million. It was clear: Public policy once again is up for sale here.

Minister, there are other companies that have come forward and said that it was a bad deal and that they were willing to pay more money. They were not given this opportunity.

You say the deal was closed in 1996. Your appraisal that you quote was not done until 1997. So you closed the deal in 1996 and then you got an appraisal in 1997 to back up the deal that you had closed. That's what you're telling us to believe.

Why won't you start taking responsibility for the actions of the Ontario Realty Corp? Come clean on this. Bring forward to the House all of the documents, including the full appraisal, and explain to us why you would have gone out and received an appraisal on this after you closed the deal, as you claim, in 1996.

Hon Mr Hodgson: A little bit of research would have helped you on this. They advertised the property widely, all or in part. The tenders were closed in 1996. The existing tenant wished to buy it. He had the highest offer. To make sure that everything was kosher and above-board, there was an appraisal required. He paid according to the appraisal price, and his highest bid was consistent.

I'm surprised that the Liberals would want to bring up this piece of property after you ripped the Ontario taxpayers off by over \$300 million with one of your boondoggles that you never checked the facts on when you were in government. That is a true waste of taxpayers' dollars, and I'm surprised you are even bringing this issue up.

Interjections.

Interjection: Why don't you shush?

The Speaker (Hon Gary Carr): Just before we continue, whoever is doing the shushing, I'd appreciate if you wouldn't do it. It's very annoying. I will try to maintain order and I would appreciate it, whoever on the government side is doing it, if they would refrain from doing it.

1430

MILLENNIUM MEMENTO

Mr Howard Hampton (Kenora-Rainy River): My question is for the Premier. Your government has squandered over \$3 million printing and couriering these propaganda books to the students of the province. It's backfired on you, because from across the province students, parents, teachers are sending these books back, saying: "We don't want them. When we don't have the textbooks we need in our classroom, we don't want them."

These particular books come from high school students at Humberside Collegiate, and I want to read some of the messages:

"Mr Harris, if you truly cared about shaping the future to make it a good one, you would put taxpayers' dollars back into education." Or this one: "Mike, you've wasted precious dollars on something that we will never use or need. We need more money in the education system." Or this one: "I'm disgusted by the obvious waste of taxpayers' dollars." Or this one: "Why are you in your position if you don't know how to spend money? I'm disgusted." Or this one: "We could use the large amount of money towards textbooks or hospital beds."

Premier, how do you justify spending \$3 million of taxpayers' money on this, when these same students don't have the science and—

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

Hon Michael D. Harris (Premier): The Minister of Citizenship, Culture and Recreation will respond.

Hon Helen Johns (Minister of Citizenship, Culture and Recreation, minister responsible for seniors and women): Let me first say that this number keeps getting bigger in everybody's mind every day we come into the House. As I've said quite clearly, the cost of production of this book is 98 cents per student. The total cost of distribution is \$1.10, with distribution and costs associated with it.

Interjection: For the book.

Hon Mrs Johns: For the book. I think it's very important to recognize that this book talks about the hopes and the dreams of the students of Ontario. It talks about their vision of where the province should be in the year 2020. As a parent of young children, I think it's very important for children to write down stories, to be able to do poems, to be able to do songs, and have them published.

We have a number of students who have written saying what a great opportunity this book was and how

pleased they were to be a part of sharing the millennium in the province of Ontario.

1430

Mr Hampton: The students will note that the Premier didn't want to answer their questions and I think the students would want me to read the response to the minister who did reply. The response from them is: "Dear Mike, Don't worry about the fact that half of my textbooks are 30 plus years old and falling apart." The next reply is, "Our geography class only has 14 books for 30 students." The next reply is, "There are schools that don't even have music programs, drama programs etc." The next, "I was just informed that funding for sports might be cut by two thirds, which means that sports will not be available to students in public schools." The next: "Does this mean no sports teams next year?" The next: "I am very concerned over the province's decision to raise tuition fees."

Minister, you can tell people that they only cost a buck apiece. The fact of the matter is that you wasted \$3 million on propaganda nonsense when these very students don't have the textbooks they need. What are you going to do about it, send out more propaganda or admit it was wrong and fix it?

Hon Mrs Johns: There is a quote in the Kingston Whig-Standard where it says, "Booklet not a waste, says teen." That's the title and it says: "'This is a very important book. Kids need to share their ideas ... so we may not be so scared to share them when we are older.'" This article also says: "Children rarely get to air their views publicly because they're not in positions of power or influence, she said. This, however, is a rare chance, she said. And the world of adults should give it to them. 'Kids need to share their points of view. We may be kids right now, but eventually we'll have your jobs ... and you are not going to be in charge any more.'"

Let me say to the opposition about this millennium vision that we're losing sight of this. This book was for kids to be able to share their vision of the future. This is a great opportunity for kids.

Mr Hampton: While this government talks about sharing their vision, these students complain that they have to share textbooks because they don't have enough.

I want to read another response from one of the students. "You should be more considerate and think of the well-being of the students, not making yourself look good." Or this, from another student, "I feel that the manner in which you exploited innocent children is disgraceful!" Or this: "Thanks for wasting all that money from our education funds. I'm proud of you, man. What next?" Or this one: "How can you make cutbacks to our education when you are publishing this? Things need to change." This student writes, "Stop insulting our intelligence." This student writes, "Thank you for wasting our money while schools are suffering."

My question is to the Premier again. This was a colossal mistake to spend \$3 million on this nonsense when students don't have the textbooks they need. What are

you going to do about it, Premier? How and when are you going to put an end to this waste?

Hon Mrs Johns: Let me just clarify the facts. First of all, not one education dollar was spent on this book. Let me also clarify the fact that for sports and recreation in the Ministry of Citizenship, Culture and Recreation, not one dollar was in any way changed in the previous budget. Let me also make it very clear that in my hand I have 16,649 requests for new copies of this book because they believe it's important for the students of the province.

I don't know why the two opposition parties are making such a hoopla about this. This is so important for the students of Ontario for them to understand and to talk about their vision of 2020. My Ontario includes kids. I don't know what's happened with them.

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

Mr Hampton: My next question is also for the Premier.

I would just say to the minister, you clearly need to start listening to the students of the province.

Hon Mrs Johns: On a point of order, Speaker: Let me say that I am very concerned about the students of the province. I care deeply. My own kids are students in the province.

LIQUOR CONTROL BOARD OF ONTARIO

Mr Howard Hampton (Kenora-Rainy River): Premier, yesterday we asked the Minister of Consumer and Commercial Relations if he was concerned about the allegations regarding Mr Brandt at the Liquor Control Board of Ontario. The minister said to us that he thought it was sufficient that the deputy minister conducted a one-day review of all these allegations. He thinks it is sufficient that the deputy minister, who has a direct relationship with Mr Brandt, can conduct a quick one-day review.

Premier, in view of the allegations of kickback, in view of the allegations of breach of the code of conduct, in view of the other serious allegations that were brought, is it your view that a one-day quick review by a deputy minister who has a direct relationship with Mr Brandt is sufficient?

Hon Michael D. Harris (Premier): I think the minister can respond.

Hon Robert W. Runciman (Minister of Consumer and Commercial Relations): This is another example of distortion of the facts. I never indicated a one-day review. In fact, the review took place over a period of several weeks by an assistant deputy minister within the ministry, a very extensive and thorough review. It also involved the internal audit committee and the board of directors of the LCBO, who reviewed all of the expenditure items in question. As I indicated in my responses yesterday, they found nothing wrong.

We have indicated an interest with respect to some changes related to some policies and procedures in terms

of accountability and transparency. But as I indicated yesterday, I reiterate that Mr Brandt did nothing wrong; he fully conformed with the policies and procedures of the board.

1440

Mr Hampton: Some would believe that Mr Brandt is the biggest bootlegger in the province. I don't believe that. What I'm concerned about is that you're changing your story from yesterday. Yesterday you said, "Upon hearing of these allegations and the investigation—I think we can characterize it as an investigation—by the Toronto Star, I did ask my deputy minister to investigate what the Star was suggesting had occurred." So yesterday your story was that the Toronto Star article appeared on Saturday and then you asked the deputy minister. Now you're telling us that you started doing this investigation work weeks ago. This is precisely why I put the question.

You may like Mr Brandt. I may in fact like Mr Brandt. That's not the issue. The issue here is this: First you tell us the deputy minister did the investigation. First you tell us that it was done following the Toronto Star article. Now you say this was done weeks ago.

Mr Brandt has intimate, close, long-lasting relations with many members of your bureaucracy, many members of this government. I think you owe it to the people of Ontario to hold an independent investigation—

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

Hon Mr Runciman: What I think is that the leader of the third party owes Mr Brandt an apology and owes this assembly an apology. That kind of language is one of the reasons the public are quite cynical about politicians generally, because of that sort of an assertion which has no basis in fact.

In fact, in the press scrum I clearly indicated that when I was made aware of these allegations in mid-October I immediately asked the deputy to instigate an investigation, which was carried out. I said during the scrum that I had a report back in early December. This was an investigation conducted over a month and a half. For this member to make this kind of an allegation again is scurrilous, to say the least, and it's truly unfortunate that this kind of dialogue is occurring in this assembly.

EMERGENCY SERVICES

Mrs Lyn McLeod (Thunder Bay-Atikokan): My question is for the Minister of Health. Last week, the Premier said that sending emergency patients from one hospital to another was not such a bad thing. So yesterday you decided to make emergency redirect a permanent fact of life in Mike Harris's Ontario. Instead of fixing the problem of emergency rooms, you've decided that you're going to order one hospital in each region of Toronto to stay open, and so ambulances are going to have to keep driving by the nearest available hospital because that emergency room will still be closed, with your permission.

Interjections.

Mrs McLeod: I'm wondering what happens if not even one hospital in the—

The Speaker (Hon Gary Carr): I can't continue with the members who asked the last question continuing with the last question. Their time is up. There's a new member asking a question. I would appreciate it if you would give quiet for the member.

Mrs McLeod: Minister, I find myself wondering what will happen if there's not one hospital, in one region, in the city of Toronto that has a bed to take emergency room patients. What are you telling them to do when you're ordering them to keep one hospital open? Are you suggesting that they keep tents open on the front lawn to take patients if there are no hospital beds for them? You can't order a solution to this crisis. You have to provide the hospital beds so that people can get care. Why do you keep avoiding taking such obviously needed action?

Hon Elizabeth Witmer (Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): I'm certainly very sorry that the member is misrepresenting the truth of—

The Speaker: I would ask all members: We're getting towards the end of the session and each day it keeps getting worse and worse and worse with the language. Today, I missed one with the Chair of Management Board, one for the third party. I'm going to listen very carefully. The Minister of Health cannot say that; I would ask her to withdraw it.

Hon Mrs Witmer: I would certainly withdraw that, Mr Speaker.

The facts, as they have been presented, are that no one has ordered any hospital to do anything. There was a meeting yesterday between the Ministry of Health officials and the hospitals and CitiCall. At that time, the partners all indicated their desire to take whatever steps were possible in order to ensure that people had access to the emergency rooms, much in the same way as we have been doing now for the last several years. At that point in time, a suggestion was put forward that we would look at these clusters.

Tomorrow we will continue to meet and we will further develop a plan of action which will ensure that there is continued improved access, much as we have been providing. It's unfortunate that this situation wasn't dealt with by the Liberals—

The Speaker: The minister's time is up.

Mrs McLeod: I would ask the minister to stop misrepresenting the extent of this crisis and start accepting some responsibility.

The Speaker: Order. No, we're not going to continue with this. I would ask the member to please withdraw that as well.

Mrs McLeod: I'll withdraw that you're misrepresenting.

The minister has to understand the extent of the crisis and accept some responsibility for resolving what is a very life-threatening situation across this province.

Mr William Bruciak died in the back of an ambulance yesterday. The hospital that would have been the closest place for the ambulance to take him wasn't available

because your restructuring commission had already shut it down. The next-nearest hospital was on critical care bypass. It couldn't take him even though he was at the point of death. Mr Bruciak's family will never know whether he would have had a chance if he had been able to get into a hospital sooner.

Now you are saying quite clearly, with this regional plan, that taking critically ill patients to a more distant hospital is going to be accepted as normal. You're building it right into the system. Your commission shut down emergency rooms across the province and you are basically shutting down even more. You're telling us the solution is to have one emergency room open in each region.

Mr Bruciak's family would probably tell you that isn't good enough. I want you to tell Mr Bruciak's family how long and how far you think it's OK to go to get care in Mike Harris's Ontario.

Hon Mrs Witmer: I would just remind the member across the way that no proposal has been thoroughly developed. As the member well knows, this has been a pressure ever since such Liberal headlines as these: "No Room in Metro: Critically Ill Newborn Flown to Buffalo"—1988; "Triplets' Mom Flown to Kingston"—1988; "Diverted from Two Hospitals: Woman Dies"—

Interjections.

The Speaker: Order. Would the minister take her seat. I can't continue when three, four, sometimes five members are shouting at the Minister of Health. I can't continue if that happens.

Minister.

Hon Mrs Witmer: We were the very first government to recognize that the issue of emergency rooms needed to be dealt with. As you know, we set up an emergency room task force. They made recommendations; we responded to every one. We made \$225 million available. We increased the capacity of beds within the hospital system. We made money available for community services. We expanded the number of long-term-care beds in Ontario. We've expanded the capacity within the rural emergency system. We have taken significant steps—

The Speaker: The minister's time is up.

HIGHWAY 7

Mr Ted Arnott (Waterloo-Wellington): My question is to my honourable friend the Minister of Transportation. I hope he hears the question. It concerns the proposed rebuilding of Highway 7 between Kitchener and Guelph, through Waterloo-Wellington.

When it comes to highway development, Ontario will only continue to prosper if we plan for growth, consult with those concerned and invest in the kinds of roads we need for the future. At present, this stretch of Highway 7 is extremely congested and unable to handle any increase in traffic. In short, my constituents tell me that Highway 7 urgently needs to be rebuilt. Will you update the House as to what action the province is taking to address this need?

Hon David Turnbull (Minister of Transportation): I certainly share the concerns of my good friend on this issue. We need to help the growth in this area. Let me remind all members that at the time we inherited the government, we inherited two deficits: a fiscal deficit and an infrastructure deficit. We've been working hard to eliminate both of these deficits.

The recommended plan for the new Highway 7 alignment between Kitchener and Guelph would be north of and parallel with the existing Highway 7. In response to local concerns by municipal leaders, my predecessor in January of this year directed ministry staff to review the alignment. In view of this, we are at this moment underway with this review.

Mr Arnott: I thank the minister for that answer. I want to state that I am very much in favour of ensuring that a new alignment is as safe and environmentally sound as possible. I also support the consultation that is taking place to ensure that everyone's views will be given all due consideration. However, the minister knows that the rural eastbound section of Highway 7 through Woolwich township is at its full capacity right now. The gridlock is spreading rapidly into the other sections of the existing corridor.

Would you provide my constituents in Kitchener and Waterloo region with timelines for consultation and its review, and expedite the process to ensure that the new Highway 7 is built as soon as possible?

Hon Mr Turnbull: Once again I would thank my honourable friend. In January we will consult with stakeholders through a series of workshops. We'll meet with local landowners and make presentations to municipal councils as well as holding public information sessions.

We're committed to resolving the issues related to Highway 7. We will continue to build roads to prosperity in this province.

1450

EDUCATION FUNDING

Mr Sean G. Conway (Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke): My question is to the Minister of Education. The minister will know that there is a real and ongoing sense of grievance among the students and ratepayers of the Renfrew County Board of Education on the fact that under the new education funding formula Renfrew county, the largest county in the province, has a public school board that doesn't qualify for one red cent of funding under the so-called rural and remote factor, while public school boards in places like North Bay, Belleville, Kingston and Lindsay qualify for millions of dollars on that account.

Can the minister tell my people, my ratepayers to the public school board in Renfrew, when she intends to change this clearly unfair and intolerable situation?

Hon Janet Ecker (Minister of Education): Yes, the honourable member raised this issue with me and argued the case for his board most forcefully. It is an issue that seems to be impacting some rural boards in a way that is

not appropriate. We recognize that a rural board that may have a sparser population and greater geographic distances requires additional funding. Actually, across the province we have doubled the amount of funding that is available for those rural boards. In this case, unfortunately this board has not qualified. It is an issue that we recognize needs to be addressed. We are looking at that. I can't give the honourable member a firm day or deadline. My assumption would be that at this point it looks like it will be addressed in the normal grant regulation process as we move forward.

I appreciate the information the member has brought forward. It has been quite helpful for the civil servants as they look at things that need to be addressed in the upcoming year.

Mr Conway: I appreciate the minister's response. Let me be more specific. The North Bay-Parry Sound public school board qualifies for approximately \$2.5 million on the so-called rural and remote funding formula line. I'm not going to argue that they're not entitled to a fair deal. But the Renfrew county public school board represents a larger geographic area and, I repeat, they get not one red cent. It is a matter of political will that this transparent unfairness that impacts so negatively on the thousands of students and staff and parents of the Renfrew county public school board be changed, and changed now.

Can the minister tell the students, staff and ratepayers to the Renfrew county public school board that not another year will pass without a change that will give the public school board in Renfrew at least the same kind of consideration that their friends, relatives and neighbours in North Bay and Parry Sound have been receiving for months?

Hon Mrs Ecker: I'd like to remind the honourable member that the Kingston board that his colleague John Gerretsen represents also qualifies for the rural funding because we have set up a funding mechanism that has laid out very clear criteria. It is done in a way to be non-partisan, to be objective, to be fair to all the boards. We understand that for this particular board the way those criteria have been laid out, there are some difficulties. We need to take a look at that to see if we can address it.

I would also like to say to the honourable member that both boards have been working very much together. They have a number of joint projects which have saved them considerable monies. That kind of co-operation is a model that I think other boards should be following, because it allows them to do more things for their students.

It is an issue that we are looking at. I cannot give him a promise or an announcement today, but I understand that it is something we need to address.

NURSE PRACTITIONERS

Mr David Tilson (Dufferin-Peel-Wellington-Grey): My question is to the Minister of Health. Rural and northern Ontario have continued to experience a lack of medical practitioners for their communities. In rural

Ontario, residents are asking for quality accessible primary health care, which is difficult to provide at times. I believe that nurse practitioners would alleviate some of these pressures. For example, my riding of Dufferin-Peel-Wellington-Grey is designated underserved for general practitioners in a whole slew of areas: the town of Shelburne, the town of Orangeville, the town of Caledon, East Luther, Grand Valley, East Garafraxa, the town of Erin and the town of Mount Forest.

My constituents are very interested in accessing the services of nurse practitioners. I would ask the minister to give us an update as to her progress in addressing this issue.

Hon Elizabeth Witmer (Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): Since we passed the nurse practitioner legislation in 1998, we have certainly been putting money forward to improve the access to primary care throughout the province. We were very pleased to make available \$10 million; that was enough to fund 106 nurse practitioner positions. We then provided an additional \$5 million, which will provide funding to 120 nurse practitioners. Again, it enables nurse practitioners to go into hard-to-serve, underserved areas.

I'm also very pleased to say that at the present time we have issued a request for proposals to hire 80 more nurse practitioners for the underserved areas such as the ones in the member's riding. Those proposals are now being evaluated and we hope to make an announcement in the very near future.

Mr Tilson: Each year the federal government has cut \$2.8 billion from Ontario transfer payments. Most of this is with respect to health care, and rural Ontario specifically is suffering from these federal cuts. I believe that part of the solution to this issue is that nurse practitioners will help to alleviate these pressures felt in rural Ontario. What is your ministry doing to resolve this situation for both the short and the long term?

Hon Mrs Witmer: We would very much appreciate if the federal government would restore all of the transfers they have removed from the province of Ontario and every other province and territory in Canada. Unfortunately, not only have they not restored this funding, they haven't taken into consideration the fact that inflation has meant that we need to spend additional dollars on health, as our government has continued to do, to meet the demands of people.

I'm very pleased to say that when we take a look at providing greater access to primary care services throughout the province of Ontario, we will be making more nurse practitioners available in long-term-care facilities; there will be an additional 20. We're also going to be issuing another request for proposals for aboriginal areas in the province and also for the primary care pilot sites. We in this province are going to continue to ensure that we increase the health spending as we have promised, to make sure people have access to nurse practitioners.

WATER EXTRACTION

Ms Marilyn Churley (Broadview-Greenwood): My question is to the Minister of the Environment. As soon as the election was over, you lifted the moratorium on permits to take water, you refused to freeze development on the Oak Ridges moraine, and you boast that "Every single drop of water that is required to be taken out based on a proposal, like for housing, has to be scientifically proved that it can be replenished." But a developer putting up five new houses doesn't need a permit. Someone taking up to 50,000 litres a day—and that's 36 million of these half-litre bottles of water a year—doesn't need a permit. And for those who get your new permits, some of which now last for five and 10 years, you just take their word for how much water they actually remove. Minister, do you even know how much water is being taken out of the ground in Ontario?

Hon Tony Clement (Minister of the Environment, Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing): As I hope the honourable member knows, we have had difficulty, because of the budget cuts they imposed on the Ministry of the Environment, to get a handle on these issues. When we inherited that ministry, the situation was that they didn't have an idea about the very question she wants answered. If the honourable member can dig deep into her institutional memory, perhaps she can help in answering that question for us.

1500

Ms Churley: Mr Speaker, I don't want to go there. He has cut so much out of the Ministry of the Environment, I cannot believe that he could stand there and make an excuse when we're talking about something as important as water in Ontario.

Minister, regulation 2/85 says that a director, deciding whether or not to issue a permit to take water, doesn't have to consider "whether it is in the public interest to grant the permit," and where the regulation says, "They shall consider the protection of the natural function of the ecosystem," they can't do it. One of your own directors says: "The permit-to-take-water manual does not incorporate these sections. Therefore it is submitted that the ecosystem approach has yet to be specifically incorporated into the permit to take water."

Your own colleague the Minister of Energy said on November 20, "There are no good laws to protect groundwater."

Minister, you've had seven months. You have boasted about it in this House. Why isn't the new manual ready? Why are you leaving your directors without the tools your regulation says they need to protect the ecosystem? Admit, Minister, that your Minister of Energy is right and you're wrong. Admit it today.

Hon Mr Clement: I just want to say for the record that we have done more in the seven months to protect groundwater in this province than they did in their five-year period.

We are very proud of our record, because we are initiating the studies to find out what the groundwater is, we

are tightening up on the permits-to-take-water system, we are seeking partnership with the conservation authorities to make sure that we are managing this very scarce resource in the best possible way.

We are very proud of that record because it is under this government that finally we are taking a look at the quantity of water available as well as the quality of groundwater that's available. That is a new trend in this province. It was initiated by this government under our ministry and we are proud of that record. We will put that record of seven months up against their record of five years any day of the week.

NORTHERN HEALTH TRAVEL GRANT

Mr Michael Gravelle (Thunder Bay-Superior North): My question is for the Minister of Health. As you well know, the northern Ontario health travel grant was put in place in 1987 to help defray the expenses of people in northern Ontario who were forced to receive medical care outside their own communities. Since that time there have been no substantial improvements to the program despite the fact that all costs associated with travel have escalated dramatically.

The number of families that have faced financial ruin as a result of the inadequacy of this program is both tragic and wrong. It is for that reason that my colleague from Thunder Bay-Atikokan and I launched a campaign this fall to persuade the government to recognize the need to increase the funding presently in the program. I have thousands of signatures on petitions on my desk as well as resolutions of support from almost all the municipalities in northwestern Ontario calling on the government to act.

The question to you, Minister, is this: Will you today acknowledge that the program is underfunded and will you agree to at least initiate a thorough review of the fairness of this program in terms of 1999-2000 financial realities and needs?

Hon Elizabeth Witmer (Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): Yes, I know that the member opposite has spoken to me about this particular issue, the northern health travel grant. This was a program that was introduced by the Liberal government in 1985. At the present time the process that is used is the same as existed at that time; also, the same formula is still in place. It was always intended to assist with travel costs to the nearest specialist or the nearest health facility in Ontario or Manitoba.

There actually was a review done in 1988 by the Centre for Rural and Northern Health Research at Laurentian University and it was determined at that time that the program was meeting its policy objectives and it was appropriately utilized.

Mr Gravelle: It just simply is remarkably inadequate and it's a tragedy what's happening with so many people in northern Ontario who truly are facing financial ruin, let alone the stress they're going through as a result of the medical emergencies.

Besides the horrendous funding shortfall in the program, there's also a real need to make it more flexible so that families are not forced to go through hoops to get approvals for travel, let alone approvals to accompany their loved ones to Toronto or elsewhere.

I spoke recently to Mr Butch Carroll and his wife, Judy, both constituents of mine, about the ordeal they went through with their daughter, Erin, as she fought and tragically lost her battle with cancer. They certainly spent countless thousands of dollars with their 13 trips to Toronto. But what frustrated Mrs Carroll perhaps the most, and Minister I want you to hear this, was the aggravation and frustration in simply accessing the program.

Minister, in light of what you've just said, will you at least look at making the program more sensitive to people often going through incredibly difficult circumstances so that people like the Carrolls do not face all that extraordinary extra aggravation while they are focusing on the health care needs of their loved ones? Will you at least review it in that context for flexibility and, again, recognizing the need for more funding for the program?

Hon Mrs Witmer: Yes, I know the member is concerned and I think we all share concern for people during times of illness. I will ensure that all issues that are dealt with are dealt with in a sensitive manner. I would certainly be prepared to do that.

GRAPE AND WINE INDUSTRY

Mr Doug Galt (Northumberland): My question is to the Minister of Consumer and Commercial Relations. Most Ontarians recognize places like the Niagara Peninsula and Pelee Island as established grape-growing regions in Ontario. Many people, however, do not realize that the area around Prince Edward county in eastern Ontario is also producing some of the province's most outstanding wine.

When I met with viticulturists from this region, they were very concerned that while they are allowed to sell wine to the LCBO for retail sale in Ontario, they are not permitted to sell directly to the public through on-site retail outlets, as other wineries in Ontario are allowed to do. Selling wine made on the premises directly to consumers is a critical part of making these fledgling businesses fly, so to speak. Minister, what steps do these wineries need to take to get permission for on-site retail stores?

Hon Robert W. Runciman (Minister of Consumer and Commercial Relations): Our government has a track record of working with the grape and wine industry to ensure fairness and prosperity, and we will continue to do so.

There are two steps that a vineyard must take to obtain a wine retail store. The proposed area must be a designated viticultural area, or DVA, as determined by the rules and regulations of the Vintners Quality Alliance. To get the designation the area must either have 200 hectares, or 495 acres, of wine-growing vines but be recog-

nized by the VQA to produce wines that are distinct to that particular geographic region. The second step is to obtain a licence from the LCBO for an on-site retail store, and to be eligible to obtain that licence wineries must be located in a DVA and must cultivate at least five hectares of vines.

Mr Galt: Thank you, Minister, for explaining the process for setting up wine retail stores. But as you said, the issue here is fairness and prosperity. In the case of these developing businesses, the rules governing on-site wine stores are not necessarily conducive to building the wine industry in eastern Ontario. Minister, what can the government do to help these budding wineries get the opportunities they need to grow?

Hon Mr Runciman: This government will not be a barrier to economic growth. There are two options for addressing the concerns of Prince Edward county's grape-growers. The government is working with the newly established VQA Ontario in drafting bylaws and regulations that will make the organization fully functional and we will urge them to carefully look at the rules for establishing DVAs.

The second option involves changing the LCBO policy requiring DVA status in order to be eligible to set up an on-site store. This policy could be revisited when the LCBO's licensing powers are transferred to the Alcohol and Gaming Commission of Ontario.

The government will look at both available options to deal with this situation in as timely a manner as possible.

1510

RIVERBANK EROSION

Mr Michael A. Brown (Algoma-Manitoulin): I have a question for the Minister of Natural Resources. I have a constituent, Mr John C. Young of Goulais River, 52 Bye Side Road. Mr Young is an 80-year-old veteran of World War II who is a pensioner. His house is about to slide down a large embankment into the Goulais River. Your ministry has not permitted Mr Young, who has been attempting for over 10 years to get a work permit, to keep the erosion from the Goulais River from eroding the bank, has not permitted him to. Minister, I'm asking you to help Mr Young.

Hon John Snobelen (Minister of Natural Resources): I thank the member opposite for bringing that matter to my attention. If he'd send the matter over to me, I'd be more than happy to take it up with my officials.

Mr Brown: Minister, I'll send you over a photocopy of the situation. I have stood on the deck of Mr Young's home. If action had been taken some time ago, Mr Young would have been able to pay to make sure that the bank was stable. The ministry has kept that from happening. Mr Young's home is literally going to slide down this embankment. I've stood on the bank. It is a very dangerous situation. It is going to affect not only Mr Young but the access road behind it, which will affect several other residents of the area.

I ask the minister on behalf of Mr Young, will you fix this problem so that Mr Young can live in his home until he no longer requires that residence?

Hon Mr Snobelen: Again I thank the member for bringing this matter to my attention on behalf of his constituent. I'm sure it's a very serious matter for his constituent. I'll make sure the officials in the Ministry of Natural Resources look into that and will respond to your office as quickly as I get some details.

INVESTMENT IN ONTARIO

Mrs Tina R. Molinari (Thornhill): My question is for my dear friend, who was also my MPP before the restructuring, the Minister of Economic Development and Trade. We ran on the platform that our government would not infringe on this province's business ability to thrive in Ontario. Instead we recognized that our role was to create the necessary economic climate through the reduction of taxes and removal of red tape to allow businesses across Ontario the opportunity to succeed.

I had the pleasure of hosting a delegation of municipal politicians from Italy this summer who were looking for expansion in business opportunities in Ontario. What services does your Ministry of Economic Development and Trade offer to both retain and attract business in Ontario?

Hon Al Palladini (Minister of Economic Development and Trade): I want to thank my good friend the member from Thornhill for the question. The key investment account program was started within our ministry just over a year ago to bridge a communication gap that was lacking with larger Ontario companies. Prior to its inception, our ministry had no real direct contact program to deliver competitive messages that larger companies in Ontario are better off expanding right here in our own province.

The program's mission is to have regular meetings with approximately 500 Ontario-based and major multinational corporations to ensure they are aware of Ontario's competitive advantage and will consider future expansion right here in our province. In fact, as of last month, our key investment account program has met with 300 different companies across the province and we're on target to meet our ambitious goal of 500 to ensure that more jobs are going to be created in our province.

Mrs Molinari: I understand the NDP shut down all our foreign trade offices during their time in office.

Interjections.

Mrs Molinari: Yes, they did. I can't help but wonder if we're not falling off the radar screen internationally as a result of these closures. I've heard you say that you'll get on a boat, a plane or a train to bring jobs to Ontario. Since investment is so powerful in creating the economic strength of our province, should we not be spending more of our time and effort in attracting new companies from abroad to invest in Ontario?

Hon Mr Palladini: While we need to keep attracting investors to Ontario from abroad, which I think is very

important, we also need to cultivate businesses that are growing right here in Ontario. It is estimated that 75% of new investments in Ontario come from already existing companies, proving that—one of the things I learned a long time ago—good customer service creates repeat customers.

Our key account managers ensure that we build relationships with these companies and provide them with the information they need when expanding their operations and their workforce. These outreach activities by our investment staff have resulted in \$715 million in new business investments in our province and 1,405 new full-time jobs. In fact, one of the largest investment firms since our program began is the new IBM software—

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

CHILD CARE

Mr Tony Martin (Sault Ste Marie): My question is for the Minister of Community and Social Services. The municipally run daycare centre in Elliot Lake is closing down. We warned you that your child care download would close daycare centres. This centre in Elliot Lake is only the first municipally run centre to close. We told you that your most recent \$25-million download was the last nail in the coffin. You've taken away the ability of municipalities to raise the 20% start-up funds that force you to match with the remaining 80%. You've actually saved yourself \$100 million in the most despicable of ways. Municipalities already crushed under your down-loading schemes are going to be forced to shut down child care centres all across this province.

Do the right thing, Minister, and restore child care funds so that Elliot Lake and communities across this province don't wake up tomorrow to find out that their daycare centre is closing down.

Hon John R. Baird (Minister of Community and Social Services, minister responsible for francophone affairs): This government is spending more supporting parents providing child care for their children than any government in Ontario's history. We'll spend more than \$738 million supporting child care in the province of Ontario. That's something we're tremendously proud of. We provide a whole host of child care support.

I want to assure the honourable member that absolutely nothing in the program review announcement with respect to our local services realignment needs to see one single child care space lost in the province of Ontario—not one single space. The honourable member would be well advised to look at the record of this government in providing support for child care. It's a record amount. It's substantially more than his government provided for child care.

NOTICE OF DISSATISFACTION

Mrs Lyn McLeod (Thunder Bay-Atikokan): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: I wanted to serve notice

under standing order 37(e) that I will be filing my dissatisfaction with the answer of the Minister of Health to my earlier question and seeking a late show.

PETITIONS

MEDICAL LABORATORIES

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

I've affixed my signature to it.

NOTICE OF DISSATISFACTION

Mr Tony Martin (Sault Ste Marie): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: I want to indicate that I wasn't satisfied with the answer to the question I just asked the Minister of Community and Social Services, so I'll be filing the appropriate paperwork to ask for a late show.

1520

KARLA HOMOLKA

Mr John O'Toole (Durham): It's my privilege to rise and present a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario. I might add, for the record, that the member for Scarborough Centre, Ms Mushinski, has brought this to the attention of all members of the House.

“Whereas Karla Homolka and Paul Bernardo were responsible for terrorizing entire communities in southern Ontario; and

“Whereas the Ontario government of the day made a deal with the devil with Karla Homolka resulting in a sentence that does not truly make her pay for her crimes; and

“Whereas our communities have not yet fully recovered from the trauma and sadness caused by Karla Homolka; and

“Whereas Karla Homolka believes that she should be entitled to pass to leave prison with an escort; and

“Whereas the people of Ontario believe that criminals should be forced to serve sentences that reflect the seriousness of their crimes;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, respectfully petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“That the government of Ontario will:

“Do everything within its power to ensure that Karla Homolka serves all her full sentence;

“Continue to reform parole and make it more difficult for serious offenders to return to our streets;

“Fight the federal government's plan to release up to 1,600 more convicted criminals on to Ontario streets; and

“Ensure that the Ontario government's sex offender registry is functioning as quickly as possible.”

I am pleased to support this and add my name to those petitioning.

MILLENNIUM MEMENTO

Mr Gerry Phillips (Scarborough-Agincourt): I have a petition from the students at Porter Collegiate in Scarborough.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the government of Ontario continues to cut millions in funding from the educational system and ultimately is the sole cause of the myriad of disturbances to the public education system,

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

“Given that the government of Ontario has little idea of how to effectively and competently administer public funds, we, the student body at W.A. Porter Collegiate Institute, are demanding that the government of Ontario desist in their endeavours to callously spend money in areas not relevant to our in-class learning, namely, the recent distribution of millennium mementoes.

“Let it be known that we feel these mementoes are a waste of valuable resources. Rather, we would have liked to have had the opportunity to see the money spent in the education system where you've cut millions, completely disregarding our needs as students in the public education system.”

That's signed by a large number of students from W.A. Porter Collegiate, and I'll attach my signature as well.

NORTHERN HEALTH TRAVEL GRANT

Mr Michael Gravelle (Thunder Bay-Superior North): The issue of a northern health travel grant and its

inadequacy is a major issue. Petitions keep coming in, signatures by the thousands.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

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

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

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

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

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

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

I have thousands of signatures. Many seniors' clubs in my riding have sent these in, as well as everybody from across northwestern Ontario. I am proud to sign my name to this.

DOCTOR SHORTAGE

Mr James J. Bradley (St Catharines): I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario. It reads as follows:

"Whereas patients requiring eye care in Niagara are faced with a shortage of ophthalmologists and as a result, are compelled to wait several weeks to secure an appointment with an ophthalmologist;

"Whereas, while the shortage of ophthalmologists is in existence, the removal of the billing cap on these medical specialists provides a temporary but essential easing of the health care crisis;

"Whereas the solution of the Ontario Ministry of Health removing the exemptions from the billing cap and forcing patients from Niagara to travel along the very busy Queen Elizabeth Highway to receive treatment in Hamilton;

"Be it therefore resolved that the Ontario Ministry of Health remove the cap on billing for ophthalmologists in Niagara until such time as Niagara is no longer an under-serviced area."

I affix my signature as I am in complete agreement.

OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH AND SAFETY

Mr David Christopherson (Hamilton West): I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly, again coming in from the Canadian Auto Workers. The petition 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);

"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; and

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

"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;

"Therefore 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."

On behalf of my NDP colleagues, I add my name to those of these petitioners.

KARLA HOMOLKA

Ms Marilyn Mushinski (Scarborough Centre): I have a petition addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario that reads as follows:

"Whereas Karla Homolka and Paul Bernardo were responsible for terrorizing entire communities in southern Ontario; and

"Whereas the Ontario government of the day made a deal with the devil with Karla Homolka resulting in a sentence that does not truly make her pay for her crimes; and

"Whereas our communities have not yet fully recovered from the trauma and sadness caused by Karla Homolka; and

"Whereas Karla Homolka believes that she should be entitled to pass to leave prison with an escort; and

"Whereas the people of Ontario believe that criminals should be forced to serve sentences that reflect the seriousness of their crimes;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, respectfully petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the government of Ontario will:

"Do everything within its power to ensure that Karla Homolka serves her full sentence;

"Continue to reform parole and make it more difficult for serious offenders to return to our streets;

"Fight the federal government's plan to release up to 1,600 more convicted criminals on to Ontario streets; and

"Ensure that the Ontario government's sex offender registry is functioning as quickly as possible."

I attach my signature to this petition.

HIGHWAY SAFETY

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

This is signed by a number of residents of Chatham and Paincourt, and I affix my signature to it.

KARLA HOMOLKA

Mr John O'Toole (Durham): Speaker, I commend you for allowing us this opportunity to read into the record the important priorities for the people of Ontario.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas Karla Homolka and Paul Bernardo were responsible for terrorizing entire communities in southern Ontario; and

"Whereas the Ontario government of the day made a deal with the devil with Karla Homolka resulting in a sentence that does not truly make her pay for her crimes; and

"Whereas our communities have not yet fully recovered from the trauma and sadness caused by Karla Homolka; and

"Whereas Karla Homolka believes that she should be entitled to passes to leave prison with an escort; and

"Whereas the people of Ontario believe that criminals should be forced to serve sentences that reflect the seriousness of their crimes;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, respectfully petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the government of Ontario will:

"Do everything within its power to ensure that Karla Homolka serves her full sentence;

"Continue to reform parole and make it more difficult for serious offenders to return to our streets;

"Fight the federal government's plan to release up to 1,600 more convicted criminals on to Ontario streets; and

"Ensure that the Ontario government's sex offender registry is functioning as quickly as possible."

I'm proud to present this petition on behalf of the member for Scarborough Centre, Marilyn Mushinski. I'll sign it, support it and would like the government to take action.

1530

NORTHERN HEALTH TRAVEL GRANT

Mr Michael A. Brown (Algoma-Manitoulin): I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

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

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

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

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

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

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

Many of these petitions are from Hornepayne and Dubreuilville. I'm proud to affix my signature.

MILLENNIUM MEMENTO

Mrs Sandra Pupatello (Windsor West): The page from my riding of Windsor West, Caroline, is going to help me deliver this petition today. I'm very proud of her. She's going to come and stand right beside me here.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the Conservative government carelessly wasted more than \$2.5 million of taxpayers' money on producing the My Ontario Millennium Memento souvenir; and

"Whereas we feel that \$2.5 million would have been better spent on textbooks, computers and curriculum teaching materials which are sorely lacking in Ontario schools today; and

"Whereas students and parents want materials in their classrooms which are not blatantly partisan in nature as is this souvenir; and

"Whereas students and parents are participating in the Return to Sender program by returning thousands of unwanted copies of the millennium souvenir to Mike Harris; and

"Whereas this action by the Conservative government demonstrates their disregard for the priorities of Ontarians; and

"Whereas 500 hard-working Ontario families had to work one full year to pay their provincial income taxes to cover the cost of printing this misguided project;

"Therefore, be it resolved that we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to condemn the skewed priorities of the Mike Harris government and demand that Mike Harris issue an apology to the people of Ontario for wasting taxpayers' money."

A truckload left Windsor from my office on Ouellette Avenue last night loaded with this millennium book.

Thank you, Caroline, for delivering that petition.

NOTICE OF DISSATISFACTION

The Acting Speaker (Mr Tony Martin): Pursuant to standing order 37(a), the member for Thunder Bay-Atikokan has given notice of her dissatisfaction with the answer to her question given by the Minister of Health concerning emergency room closures. This matter will be debated today at 6 pm.

Pursuant to standing order 37(a), the member for Sault Ste Marie has given notice of his dissatisfaction with the answer to his question given by the Minister of Community and Social Services concerning the Elliott Lake day care centre. This matter will be debated today at 6 pm as well.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

FEWER MUNICIPAL
POLITICIANS ACT, 1999LOI DE 1999 RÉDUISANT LE NOMBRE
DE CONSEILLERS MUNICIPAUX

Resuming the debate adjourned on December 13, 1999, on the motion for second reading of Bill 25, An Act to provide for the restructuring of four regional municipalities and to amend the Municipal Act and various other Acts in connection with municipal restructuring and with municipal electricity services / Projet de loi 25, Loi prévoyant la restructuration de quatre municipalités régionales et modifiant la Loi sur les municipalités et diverses autres lois en ce qui a trait aux restructurations municipales et aux services municipaux d'électricité.

Mr John Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands): Mr Speaker, it was the intention of our leadoff speaker to split his time with me. I'm not sure whether he indicated that yesterday. If not, I'm asking for unanimous consent for that at this stage.

The Acting Speaker (Mr Tony Martin): Is there unanimous consent? Agreed.

Mr Gerretsen: I'm very pleased to debate this bill, Bill 25, although I'm not all that pleased that it's here, quite frankly. The reason for that is that I think the government has once again spun this whole notion that we would all be better off if there were fewer politicians in this province. As if the politicians are the ones that cost all the money.

Now let's be fair about it. It's my understanding that because of the fact that the number of politicians will be reduced in the province of Ontario by something like 190 politicians in these four restructured areas and in Metro Toronto we'll have a saving of about \$4 million to \$5 million. That's the saving for these politicians.

But let's also be fair about it and say that the average municipal politician in this province earns no more than \$5,000 or \$10,000 per year, because the vast majority of these people are on a part-time basis. What this government has been spinning is this whole notion that somehow bigger is necessarily better. To be fair about it, in some cases it may be and in some cases it may not be.

If I look at our own example in Kingston and the Islands where the new city of Kingston has been formulated as a result of restructuring, which was basically supported by most of the people, and I supported the basic concept as well, except for the fact that vast rural areas in my new city of Kingston, namely the rural areas north of the 401 in the township of Kingston and the township of Pittsburgh, were included in the new city of Kingston and some of these areas are as far as 20 to 25 miles away from the city centre, I think it's fair to say that as far as I'm concerned those areas never should have been included. It's my understanding that we're doing exactly the same thing in the Hamilton-Wentworth area and in Ottawa-Carleton, where whole tracts of rural

lands—agricultural land, by and large—are being included into these restructured areas, which shouldn't happen.

Why shouldn't it happen? First of all, there's this whole notion of community of interests. Living in an urban community is totally different from living in a rural community. The kind of topics that get discussed at council, the kind of problems that are dealt with on a day-to-day basis, are totally and absolutely different. To put a rural area, which may be as much as 20 miles away, and in Ottawa-Carleton I would dare say some of these areas are probably closer to 40 miles away from the city centre, into a regional area, into a new city centre makes absolutely no sense.

There's the other aspect as well, and that is the whole aspect of representation. The people of Ontario have to ask themselves, why has municipal government in this province basically worked pretty well over the last 150 years? It is undoubtedly that it is the government level that's closest to the people. If they take any interest in it at all, the people usually know their local representatives. They know their mayor and reeve etc. If there is a problem that they want to discuss, they're able to do so because that person, their own representative, usually isn't further than a concession line away or lives in the same neighbourhood, the same geographic area, etc.

That's worked pretty well for this province over the last 150 years. In these restructured areas, including my own, that is going to be totally denied. The rural voices in these areas are going to be unheard.

Let me make it clear that the individuals who may be representing those rural areas will be heard in their councils, but just in the normal makeup of these new urban, large, restructured councils, their voices are going to be in the vast minority. Let me give you an example.

In the city of Kingston, we currently have a mayor, 12 councillors and four individuals on the board of control, for a total of 17. Now council has decided to go from 17 to 12 in total number. The big debate that has been going on in the city of Kingston lately is whether there should be one or two rural voices on the new council. I say that even that debate is buying into this whole notion that somehow the rural voices will be heard on a consistent basis in these new urban areas. It's just not going to happen. Whether or not they have one voice—two voices are obviously better than one—or two voices, most of the issues that these councils are going to deal with are going to basically not deal with the rural areas and the rural concerns.

1540

People in the Kingston area, before the boundaries of the new ridings were formed, used to say, "Why are you interested in this?" At that point of time I represented the major urban area of the Kingston community. Now, with the new boundary lines, I represent more of the rural people as well. Even in the last Parliament, they would say, "Why are you concerned about that?" I'm concerned about that for one reason and one reason only: I am a true believer in representative government.

This notion that if we have smaller councils we will be better off is absolute nonsense. I think that local councils ought to be truly representatives of the communities that they are. Whether there are people on those councils from the left side of the political spectrum or from the right side of the political spectrum or somewhere in between is totally immaterial. That community ought to be represented on council and there ought to be representatives from one side to the other of the political spectrum.

The reason is that councils have to be truly representative of the communities they represent. That is not talked about. Somehow a lot of people have sort of bought into this notion that larger is better and fewer council members is better because we've got to get rid of the politicians. I'll tell you, the representative aspect is gone.

Today our critic, Mr Colle, received a letter put out by the Association of Municipal Managers, Clerks and Treasurers of Ontario. You may recall that this organization is made up of the clerks, treasurers and city managers of this province, who by and large are non-partisan. They are our civil servants, on whom the effective operation of our municipalities rely, whether it's large or small. This is the same group that, over two years ago, warned the Minister of Finance, when he came out with his first tax restructuring bill, that he was making huge mistakes and, "Please come and talk to us and we will show you how you should implement what you have in mind."

We all know the result of that. The Minister of Finance didn't listen to them. As a result, seven different tax bills had to be introduced. As a matter of fact, I think most municipalities are only now getting out their last commercial and industrial tax bills for this year, 1999. A lot of the bills for 1998 had to be redone because of the bill that we passed last December. People who thought they were getting a tax break in effect were taxed back earlier this year. It was a total and absolute mess.

Two years ago, this organization warned the government of that situation in the taxation area. Now they're issuing the same warning with respect to the bills that are in front of us. We know all about how this bill, which is 175 pages long, is being rammed through the House without any public debate and how it all has to be done by Christmas for some reason. It's kind of interesting that when we had the Toronto megacity bill, it was done in April, even though the municipal elections were held in November. I have no idea why this bill has to be passed before Christmas other than the fact that the government doesn't want the House to sit in January and February, hold public hearings into this bill. I've no idea why.

Interjection.

Mr Gerretsen: OK, the government whip says, "That's why we're not having hearings."

Let's just deal with the issue of what the Association of Municipal Managers, Clerks and Treasurers of Ontario has to say, in a letter dated today, about this particular bill. Just for the record, they're the leading professional training organization for municipal government managers

in Ontario: clerks, treasurers, chief administrative officers. They represent 95% of Ontario municipalities. The AMCTO represents just about every clerk, treasurer, city manager in this province. What do they say?

"I am writing to you on behalf of the Association of Municipal Managers, Clerks and Treasurers of Ontario to express our strong disappointment at the government's latest effort to reform municipal governance through Bill 25." This, by the way, is addressed to the Minister of Municipal Affairs, the Honourable Tony Clement.

"The AMCTO has a long history of assisting the Ontario government in shaping legislation and policies for implementation by municipal managers. As valuable partners in providing responsible government at the local level, we support the objectives of municipal reform, namely increased autonomy, increased flexibility, less duplication and decreased administrative costs. However"—now listen to this—"proposed legislation such as Bill 25 flies in the face of those principles."

That's what the government is trying to accomplish in this legislation. They want less duplication, increased flexibility, decreased administrative costs, and the people who are going to implement this at the local level are saying, "Bill 25 flies in the face of those principles, as does the lack of consultation on proposed legislation such as Bill 25."

For example, they say the act "permits the minister to amend legislation by regulation." Now this is an organization that's been around since 1937 and what do they say? They say, "This is unprecedented."

Hon Chris Stockwell (Minister of Labour): Think for yourself.

Mr Gerretsen: I always think for myself, sir, and I know darn well that this legislation is wrong. I'm sure that if you had asked the former mayor who is sitting right behind you, he would know too that this legislation is wrong, and many other people. If you ask Mr Skarica over there, he knows it's wrong. As a matter of fact, he's threatened to resign. And Mr Clark, within your caucus, who is going to make a speech about this, I understand, tomorrow evening, knows that this bill is wrong as well.

Interjections.

Mr Gerretsen: It says it "represents a clear contradiction"—I always find it interesting that the heckling starts when they darn well know you've hit a sore spot. They say Bill 25 "represents a clear contradiction of the principles espoused by this government, namely public accountability and transparency of the process." This isn't some political organization that's saying this; these are the clerks and treasurers in our municipalities who work for our municipalities on a day-to-day, week-to-week, month-to-month basis.

It says: "This bill is replete with regulatory powers.... Why are they not included as part of this bill? Will the rules be similar to the proposed referenda legislation released last year?" That deals with the section where the minister—and this must be an all-time first—is going to get the power under this act whereby he can state that a bylaw passed under clause 1(b) and a resolution passed

under subsection (2) must comply with such rules as may be prescribed. So all this is going to be done by way of regulation.

Let's talk about the powers that the transition boards will have. Do you want to hear what the organization has to say about that? Well, I'll tell you: "The transition boards will have the power to approve year 2000 budgets for existing municipalities and any in-year changes; amalgamate municipal electrical utilities and convert them to business corporations or sell them;... hire key staff, including a new administrative officer; and make recommendations" for budgets for the year 2001.

What does this group say? They say: "What are the duly elected officials expected to do in the meantime? Municipalities may effectively be paralyzed by indecision.... Bill 25 may have seriously negative implications for those municipalities slated for amalgamation. This bill needs to be vetted by the public. We urge you to proceed with your original plan to hold public hearings in each of the affected areas."

This is another way in which this organization that has served this province and the taxpayers of this province well, that is a non-political, non-allied group, is saying, "Government, you've got it wrong."

The AMCTO had it right when it came to the tax legislation that was passed one and two years ago and they've got it right again. Why are you doing this? I think the reason that the government's doing this is because they are bent on the notion that bigger is better. This is supposedly from a government that believes in less government.

For example, in the city of Kingston I don't believe we've had any savings at all. As a matter of fact, a bond-rating agency just recently indicated—let me just read to you from that report. This was issued by the Canadian Bond Rating Service, which basically gives the city of Kingston an excellent rating, but it also goes on to say that "the city will need to identify a shortfall estimated to range between \$4.2 million and \$7.2 million based, in part, on a portion of the 1998 and 1999 shortfalls not being fully funded with permanent sources ... amalgamate costs not met by the province and assessment losses."

1550

Remember, that's how the province said they were going to cover all these amalgamation costs. Here's one municipality where they didn't cover them all.

Hon Mr Stockwell: Big finish.

Mr Gerretsen: The Minister of Labour says, "Big finish." He is another individual who of course at one time was involved at the local level and he should realize the tremendous contribution that local councils and local councillors have made to this province on a day-to-day basis. I would like him to get up and say, not right now but when it's his turn to speak, why he thinks it is so necessary to reduce the number of municipal politicians across this province.

I'm sure the people realize that the end result is going to be fewer politicians but more full-time politicians who

will probably cost a heck of a lot more than the part-time politicians that many of the municipalities enjoy currently at a cost of no more than \$5,000 or \$10,000 per year.

I say to this government, it's not too late yet. You can still have your rethinks. Don't do the same thing you did with the taxation laws you passed last year.

The Acting Speaker: Comments and questions?

Ms Shelley Martel (Nickel Belt): Yesterday the member for Eglinton-Lawrence talked about the incredible power of the trustees of the transition board and how undemocratic that power was, and I want to reinforce that today.

If you look at the bill, it's clear that the transition boards, however many members they will hold, will be appointed solely by the minister. They will be appointed by regulation. The local community will have no say whatsoever in who is appointed. Their salaries, pay and expenses will also be determined by regulations. The local communities will have no say.

The transition board members are going to establish all the "key elements of the city's organizational structure and hire the municipal officers required by statute and any employees of executive rank whom the transition board considers necessary." They are allowed to enter into contracts with those people for terms of employment and the city is bound by the employment contracts once the new city starts.

The boards, as well, have a primary function which is to control all of the decisions of the municipalities and their local boards that may have any kind of financial consequences. They will be responsible for developing business plans for the city and its local boards in terms of cost saving and organize the new municipal structure. All of those people on the transition board, as well, will have any other powers they need in order to implement this particular act. So anything that they need to have done, they will come to the minister and that will be done behind closed doors, without public input, by regulation.

They also have the power to override the Municipal Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act and the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act and they don't have to be dissolved until January 2001 or such later date as determined by the minister by regulation. They have enormous power. They are not accountable to anyone in the community, but the community by way of this bill also has to pay for all the costs of this transition team. How undemocratic.

Mr Toni Skarica (Wentworth-Burlington): The wonderful people back in my riding, which includes the member for Hamilton Mountain, have been saying I'm a hero, and all I've done is kept my word. That should not make me a hero. What does that say about our society? The real heroes are the millions of people who died for democracy.

What is democracy? It's a promise. You make a promise, people vote on it, you get elected and then you keep that promise. The member for Stoney Creek and myself

and Mr Rhodes, on behalf of our party, said if we were elected, no supercity. And here we are—supercity.

People say to me, "Toni, why don't you just walk across the floor, join those people over there?" What's their position? The member for Hamilton East, the Leader of the Opposition, what was their position during the election? A 90-day process and then there would be a supercity. That's what we're doing.

Are they voting for the legislation? No, they're not. What's their word worth? What's anybody's word worth in this place? I don't feel like I'm in the Legislative Assembly; I'm feel like I'm in the bizarre world, the macabre, where day is night and night is day. I'm in Alice in Wonderland but there's nothing wonderful about it.

I want to tell every member in the House that I've got something that's precious, that's better than being a cabinet minister. I spent the last two weekends in my community walking in Dundas, Ancaster, Flamborough, Hamilton and Aldershot, and everywhere I go people are coming up to me and some of them are hugging me and some are kissing me, and all I've done is keep my word. There is one word I want to use—I'm not talking to any member of the House but to people in my community—that you never hear in this House, and I'm saying to the people in my community, thank you so much for being so kind to me and I love you.

Mr Mario Sergio (York West): I compliment the member for Kingston and the Islands for always giving wonderful accounts of the bills in front of us and for his discussion. Of course with his experience as a former mayor of the city, he knows what he's talking about when we are dealing with legislation that superimposes the government's will on the will of the people. What he has been saying to us and why we are voting against the bill is that it doesn't do justice to those particular communities, especially to communities where 97% of the people voted no.

We've been saying in this House, "Mr Harris, split the bill." You cannot have one bill comprising four different communities. Each community is being hit differently. It's one of those examples where it's not the politicians trying to feather their nests; this is the people themselves who have been telling Harris and the government, "We don't want it." The government is not listening to the people.

Worse yet, they appointed a commission to deal with those very contentious issues in those particular areas, and now we have a bill presented in the House with very little time to debate it. They are going to impose their decision contrary even to the recommendation of that commission. Is this democratic? Is this a democratic process that is taking place? No. That is why we are against it, because those communities have voiced their concerns. In Haldimand, in the area of which the member just spoke, 97% of those people said, "We don't want it." Again the government is doing it their way, which is not necessarily the best way in the best interests of the people.

Mr David Christopherson (Hamilton West): I want to comment on the remarks of the member for Kingston and the Islands when he talked about public hearings and the fact that they aren't going to happen. The reality, as I would hope everyone understands, is that the government, by virtue of their majority and the rules they brought in, can do virtually anything they want. They organize the time. The government decides how long we're in this place. The government decides what the hours are going to be. The government decides what the order of business is going to be. The government decides what's going to committee, which committee it goes to, how long it will be in that committee. The government decides how much time we spend debating issues. The government decides whether or not they're going to allow any amendments.

The reality is the government virtually controls everything, and when they bring in a time allocation motion, which I am certainly expecting them to do under Bill 25, they will put an absolute, 100% guaranteed lock on the process. Somehow in the midst of all that power they want to suggest it's the opposition that is preventing public hearings from taking place. Nothing could be further from the truth. The fact is that the government can have us stay here, come back, stay later, do weekends, whatever it takes, or maybe you could have planned things a little better so that this was introduced a little sooner. You had every ability to ensure there were public hearings and you decided not to, and then you didn't even have the guts to say so. You said, "We can't, because the opposition won't give up what little democratic rights they have in terms of procedures." How bogus. You don't want public hearings.

1600

The Acting Speaker: Response, member for Kingston and the Islands.

Mr Gerretsen: I would like to respond to the member for Wentworth-Burlington. I can certainly appreciate what he has gone through over the last two or three years on this issue.

I totally agree with him. Rural areas should not be put in with urban communities. There ought to be a community of interests there.

I also agree with him that, yes, we also would have put whatever you call these persons, a mediator or a facilitator, to work, but he's making one huge error in suggesting that our facilitator would have come up with exactly the same kind of recommendation that this chap came up with. If you think he was going to, and if you're saying, "Well, you guys would have done the same thing anyway," then he is just as guilty of the cynicism that he is ascribing to everybody else.

Hon Mr Stockwell: What would you have done differently?

Mr Gerretsen: There are other solutions possible. Why is it, for example, that we have to stick to the geographic boundaries that now exist within these areas? There is absolutely no reason for that. There are a number of other solutions possible.

Hon Mr Stockwell: Like what?

Mr Gerretsen: You could have taken some of the rural areas, as I've suggested they could have done in the Kingston area by taking the rural areas north of the 401 and attaching them on to the next rural community, which would be south Frontenac. There is a community of interests there. The same thing could have happened in all these different areas.

To merely say, "You people are for or against amalgamation," is not the answer. The answer is how you do it, and you've got to look at the community of interests that are there, sir. Your guys went in there and basically toed the government line. That is the big difference. What you did is wrong to the people in Hamilton-Wentworth. What you did is wrong to the people in Ottawa-Carleton. You cannot do it the way you've done it in this particular case.

The Acting Speaker: Further debate?

Mr Howard Hampton (Kenora-Rainy River): I am asking for unanimous consent that we can share this leadoff time on behalf of our caucus. I want to share it with the members for Timmins-James Bay and Hamilton West. I'm asking for unanimous consent that we do that.

The Acting Speaker: You really don't need consent, but that's fine. You let us know, and that's great.

Mr Hampton: I want to put on the record why our caucus disagrees with this legislation, disagrees with the process and disagrees with where this is all headed.

I want to say very clearly so people do not misunderstand me that the process is a totally unacceptable process. Democracy is not top-down. Democracy means working from the citizens up. But here, there is no working from the citizens up. It is two or three cabinet ministers who claim to know what is good for people who live in communities as diverse as Ottawa, Sudbury, Nickel Belt, Toronto, Hamilton, Stoney Creek, Dundas, Ancaster, Haldimand, Norfolk etc. There is no democracy here.

This is a government that says people should be consulted, that local democracy is important. This is a government that says you should hold referenda and allow people to be consulted. Yet with these decisions, which are some of the most important decisions for communities, which touch people's lives very directly, this government says, "No, these decisions are going to be made top-down."

The process here is totally flawed. The process here is totally at odds with democracy. This is command from the top down. The boys in the Kremlin would be very proud of this government's interpretation of democracy. That's the process.

Then we get into the substance and the context. I want to say just a bit about the context. Someone could support municipal amalgamation if the process whereby it is worked through, if the process whereby citizens have an opportunity to be involved, was a good process. Someone could support the concept if the concept had to do with improving people's democracy, improving people's services at the local level. But the context of this is very

clear. The context here is a government that is determined to download the cost of more services on to local municipalities, to download the cost of important services like public health, like housing for senior citizens, the cost of services like child care, the cost of services like transportation and transit, the cost of all those services that allow our communities to be productive, and in fact make our communities more productive and allow each of us to be more productive.

The strategy is to download all those costs without providing municipalities with any additional revenue or opportunities for additional revenue. That's what this is about. For proof of that, all you need to do is take a quick look at what has happened with some of the initial amalgamations.

For example, you've got the new city of Toronto, which has seen at least \$14 million in new costs in the year 2000 operating budget—just in one year. That's not to mention downloading that has already happened, but just budgeting for this year there's going to be a further \$14 million in downloading on the operating side. The capital side: The Toronto Transit Commission capital budget impact is estimated to be \$180 million annually, \$180 million of downloading of costs on to the new city of Toronto with no revenue to help the city deal with that or help the city pay for those services.

Just to give you an example on a small scale, early in its first term this government went to a small community in northwestern Ontario, the community of Sioux Lookout, with the neighbouring unorganized areas, and forced amalgamation. Part of the amalgamation order was an almost 40% tax increase for many of the residents in the first year and then a 47% tax increase the second year, with no new services. In fact, the services that people will have in this new town of Sioux Lookout are dwindling away. Despite the tax increases, the services are actually dwindling away. Why? Because the real agenda here is download: download the cost of these important community services which help to make people and communities more productive; download them, but give the municipality no additional streams of revenue.

So both in the smallest example, a community like Sioux Lookout, or a community like the new city of Toronto, what's very clearly happening is: force municipal amalgamation, then force all these new costs on to the municipality and then say to people, "Well, if services are suffering, it's because the municipal officials are inefficient; they don't know how to handle this."

The context of this is awful. Even if one theoretically agrees with municipal amalgamation, the context has totally corrupted what otherwise to some might be a good idea. Because it's clear this is not about improving municipal government. It's not about improving municipal services. It's not about providing people with the services they need in some more efficient way. It is about this government taking costs that it used to pay, that the province used to pay, and pushing those costs on to municipal taxpayers and otherwise burdening municipal

taxpayers and lessening the quality of service that they receive in their community.

That context is important, and because of that context, because this is about downloading, because it's about the province actually reaching into municipalities and scooping out revenue, we oppose it.

But there's another fundamental flaw, and I want to go through that fundamental flaw as well.

1610

This government has tried repeatedly since it became the government to find ways to undermine collective agreements at the local level. Their initial attempt, and we remember this, was the omnibus bill which was introduced in December 1995. As people looked at the omnibus bill they found all kinds of ways that this government was going to screech down and scoop money out of the pockets of municipal employees.

Then we saw, in connection with the amalgamation of the municipalities in Toronto, Bill 136. Bill 136 had a number of very unfair, very pernicious clauses in it which, again, would have had the effect of trying to lower the wages of those people who provide the important public services like public health, those people who ensure that our drinking water is clean, those people who ensure that urban environments are well protected and looked after, those people who provide services like security in seniors' apartments, those people who provide, again, the services that we all need if we're going to have efficient and productive cities. There was a very direct attempt to go after the wages and go after the working conditions of those people.

The government was forced to back off on Bill 136. Probably, I think, the reason they backed off is they recognized that many sections of it would have been attacked successfully in a court of law, that they were so grossly unfair and so grossly beyond the legal capacity of the province to do what it was in fact trying to do.

But if we look at this legislation, what we find in it is another attempt by this government to reach down into the pockets of those people who provide those important community services and take money from them. I urge people to read carefully what is in this legislation.

This legislation creates a transition board. This transition board is almost all-powerful. This transition board literally has the capacity to rewrite agreements, rewrite contracts and void contracts, something that I think most people in our society would find most repugnant.

How would this affect those hard-working people who provide many of the community services that make our urban municipalities and indeed in many cases our rural municipalities work? Among other things, if you read through the various sections, it would provide the transition board with the capacity to basically impose a two-year wage freeze on people who work providing those municipal services. I think the question ought to be asked.

We've seen this government give its own political staff 30%, 40% and 50% wage increases. We've seen this government give the highest levels of the civil service

dramatic wage increases and then bonuses on top of that. We've seen this government, through its income tax scheme, give some of the wealthiest people in this province multi-million-dollar tax breaks. We see that this government, through another one of its schemes, is now prepared to go out and finance NHL hockey millionaires. But if you read this amalgamation legislation, part of their strategy is to go out and impose a wage freeze on people who provide very important public and community services and people who are not very well paid at all.

Where is the fairness? Where is the fairness in a government that is constantly increasing the wages, the salaries, the bonuses of people who are already well off, but one of the direct impacts of this legislation is to go after people who provide important public services but who are not very well paid at all, to freeze the wages of public health nurses, to freeze the wages of the people who ensure that the water is clean, to freeze the wages of people who ensure that in the winter the streets are snowplowed, to freeze the wages of those people who provide those very important community services that allow us all to be more productive and allow our communities to be productive in terms of their functioning? That's what this is all about.

The government puts out a lot of propaganda saying this is going to reduce the number of elected political representatives. Well, in many of the municipalities that you go into here, the elected municipal representatives don't get paid a salary. Yes, they may get paid some kind of per diem, they may get paid some kind of allowance, but that allowance is very minimal.

What this government is going to do at the end of the day—and you could already see this as you see the blueprint of the new city of Toronto. Elected political representatives whom the citizen can get at, the citizen knows who they are, the citizen knows where to find them, how to phone them, how to hold them accountable at election time, those people—people who can be held accountable, who aren't paid a great deal of money—are going to be decreased. But in the context of all this, more and more of the work is going to be done by upper-level managers and middle-level managers who command very high salaries indeed.

Anyone who believes in megacities should go to various jurisdictions in the United States. You will find that megacities have not resulted in savings for citizens, in savings for communities. What megacities have resulted in is greater and greater layers of upper-level management and middle-level management, who demand high salaries. Or what those megacities have resulted in is the privatization of many of the services, selling off many of those services to the private sector. The people who used to operate the public service, who used to be paid a moderate wage operating the public service, then go out to run the private sector company and demand much higher wage increases.

Hon Mr Stockwell: Sure, Howie.

Mr Hampton: I say to the Minister of Labour, who has so much to say about this, all you need to do is look

at the track record of privatization in Margaret Thatcher's Britain. Look at the privatization of the water utilities, the hydro utilities, the transit systems. The people who used to work in the public sector and were paid moderate wages—now, after it has been privatized, the senior managers, the executives, are demanding not only high salaries but huge corporate bonuses. That is where this is headed. In fact, the people don't get any more efficient service; they get less efficient service. What people get is service now being provided as a business. If you have money, you can afford the service. If you don't have money, you get cut off. That's where this is headed.

Speaking for our caucus, the NDP caucus, as we review the process, the process here is corrupt. It is a corruption of democracy. There is no working from the citizen up. There is simply command from the top down. If we look at the context, and the context is one of downloading more and more costs on to municipalities, scooping money out of municipalities, lowering the quality of services in those municipalities, we oppose it on those grounds. We also oppose it on the grounds that if you look at where megacities have been created around the world, megacities are not successes. The services that are provided in megacities are not the best services. The kind of administration that is provided in megacities is not the best administration. The kind of democracy where you have one elected councillor for 50,000 or 100,000 or 150,000 constituents is not good democracy.

We are opposed to this and we are going to vote according to our conscience. We are going to vote according to our opposition to the process, our opposition to the context and our opposition to, again, the government's aim of reaching down and taking money out of the pockets of the hard-working people who provide many of those public and community services we depend on.

I urge people across the province to look at where this is going, because these bills don't just affect people in Ottawa, they don't just affect people in the Sudbury basin, they don't just affect people in Toronto, they don't just affect people in the Hamilton area or Haldimand-Norfolk. To give you an idea of how contrary to democracy this is, now 75 citizens only need to sign a petition and they can then request an amalgamation order. Imagine that. So you've got rural municipalities, you've got small-town municipalities—75 people well connected to the Conservative Party, 75 people who perhaps want to see the services privatized because they believe they can make some money off it, those 75 people under this legislation can begin the process of forcing an amalgamation.

This is a total corruption of democracy. This is top down at its worst. The boys in the Kremlin would blush at this legislation. They can't believe that any government in the so-called democratic world would dare to introduce this kind of draconian legislation which strikes so much at the heart of democracy. But it goes beyond that. If you live in an unorganized area in certain parts of rural Ontario, all it takes there now is one citizen. One

citizen can come forward and can start the process of forcing an amalgamation.

1620

Democracy is supposed to be about the many. It's supposed to be about one person, one vote, not one person decides for everybody else. It is very clear, when you read this legislation, that that's what going on here. Again, totally contrary to the precepts of democracy, totally contrary to the spirit of democracy, but totally in keeping with this government, a government that believes in centralization, a government that believes that three or four people sitting in a back room should be able to make decisions that affect everyone else's lives. Because that's what is going on here, and that's why we are so fundamentally opposed to this.

I indicated at the outset that I wanted to share the time. I believe the member for Timmins-James Bay is here and I know that he would like to make comments.

M. Gilles Bisson (Timmins-Baie James) : Merci beaucoup pour les commentaires de notre chef, qui a parlé sur quelques aspects importants dans ce projet de loi, comme l'effet sur les citoyens de ces communautés quand ça vient aux services qu'ils vont avoir, le niveau de taxation qu'ils vont payer et aussi l'attaque sur la démocratie que ce gouvernement est encore en train de faire avec ce projet de loi 25.

Il y a deux ou trois points que j'aimerais faire dans mes 20 minutes. J'aimerais commencer avec un point qui est très important pour la communauté francophone. C'est la question de ce qui va arriver dans ces nouvelles municipalités qui sont nouvellement fusionnées à Sudbury et à Ottawa quand ça vient aux services en français.

Ce gouvernement, dès le début de son terme en 1995, à chaque occasion qu'il a transféré des services aux municipalités, ne les a jamais obligés, par le biais de la loi, à protéger les services en français. On a vu, à travers tous les transferts où il y avait un service qui était donné par la province et qui était protégé sous la Loi 8, la Loi sur les services en français, quand le gouvernement provincial a transféré ses responsabilités aux municipalités—même dans les régions désignées, comme Ottawa et Sudbury—que le gouvernement n'a donné aucune protection sous la Loi 8 en ce qui concerne ces services.

On voit aujourd'hui, par conséquent, que dans ces communautés où les services ont été transférés, il n'est pas nécessairement le cas qu'on a gardé les services en français qu'on avait quand la province de l'Ontario donnait ces services. Par exemple, dans le domaine du bien-être social, quand on a transféré toutes les garderies aux municipalités, et d'autres services, on avait déjà des garanties sous la province qu'on pouvait avoir nos services en français. Aujourd'hui ce n'est pas nécessairement le cas même—puis c'est ça l'important pour ce débat—dans les régions désignées et dans les communautés où les francophones se trouvent majoritaires.

Moi, je viens d'un endroit, Timmins-Kapuskasing-Hearst, où les francophones sont majoritaires. Je ne suis pas convaincu que sous cette loi, si mes communautés seraient fusionnées—c'est possible, parce que cette loi va

donner pour trois ans la possibilité au ministre des Affaires civiques de fusionner nos municipalités—les services en français qu'on a présentement dans les municipalités seraient protégés.

Je vais expliquer. Monsieur le Président, vous êtes un député du nord de la province. Vous comprenez que la ville de Sudbury a toujours été reconnue comme une ville progressive, une ville qui offre des services en français pour les citoyens de la municipalité—la région et la municipalité. Présentement, ces municipalités ont des règlements municipaux qui disent que la municipalité va offrir des services en français au comptoir pour les francophones quand ils se présentent. Si tu vas payer une amende dans la police locale, si tu vas payer tes conventions, si tu as besoin de parler à quelqu'un dans la municipalité pour payer tes taxes, n'importe quoi, la municipalité va donner les services en français.

Ça ne veut pas dire que la ville est officiellement bilingue. Non. Si on regarde tous les amendements, si on regarde tous les règlements municipaux qui ont été mis en place dans ces municipalités, les villes n'ont pas été aussi loin dans la région de Sudbury de dire : « On se déclare et on s'affiche officiellement bilingue. » C'est un statut provincial quand ça vient aux services de la province, ou des statuts fédéraux pour les services fédéraux.

Les municipalités ont besoin de prendre une approche différente. Les municipalités, selon les règlements de ces lois, ont le droit de s'afficher sur le bord d'un amendement avec un règlement municipal qui dit que les services en français vont être offerts aux citoyens. C'est le cas avec beaucoup de municipalités qui sont présentement dans la région où la nouvelle cité de Sudbury va se situer.

La province dit, « On va aller chercher toutes les municipalités dans cette région et on va les fusionner. » Le problème est que toutes les municipalités ne donnent pas les mêmes services en français. Même dans la région de Sudbury-Ottawa il y a beaucoup de municipalités qui vont faire part de la nouvelle municipalité de Sudbury mais qui n'offrent pas de services en français. C'est là le problème. Les francophones à Sudbury, comme à Ottawa et ailleurs dans la province, ont vraiment peur qu'une fois protégées, les nouvelles municipalités vont se trouver dans une situation où les nouveaux politiciens, dans le cas de Sudbury 12 politiciens régionaux, ou dans le cas d'Ottawa encore de nouveaux politiciens municipaux, il va y avoir le débat dans ces nouveaux conseils de peut-être ne pas offrir ces services aux francophones.

C'est une possibilité. On ne peut pas dire que cela ne va pas arriver, parce que la loi est très claire. Si on regarde l'article (6) à la page 9 du projet de loi 25, je vois que le gouvernement provincial dit que si un règlement municipal est présentement en effet dans la municipalité, tel qu'à Sudbury ou la région qui dit qu'il y a des services offerts en français par les règlements municipaux, dès le 1^{er} janvier de l'an 2001, la nouvelle municipalité de Sudbury ou Ottawa a besoin d'offrir les mêmes services selon les règlements municipaux qui existaient avant le fusionnement. Cela veut dire très simplement, par exemple, que s'il y avait la région de Sudbury et d'autres

municipalités qui avaient des règlements qui offrent des services en français, dès le nouveau fusionnement du 1^{er} janvier, ces mêmes règlements municipaux doivent être en effet pour ces municipalités.

Tiens, il y a un petit problème. Le problème est que toutes les municipalités ont des règlements différents. La ville de Sudbury, la région de Sudbury—pour Valley East j'imagine que c'est la même situation et pour Chelmsford aussi, elles ne sont pas désignées officiellement bilingues mais elles ont des règlements municipaux—ont toutes des règlements qui sont un peu différents. Le nouveau conseil va falloir revenir là-dessus pour avoir un débat à ce sujet. Il y a des francophones qui ont peur que le nouveau conseil ne sera peut-être pas aussi progressiste que les conseillers locaux qu'on a actuellement. Ils ont aussi peur que dans la politique de l'Ontario, dans la politique du jour, les nouveaux conseillers ne vont pas accorder les mêmes services en français qu'ont ces citoyens présentement.

Le deuxième problème, et c'est franchement un plus grand problème jusqu'à un certain point, est que le règlement dit que là où les services étaient offerts à travers des règlements, ils vont rester en effet. Mais comment s'organise-t-elle, une municipalité, monsieur le ministre ? Je regarde le ministre du Travail, mon ami M. Stockwell. Si par exemple il y avait six municipalités qui font une grosse nouvelle communauté, dont quatre avaient des règlements qui donnent les services en français et deux n'en avaient pas, comment la nouvelle municipalité peut-elle être dans une situation pour dire, « Mais on ne va pas offrir des services dans les régions où ils n'étaient pas déjà offerts »? Vous ne pouvez pas faire ça comme nouveaux conseils.

Si vous, monsieur le ministre, seriez le maire de cette communauté, ou dans l'échevin le conseiller de la municipalité, vous direz, « Ça ne fait pas de bon sens de donner des services différents qui dépendent d'où on reste dans la communauté. » C'est comme si on avait des lois provinciales qui disent : « Si tu restes à Ottawa c'est une loi. Si tu restes à Timmins c'est une autre loi. Si tu restes à Toronto, etc. » Le conseil municipal va falloir trouver une manière non seulement de fusionner ces nouveaux règlements municipaux, mais comment les étendre à travers les régions qui déjà n'ont pas de services ou de règlements municipaux en français ? Là il y a beaucoup de monde qui ont peur à Sudbury et à Ottawa. Ils disent : « Écoutez, il y a un problème. Comment est-ce qu'on va s'organiser dans ces places-là. Y va-t-il avoir un débat où les nouveaux conseillers vont peut-être dire que c'est une patate un peu trop chaude et qu'on n'a pas le courage politique pour nous assurer que les services restent du moins au point où ils sont? » C'est là, le débat.

Je propose au gouvernement qu'ils fassent un amendement à leur loi. Dans la loi, au lieu de dire seulement que tous les règlements dès le 1^{er} janvier de l'an 2001 demeurent en effet, vous avez besoin d'aller un peu plus loin quand ça vient aux services pour les francophones et dire : « Dans les municipalités où la majorité des communautés sont déjà francophones, comme à Sudbury et à

Ottawa, les services dans les nouvelles municipalités vont demeurer au moins les mêmes à travers toute la communauté, et non pas dépendant d'où on restait avant. » C'est un amendement que mon caucus aimerait être capable de mettre en avant, mais on a un petit problème : le gouvernement provincial ne va pas allouer ce projet de loi à un comité où nous, députés, avons le droit de déposer des amendements à ce projet de loi. C'est encore un autre exemple de comment ce gouvernement, toujours à la plus grande vitesse, essaie de passer ses projets de loi. Ils disent : « Nous avons toutes les idées. On est bien smart, nous, les Conservateurs de Mike Harris. On a une grosse idée. On va sauver des millions de dollars en faisant le fusionnement des municipalités. »

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On va tout écrire dans un projet de loi. Ils ont écrit ce projet de loi en deux semaines. Puis ils ont figuré tous les angles possibles au projet de loi. Là il nous disent, « On va avoir un débat de deuxième et troisième lectures sur une période d'une semaine ou une semaine et demie. » On ne va pas avoir même une chance de faire des amendements à la législation. On se trouve déjà dans un des endroits les plus importants quand ça vient aux droits linguistiques pour les francophones dans ces communautés. Quand cette loi sera passée et quand les nouvelles municipalités seront créées dans l'an 2001, on va falloir recommencer les batailles qu'on a battues ça fait 15, 20, 25 ans.

Nous autres, les francophones, ne sommes pas intéressés à tout recommencer de nouveau. C'est très simple : tout ce que le gouvernement a besoin de faire, c'est de permettre à ce projet de loi d'aller soit au comité plénier ici à l'Assemblée ou à un comité législatif pour permettre le dépôt de certains amendements à cette loi, pour s'assurer que dans les communautés comme Sudbury et Ottawa, où la majorité des citoyens se trouvent déjà dans une situation, par droit des règlements municipaux, d'avoir des services en français, ces mêmes règlements soient étendus à travers les communautés pour s'assurer que les droits des citoyens dans ces communautés ne vont pas être érodés.

Je ne pense pas que ce soit un amendement qui fait quelque chose de nouveau. Ce n'est rien qui va apeurer le monde. Ce n'est pas quelque chose qui va coûter plus d'argent aux municipalités. Ça va seulement mettre, par droit de la loi, un amendement qui dit : « On garantit aux francophones que les services en français vont être protégés. » C'est très simple.

Le ministre me regarde de l'autre bord de la Chambre puis il dit : « Bien, écoute. Regarde les amendements. On a déjà ça. On l'a dans la section (6) de la loi à la page 9. » Non, vous ne l'avez pas. C'est ça le point. Vous le savez, monsieur Stockwell. Vous avez été assez longtemps dans ces conseils municipaux pour savoir que les échevins municipaux, quand ça vient à cette question, vont falloir se prononcer sur la question. Dépendant de comment les élections municipales vont se dérouler dans l'an 2000-01, l'automne prochain, on ne va peut-être pas avoir des échevins aussi progressistes que vous et moi. Moi je sais,

comme échevin local, et vous, qu'on va être en faveur. Mais ce n'est pas nécessairement le cas, et c'est pour ça qu'on a besoin de donner certaines protections. Ce n'est pas une question d'aller commencer quelque chose de nouveau. Ce n'est pas la question de développer des nouvelles politiques ontariennes. C'est seulement dire, « Dans le moindre des moins, on ne va pas perdre notre droit linguistique en Ontario à travers ces lois. »

C'est pour ça que dans la dernière session du parlement j'avais proposé la Loi 8. La Loi 8 était simplement ça, mon projet de loi privé qui aurait dit que n'importe le moment où la province transfère des services aux municipalités, on garantit au moins par droit de la Loi 8 que les services en français vont être protégés. Le ministre dit : « On l'a fait. » Non, vous ne l'avez pas fait, parce que vous avez dit : « On va laisser toutes les décisions aux accords municipaux à la signature de la province et des municipalités. » Je peux vous dire que ce n'est pas arrivé, monsieur le ministre. Dans la situation telle que j'ai vue directement dans ma communauté, les services en français n'ont pas été protégés au point qu'ils ont été protégés sous la vieille Loi 8. Il se trouve que les accords qui étaient supposés garantir nos droits linguistiques dans la moitié des cas n'ont pas été signés.

Interjection.

M. Bisson : Non, ce n'est pas la copie. Moi, je le sais, monsieur le ministre. Je ne vais pas me débattre avec vous. Mais je sais que ce n'est pas le cas, et je vous demande d'aller regarder de très près. Nous, les francophones, vous comprenez, vous êtes progressiste sur ce point. Vous avez besoin de comprendre qu'on ne veut pas recommencer les batailles qu'on a eues ça fait 15, 20, 25 ans. Comme tous les autres Ontariens, on veut regarder où on est et où on peut aller demain, et ne pas regarder par-dessus de notre épaule à ce qui est arrivé il y a 20, 25 ans.

Je demande quelque chose qui est très simple sur l'accord du caucus NPD : qu'il y ait un amendement mis à cette loi qui garantit que les services qui sont existants présentement dans ces communautés, quand ça vient aux services en français, soient garantis sous la loi.

Regardez justement ma bonne amie Shelley Martel, qui fait le point, parce que je sais qu'elle veut parler. M^{me} Martel et moi, nous nous sommes parlés à beaucoup d'occasions de cette situation. Ce n'est pas seulement moi qui demande ça. Ce n'est pas seulement M^{me} Martel qui dit, « On veut défendre le droit des francophones. »

Vous savez, monsieur le ministre, qu'on a présentement dans la région de Sudbury une résolution de la municipalité qui a été passée il n'y a même pas une semaine. Il y a eu un débat, et par unanimité du conseil existant, on a dit que vous avez besoin de mettre en place une protection sous la loi. J'ai la copie en anglais mais je ne veux pas la lire parce qu'elle est en anglais, mais je n'ai pas trop de choix. Elle dit :

“Therefore be it resolved that the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing and the transitional board assures that the French-language services currently pro-

vided be enhanced and expanded for the city of greater Sudbury.”

Donc c'est la municipalité de la région de Sudbury elle-même qui dit : « On reconnaît que vous avez besoin de faire ça bien avant que l'on fasse le fusionnement. » Ils reconnaissent le débat possible qui va se passer après.

C'est pour cette raison que je vous envoie cet amendement. Je sais que M^{me} Martel aimerait parler un peu plus sur ce point.

Je vous dis très simplement, avant que je passe aux autres parties du projet de loi, que vous avez besoin de garder en conséquence le droit linguistique des francophones dans ces communautés où, présentement, il y a déjà des règlements municipaux qui assurent les services en français pour les citoyens. Vous avez besoin de vous assurer qu'il n'y a pas une perte des services de droits linguistiques une fois que la transition est faite aux nouvelles municipalités. Point final.

C'est pour cela que c'est très important qu'on a une opportunité de faire des amendements parce que nous, le NPD, on a l'amendement qui est préparé. Nous sommes préparés à déposer cet amendement à l'assemblée pour protéger les droits des francophones mais vous avez besoin, le gouvernement, de nous accorder la possibilité de l'introduire au comité, et jusqu'à date vous dites : « Nous autres savons mieux. On est le gouvernement de Mike Harris. On peut tout faire. On a le pouvoir et on a le savoir et tout et on n'a pas besoin de rentrer au comité. » Moi, je ne suis pas d'accord avec vous sur ce point-là.

I want to make two points in the few minutes I have left because they need to be put on the record from a bit of a different perspective of what happens when it comes to this whole issue of amalgamation.

One is that I do not believe that we should, as provincial politicians, take on the legislative authority that we are now taking on through this legislation to force amalgamation on to unwilling citizens. They are the local taxpayers, very simple, and it's up to the taxpayers of those municipalities to decide if they do or do not want to be amalgamated with another community.

I'm going to make this very simple. For example, I'm going to look up in my area. Well, no, let's look at Sudbury. If the citizens who live in Valley East decide that they want to keep on having the same municipal structure they've got now, let it be that they pay more taxes currently or less taxes, no different. It is up to them as local citizens to decide if they want to be amalgamated, not a bunch of overpaid, underworked politicians at Queen's Park to decide what's going to happen.

I shouldn't say “underworked” because we're all overworked. I was trying to find some analogy. Sometimes you talk yourself into a corner. “Insert foot in mouth and pull it out again.” But you know what I'm saying: It's not up to a bunch of politicians at Queen's Park to decide what is good or not good for local taxpayers. They are the taxpayers. It is their municipality. Those councillors work for them. They've made decisions about what services they want in their community and it's entirely their decision.

For this provincial assembly to continue what this government started with the megacity across the province of Ontario and say, "We know best. We're the government of Mike Harris and we're going to tell you and we're going to shove it down your throat. You will be amalgamated. That is the word of Mike Harris," I think is wrong. It's dictatorial, it's high-handed. No wonder the public is cynical about politicians when they see politicians take on the type of power and authority they're exercising through legislation like this.

The other thing I want to say is that the argument from the government on my point will be that municipalities would never amalgamate if that was the case. Hogwash. Municipalities across Ontario have been amalgamating on an ongoing basis, based on their own needs, and they didn't need the province to make them do it.

Mr Bert Johnson (Perth-Middlesex): Name names.

Mr Bisson: Bert Johnson, my good friend the Deputy Speaker, says, "Name names." The city of Timmins. Twenty-five years ago our city amalgamated from within five communities. It was a long debate. It was a very hot debate, as I remember it as a young man, in the city of Timmins. There were some citizens in favour, against; the same type of debate we're having now. But there was a local process set out within the city of Timmins and all of the other communities that eventually amalgamated and there was a referendum, and people, by democratic franchise, walked up to the ballot box and said, "I, the taxpayer, will decide what's going to happen in my municipality, not the province of Ontario." In that case they voted to amalgamate. That was their decision. Was it good or was it bad? I think there's a bit of a mix on both sides, but the thing is, it was their decision.

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You say, "Where recently?" Take a look at what happened in and around the Premier's riding, in Sturgeon Falls and the communities around it. They did that themselves. It was a decision they made for their own reasons. I'm not a big fan of amalgamation, but they decided that was the way to go. It wasn't exactly the process I would have followed, but the point is there are a number of municipalities over the years that have amalgamated on their own. It's happened here in Toronto, it's happened in the Ottawa region, it's happened all over the province. They do it when they think it's necessary. The bottom line is, it's their tax dollars. They're the taxpayers, they're footing the bill—

Mr Johnson: No, no, no.

Mr Bisson: If they're not the taxpayers, Bert, who is? The Deputy Speaker says, "No, no, no." Well, excuse me. Who's paying the municipal bill? Is it Mike Harris? No. They downloaded all the services to the municipalities. We don't have any more transfer payments going to the municipalities.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr Michael A. Brown): Order. All members know one member speaks at a time. At this moment it's the member for Timmins-James Bay.

I would remind members that they should speak through the Speaker.

Mr Bisson: Mr Speaker, I'd like to speak through you to the Deputy Speaker that he should know better than to heckle during debate. It's something for me to do that, but for the Deputy Speaker? Anyway, the point is, he seems to think it's not their decision. I disagree. I respect the taxpayers in local communities. It is their money. They're footing the bill. It's up to them to decide if they will or will not amalgamate. They also decide on how many services they want.

The last point I want to make very quickly, because I know the member from Hamilton wants to get up and debate and I know that he's opposed to this bill as well and will vote accordingly at the end of this debate, is the whole issue of what you're doing by way of extending the rights under the old—remember the omnibus bill, or as the former Speaker used to call it, the "ominous bill," Bill 26? In that bill there was a section, and I believe it was section 25.3, that basically said if there were 75 people who signed a petition, the minister had the power to appoint a restructuring commission that would decide if restructuring should happen within a local municipality. That is being extended by way of this legislation. It means that if you're sitting in Kapuskasing or wherever it might be in the province and you're thinking, "Man, we got away with this; there's no amalgamation coming to Hamilton or anywhere else," you ain't seen nothing yet, because the minister has given himself the power to start amalgamation for another three years. I'm opposed to that as well.

Mr Christopherson: I thank my colleagues for the opportunity to share in the leadoff, particularly in light of the fact that, quite frankly, my personal position as the member for Hamilton West is different from that of my caucus. We all know how difficult those moments can be, and I want to begin my comments by thanking my leader, Howard Hampton, and my caucus, who from the outset have clearly understood that this is a position I've held since 1985 when first elected as a Hamilton alderman and regional councillor and served until being elected to this place in 1990.

For that reason, my colleague is correct in saying that I'm voting against this for a number of reasons, but I want to state clearly that it's not my desire to vote against. I very much wanted an opportunity to be able to vote in favour of something that I support, which is the creation of a single-tier government in the Hamilton-Wentworth area. But because the government won't allow the bill to be split—and we've mentioned this before; there are at least five different bills in here and the part that relates to Hamilton is actually known as the City of Hamilton Act, 1999.

Obviously there are a number of pieces that make up this omnibus bill and it would be unusual for members, particularly in the opposition benches, to be totally opposed or totally in favour of something that deals with so many different matters in different parts of the province, and in terms of what you did to Toronto, the whole

notion that you came out of nowhere and said, "Thou shalt," gave them one or two days' notice and then there was going to be the shootout at the OK Corral at sundown the next day—just nonsensical stuff.

At the end of the day I feel somewhat like I'm being held for parliamentary blackmail in that I will vote against this because I will not put my name to everything that's in this bill. I was one of those who asked for an opportunity to break up the bill so I could deal with the part that deals with my hometown differently than the rest. That's not to be and the universe will unfold, I suppose, as it should.

Let me state, first of all, for part of the 16 minutes I have, why I'm in support of one tier, and then maybe in the last part of my comments, if I have time, I'll also talk about parts of the actual schedule that effects the City of Hamilton Act, 1999, which give me grave concern, although let me say now in case I don't get too far through that part of my comments that I support all the concerns that have been raised both by the official opposition and my colleagues in terms of the incredible, overwhelming power being handed to unelected officials through the transition board provisions contained here in Bill 25.

First of all, when we talk about megacity and supercity, people in this province tend to think about Toronto. The population there, Minister, is what now?

Hon Mr Stockwell: Two and a half million.

Mr Christopherson: Two and a half million. I would think that in a world context that's probably a little on the small side for some, but clearly it's within the range of world-class, world-sized megacities.

Whenever someone makes a reference to megacity and talks about it in the context of what's happening in Hamilton, it's to make one laugh, because the total population we're talking about is not 2.5 million, not two million, not 1.5 million, not one million, it's not even half a million yet; it's just a little under that. It's about 450,000 people, which if memory serves correctly is about the average size of some of the component municipalities that now make up the new megacity of Toronto. I think people would be hard-pressed to make an objective argument that a municipality of 450,000 people is somehow a megacity or a supercity and that it's not manageable. In fact I would argue the opposite, that 450,000 is an excellent size for a municipality in Ontario.

I'm very much in favour of recognizing both the obvious and the practical, which is that having a makeup as follows, and I'll list them—

Hon Mr Stockwell: So you're in favour.

Hon Chris Hodgson (Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet): So you're voting for it?

Mr Christopherson: Minister, if you want to talk, I'll sit down.

Hon Mr Stockwell: Oh, you don't heckle?

Mr Christopherson: Sure I do, but I'm trying to get you to stop. Normally it's loud enough so I can ignore it, but he's on that wavelength that's getting there.

To me, this is not just any piece of legislation, it's hometown. Obviously, if you want to even a few scores, I can't argue the fact that you don't have that coming, or I don't have it coming to me, I guess. That's the best way to put it.

Of the 450,000 people, it doesn't break out into six individual-sized municipalities, and that somehow this is a merger from the point of view of stand-alone communities that are all equal in size. You have a very unique situation in Hamilton-Wentworth where, out of 450,000 people, the current numbers are about as follows: Stoney Creek has 54,000—these are round figures; Flamborough has 33,000; Dundas has 23,000; Ancaster has 23,000; Glanbrook has 11,000; Hamilton has 322,000. So you have a really large municipality surrounded by a lot of smaller communities. That doesn't automatically mean that they should all be merged. I'm not making that case, but I am making the case that it is very different than what happened in Toronto—which is so far the best example that we have—where you had, relatively speaking, evenly sized municipalities being merged into one. We've always had this really strong imbalance in Hamilton-Wentworth as a region.

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When I look at what's happening particularly around Toronto with the GTA, the GTSB—the Greater Toronto Services Board—which encompass not just Toronto but the other regions around the Toronto area, all of which eventually abut our community, and I look at the planning and the extent to which planning issues—and by planning I mean all of the following: land use planning, transportation planning, environmental planning, waste management planning and economic development planning. As those plans are coordinated from Toronto outward, it's absolutely impossible for us to believe that in Hamilton-Wentworth we won't be affected in a big way by these decisions.

Two things need to happen. One is that we need to be able to respond in a coordinated fashion on behalf of our community to those things that are happening to us. I don't mean that there's an attack coming from outside Hamilton-Wentworth, but rather transportation issues and environmental issues and waste management issues, once made locally or within the GTSB, will have an impact on us. To that degree they're coming at us. We need an ability, in my opinion, to coordinate our response to those extremely important issues that affect our economic future in Hamilton-Wentworth, affect the quality of life in our community and, quite frankly, will affect the citizens every day of their lives as they live in our community. We need to be able to respond in a coordinated fashion that meets the needs of our community—not at the expense of any other, but neither should there be an expense in our community just because such a larger land mass with so much more population is making decisions we can't respond to.

The other part of this is that, having spent almost a decade here at Queen's Park, I see the absolute total need for us to be able to speak as one voice, because given the

fact that we're only 450,000 people in the context of the whole Niagara Golden Horseshoe actually, but certainly the Toronto area, when we do speak on all of these issues that I've outlined—land use, transportation, environment, waste management, economic development—we have to do it as one. It's the only chance that we're going to be heard around here.

Mayor Lastman speaks; Mike Harris, the Premier, listens. When you represent that many people, that's the reality.

Mr Gerretsen: Are you sure?

Mr Christopherson: He may disagree and he may not give him what he wants, but he's listening. Yes, I believe that.

We need to be sure that in the Hamilton-Wentworth region, the new city of Hamilton, we have the ability, as effectively as we can—not that we're ever going to be able to compete with what Mel Lastman in Toronto can do. But 450,000 people is a significant chunk of the population. We need to do everything we can to maximize our message penetrating through and the needs of our citizens being met. I don't believe for a moment that this happens in the best way when that voice is fractured, and it's fractured among six different entities, seven if you include the region. So I think we need that one voice.

Not just that, but we now have the situation in Hamilton-Wentworth—and this is real, this is sort of the on-the-ground stuff that's happening in our municipality—that if one gets wind that there is an investor or group of people looking to make an investment into our area, because the geography of where we are and the services we have meets their needs, immediately what happens is that the regional government economic development officials will go out and speak on behalf of the region and do what they can to lock in that investment within our boundaries. It's no different than what happens in every other community across the province.

What's unique to us, as opposed to Toronto now, is that in addition to that voice you've got all the component municipalities having their mayors and their officials enticing within the region to be in their municipality. Why? Obviously, whoever gets the investment gets the tax base. Some of it goes up to the regional municipality but, nonetheless, there's a benefit to the local government, the first tier, if you will: municipal government. So you've got all these mayors running around and doing their job—I'm not faulting them for it; it's exactly what they should do—but they're all out doing the same thing. That takes time, it takes money, it takes staff effort and, in my opinion, can send out mixed messages, particularly—mayors wouldn't do this, but certain individuals may get a little overexcited in their enthusiasm for their municipality and perhaps say something negative about an adjacent municipality, because there are real prizes. None of this happening, in the context of everything I mentioned earlier, is in the best long-term interests of the people in the broader community of what is now known as Hamilton-Wentworth. We have to have our voices focused.

That pretty much lays out the main reason. If I had an hour lead speech I'd get into a lot of details, but the fact is that those are the main ones. Some people are saying it's going to save a whole lot of money and that's why they want it done. I believe there will be some money saved. There should be. Once you're eliminating duplication, to one degree or another there ought to be some savings. Let's understand that those savings, while they may be positive to the majority of people in our community, may possibly mean job losses to others. We ought to be very sensitive to that, and we ought to have labour policies in place that are doing everything humanly possible to mitigate that. But at the end of the day there have to be some savings.

I don't believe, and never have, that it will be to the tune of the multiple tens of millions that some have claimed will happen. I'm not nearly as convinced. Therefore, I don't see that as the driving reason. For me, it's a matter of looking at the way Ontario is unfolding and, having spent time at both the municipal and the regional level of government in Hamilton-Wentworth, coming to the belief that the only thing that makes any sense for us is to ensure that we have one unified voice. Some of the problems that we have—and we're not going to get a chance to debate them much; we're not going to get a chance to place any amendments. I don't know if people who are watching realize, but because of the process the government is going to follow, at least what they're indicating they're going to follow, there will be absolutely no opportunity to make amendments. You can only do that in committee or committee of the whole. Neither of those look like they're going to take place during the debate on Bill 25. That's a shame. It's wrong, it's undemocratic, but it's also a shame, because I have yet to see a bill of any substance, let alone a bill the size of this one, that isn't improved by virtue of all the people who are affected, the stakeholders, contacting government members and opposition members and saying: "There's a potential problem here. Please raise it."

You know yourself, oftentimes at the committee level partisanship is set aside and there is a collective effort to work through a problem, particularly if it's not a point of controversy or contention between the three parties in this place. We lose the benefit of all that. It is a shame because we won't have as good a piece of legislation as we could and as we should.

One of the things that drives me to distraction is this notion—maybe when the member from Stoney Creek speaks he can shed some light on it; I mean that sincerely—that one of our communities within the region may or may not be a part of the new city. They may or may not. I don't see it spelled out in here whether they are or aren't. I think what's going to happen is it's going to be captured—and I don't have time to get into too much detail—by the power that the government has given itself by virtue of this bill.

1700

What that means is that whether it's the local councils continuing with whatever meagre little residual power

they've been left with or whether it's the transition board, how are they supposed to make any decisions without even knowing what the component parts of the new city are going to be? What kind of transition planning do you do, whether you're on the local council or on the transition board? It's nutty to suggest that you're going to have all this transition taking place and one of the component municipalities may or may not be in and that could happen at any point down the road. This is bizarre. It's a bizarre way—and I understand why. We all know why that happened. It was an attempt to provide some room for the honourable member from Wentworth-Burlington. It failed, but we're still left with this wacko notion that this could still happen.

I hope that the member from Stoney Creek would assist as we move through this in nailing this down. Is it in, is it out? Let's do it quickly so that we understand what exactly is going to make up our new city as we move forward trying to make the initial plans, the initial decisions, that are going to affect the success and the viability of our new city.

Two quick things, if I can get them in in 60 seconds: One of the powers that the government is giving themselves under Bill 25 is, "In the event of a conflict between a regulation made under this act and a provision of this act or of another act or a regulation made under another act, the regulation made under this act prevails." Regulations are decided by cabinet behind closed doors. That's the process. I'm not complaining about that, but that means that you can pass a regulation that overrides the law we're passing here. That's a complete flip from the way that things normally run around here, and that is that this place passes the law and then the minor details are handed to the cabinet to deal with by regulation.

There's even a Professor Ed Morgan of the University of Toronto who states that this is borderline unconstitutional because of the way that it puts powers back there. What we do here becomes almost meaningless.

I am in support of one-tier government for my community and proud to say so.

The Acting Speaker: Comments?

Mr John O'Toole (Durham): It's a pleasure to respond briefly to the members from Kenora-Rainy River, Timmins-James Bay and Hamilton West.

For the record, I did serve on lower-tier in Durham, the municipality of Clarington, as well as the region of Durham. So I'm somewhat familiar with the struggle of restructuring government. It's been an issue for many years; in fact, arguably, for the last 25 years, since the region of Durham was formed. For the record, it's important first of all that the government leads by example, and those commitments that were made to restructure ourselves—130 members down to 103—a promise made, a promise kept. I'd also say that in our most recent election platform restructuring government was an important commitment.

I have to read for the record from the Greater Oshawa Chamber of Commerce correspondence to the regional chair, anxiously anticipating a change and reform there,

dated October 1. "What is puzzling to the business community is that there appears to be consensus at the region that the status quo is not acceptable but no united commitment to find a made-in-Durham solution. The chamber feels strongly that the region of Durham and the municipalities must act immediately to find a solution before the province takes action to impose."

I can remember, as a member of the regional council, reading a report on Ottawa. It was called A Single-Tier Study on Ottawa-Carleton. In that report, there was clearly no way of reaching consensus, yet the motive at the time in 1990 was to find a more efficient way of delivering government while providing accessibility.

So the single-tier study forms as a document the issue Ottawa-Carleton has been struggling with for many years. But it's important to recognize too that this is an emotional issue. Local input is extremely important and I think that any resolution to strengthen the representation and the role of the elected person should certainly be the motive, and I am sure it is the motive within this intended legislation.

Mrs Leona Dombrowsky (Hastings-Frontenac-Lennox and Addington): I am rising this afternoon to raise concerns that have come to me from municipalities within my riding, and I would have to oppose the legislation that is before the House at this time.

I've heard from a lot of reeves and a lot of mayors in Hastings-Frontenac-Lennox and Addington who believe that truly, rural Ontario has been put upon by this government. There have been expectations placed upon municipalities that they do not have the resources to meet. Very sadly they share with me experiences where they are not able to provide the services that they should, that they would like to, to their taxpayers because they don't have the assessment base.

They are also very frightened. They're looking at what is happening in the urban centres, the imposition of a solution without consultation with the local representatives. They're most frightened that we're going to have in our part of Ontario, in our communities, made-in-Toronto solutions imposed on our elected representatives. It frightens them and quite honestly it's totally unacceptable.

For many years in rural Ontario people who have maintained jobs outside their homes or have worked on farms or whatever have been able to seek an elected office. There is certainly the sense that with the larger municipalities an elected role is becoming a full-time job. In rural Ontario there is not the compensation or remuneration for a representative role that there is in the larger centres. So there is a great concern about accessibility, about commitment for people who would be seeking office in rural Ontario. It's not based on consulting the local people and so they are very upset and disturbed by this.

Ms Martel: One of the more offensive things about this bill, and there are lots of things that are offensive, relates to the special deal that the Minister of Municipal Affairs has cut for two of his own in two Conservative

ridings. I speak about West Carleton and I speak about Flamborough.

How is it that every other community in my area has to be amalgamated, is being forced to be amalgamated? No one has a second opportunity by way of ballot or referendum to decide if they want to be in or out of the greater city of Sudbury. But in West Carleton, the folks there, after this bill is passed, will have an opportunity to decide whether they want to be part of the city of Ottawa or not, and the people in Flamborough will have the same opportunity. Why is it that people in Dundas and other communities, who have voted no to amalgamation in a referendum, don't have a chance to vote again?

I'm insulted by this bill and this provision because it cuts a special deal to try and help two Conservative members in their own backyards where this is not going over very well. I think it's reprehensible that the government would do that. Why aren't communities in my neck of the woods given the same opportunity to vote yes or no?

I am also very concerned that this has nothing to do but for downloading. This is what this bill is all about. If you look at the first download, that happens to be for the cost of the transition team. For the people in the regional municipality, who have no choice about who is going to be on the team, how long they do their business etc, that's the first cost they have to pick up. The second cost, no doubt, is going to be the entire \$12-million cost of the transition itself. The minister told the Sudbury media that who pays is not part of this bill; it will be discussed at a later date. I'm sure it will. I'm sure we'll be getting the pleasure of paying the \$12 million that it's going to cost to do the restructuring in our community.

Finally the government has to do something with respect to French-language services. Forty per cent of the riding I represent has people who identify with the French language first. We need to guarantee that they will continue to receive services in French like they do now.

Mr Brad Clark (Stoney Creek): If you listen very carefully today, you might be able to hear some music in the House because I've never seen so much dancing in my life. We have Liberals on one side—the member for Hamilton East who clearly supports one tier—but they're going to oppose it by finding something in the bill that upsets them. That's the reality, regardless of whether he spoke in the House or not; that's what he is doing.

1710

The member for Hamilton West has been a long-time proponent of one tier, and I give him complete credit for it, but then he should support the bill.

I'm opposing the bill and I will vote against it in the House. The reality for me, the bottom line, is you should look at, for example, the township of Glanbrook. If the member would listen, he would hear about the impact it would have in the township of Glanbrook. The township of Glanbrook, with virtually no debt, \$6 million in reserve, \$7,500 a year for their part-time councillors—a council that should be held up for accolades—is going to

disappear. Someone should explain to me what the direct benefit is to Glanbrook. We've heard the dancing; I want to hear the realities. What is the direct benefit? What is helping Glanbrook?

Mr Christopherson: It's your government.

Mr Clark: You're supporting it, member for Hamilton West. How can you support this when you know it's going to impact on Glanbrook? You can't say you support one tier and then oppose the bill. Glanbrook is going to hurt. The great defender of the underdogs, you should be speaking for them, and I don't hear it. I'm speaking for them; I don't hear it. The reality is, I will be opposing it.

The Acting Speaker: Response?

Mr Bisson: To the various members who commented, in no particular order: Member from Stoney Creek, I'm interested to see that you're going to vote against this bill. I think that's consistent with the NDP policy, the NDP position that it's up to local people themselves, as taxpayers, to decide if they will or will not amalgamate. If, in your case, Stoney Creek is run with a lower tax base, it has a lower debt and there are good reasons why citizens there don't want to amalgamate, that should be their decision; I agree with you. Only by way of referendum should they be given the point. I'm surprised but happy that you're actually going to vote against the bill.

The member from Sudbury raises a very interesting point, one that has not been raised enough: a special deal that a certain Conservative backbencher and a minister are getting by way of this legislation. Virtually every citizen who is affected by amalgamation, other than those in two particular communities, because they happen to have Conservative members, will not have the right to their democratic say by way of a referendum when it comes to being able to choose to amalgamate or not amalgamate.

It's unbelievable that the government of the province of Ontario would take the position that this government is taking, to say that in the case of Flamborough and in the case of the community of the government House leader, they would give those people the right to decide afterwards if they want to go the way of referendums. So either you is or you isn't, as the former Speaker of the House, Chris Stockwell, would say; you're either in favour of referendums or you're against referendums, but you can't have it both ways in the bill.

I say give the citizens of Ontario the right to decide by way of a referendum if they choose to amalgamate or not. They are the taxpayers; they're footing the bill. It should be rightfully their decision and not that of this assembly.

Mr Doug Galt (Northumberland): It is certainly a pleasure to be able to address Bill 25. I would just like to start out with a couple of quotes: "In my mind there's no question that transforming the seven urban local governments we now have into a single city will save tax dollars, reduce bureaucracy and streamline services. It will also put Ottawa on a more even footing with other cities around the world when it comes to competing in today's global economy for investment and jobs." That was by

Dalton McGuinty, in a Liberal news release of August 24, 1999.

Another quote: "If he"—Mike Harris—"doesn't restructure Ottawa, the best opportunity we've had in years to transform our community into an efficient, effective and competitive force in the new century will have been lost." Dalton McGuinty on restructuring in an Ottawa letter to the editor, *Ottawa Citizen*, August 8, 1999.

Another quote, Mr Speaker—I hope I'm not boring you with all these quotes, but I'm sure that in your position you'd be particularly interested: "If the Liberals form the government, shortly after that I will be appointing a facilitator in order to see if we can achieve some sort of agreement. If we are unable to arrive at an agreement within 90 days, I will appoint a commissioner who will be charged to consult broadly and return to cabinet with recommendations." Again, Dalton McGuinty, *Ottawa Citizen*, January 22, 1999.

These are quotes from the leader of the official opposition. I'm surprised, actually, that he is the leader of the official opposition and not of the third party.

I'll just go through some of the questions. I thought it was interesting to look into Hansard and see some of the things that he's been saying. I went back to look at the statements. He was trying to come up with some reason to oppose the bill. He said "that we deal with five separate and distinct plans for restructuring, and that we do that by means of one bill." Here he is, trying to split it up into five separate bills. I can't think of a weaker statement to come up with to put forth in the House. It's just an excuse to flip-flop. I thought he and the Liberal Party of Ontario would have stood for their convictions, the kind of things that they were campaigning on back in May and June 1999.

Then he goes on—and this is in that same statement; I'm quoting from December 6; I'm sure you'll recall it—"Let's remind the government that it chose to wait five long months after the election before appointing its special advisers." I don't know what kind of a calendar Mr McGuinty uses, but it was first mentioned that we were going to bring out special advisers on August 23. By my calculations, that's roughly two and a half months. They were named on September 24—I think that's three and a half months—to bring in a report by the end of November. They brought that report in on November 26. That's slightly over the five months.

If members in the Liberal Party got this man a calendar and explained to him how it works, his questions would be more credible indeed. I think it's most unfortunate that we have those kinds of questions with no substance in the House. The Liberal Party would go so far if they had a leader who had questions that had some substance to them. I find these kinds of questions disappointing for our cabinet ministers. It's not a challenge for them at all. It's just most unfortunate.

On that same day it moved on into question period and his question was, "One of those specific recommendations was that that new city be designated bilingual, with the eminently reasonable proviso that bilingualism be

available where numbers warrant." It's already bilingual. The province of Ontario supplies bilingual services there because numbers warrant it. Are they saying they don't want to be autonomous in this—

The Acting Speaker: Minister of Labour, sit down. I can't see the person speaking. Thank you.

Mr Galt: Certainly, it's obvious that the status quo will continue and they're trying to take away the autonomy of this wonderful city.

I'd like to bring to the members across the House here, particularly to Mr McGuinty, that the province brought in francophone school boards province-wide. This government has concerns for Franco-Ontarians and I'm not so sure that you people do.

Then on December 7 he started talking about "mega-bill." He's back to the same thing. Nothing new, nothing original, just muttering away about, "Hidden within your mega-bill are sweeping new powers for the Mike Harris cabinet," searching for an excuse to come up with something to object to in this bill.

Later, in his next question—I think it's kind of interesting in that one—he said, "I defy this minister to stand up and tell us how it is in keeping with democratic principles that 75 people can be allowed to sign a petition and compel"—I underline "compel"—"a commissioner or this minister to impose a restructuring solution on a community." Just a few minutes before that, the minister said there was nothing in the bill that compelled the appointment of a commissioner. So he's wrong. Obviously he didn't listen and/or he didn't read the bill to start with. Again, it's most unfortunate that he doesn't understand the bill that he's actually speaking on.

Then we move on with this and look at December 8. What does he have for the second question? It's on referendum. Lo and behold, that's the very question the NDP leader had on the first day and now he's copycatting a question that the NDP was using. I guess they finally clued in and realized it was a good question.

Then on December 9, what do they do? It drops to a backbencher. The member for Essex had a question on restructuring, and then it disappears.

1720

All I can assume from this kind of questioning is that this restructuring isn't very important to those members. They didn't have good questions, there's nothing in the statement, and now they're trying to backtrack and compensate for a really serious mistake they're making here in flip-flopping. But then Liberal waffling, what's really new? You really don't know why the Liberal leader continuously pontificates over these things. No one cares much, really, which way he thinks. You kind of wonder if it's something they're trying to set up so the leader can get his brother hired again. They tried it at one time and had to lay him off. That was kind of embarrassing for the party and also for the new leader.

But Mr Speaker, if you look at restructuring and think about your leader, the leader of the Liberal Party, he was at first for it and now he's against it. What happened? Was there a bit of pressure and he couldn't stand up to

the pressure from the people in Ottawa? Does he have poor advisers? The answer to that must be yes, with the kind of questions he comes into this House with. Or is it totally indecision on his part and the part of the Liberals, continuously going on and flip-flopping—

Hon David Turnbull (Minister of Transportation): Probably all of the above.

Mr Galt: Probably you're right. The Minister of Transportation says, "Probably all of the above," and I think he's absolutely right on that one.

Another good example of the Liberals' flip-flopping around goes along with the Millennium Memento journal. Just how low can you go to use students? It's sad and it's shocking and unusual that a political party would actually use students to carry out their political agenda. In my statement earlier today they were trying to deny the fact that they were behind it. And then they bring across the House books that state inside in red: "Return to sender. Try spending wisely."

That's red and it's all over, and it's obviously the Liberal Party. They've even got a stamp to deface books. I thought it was bad enough when students in my riding were defacing books, and then, lo and behold—

Mr Gerretsen: On a point of order, Speaker: The member has levelled some very serious allegations of deceit towards this House. If he has proof—

The Acting Speaker: That's not a point of order. No.

Mr Galt: Mr Speaker, I'm so pleased that he asked that question, because in last Thursday's Cobourg Star they quoted that the Liberals are behind the return of these books. That was in the Cobourg Star, so it must be right. You'd believe anything that would be in a Star.

What an insult, what you people are doing, to 100,000 students in this province who made submissions for this book. What an insult. It's a shame and it's most unfortunate. Anyway, the tactic is really backfiring on you, because as soon as they heard in my riding that these books were coming back, I had all kinds of people phoning, wanting copies. They wanted them, everyone from a radio station in Campbellford, a seniors' residence, a school. Some of the municipal offices wanted them and the list just goes on. I was more than pleased to supply those books to them.

In conclusion, for once I'd like to see the Liberal leader really take a stand on something and stick to it. We'd just love to see it on this side of the House. It would be quite unusual. The people of Ontario aren't so interested in political posturing. They want clear, well-thought-out solutions to serious problems. The solutions to municipal restructuring contained in this legislation are just that: elegant answers to long-standing problems, answers that will save taxpayers' money in the long run. These are solutions I can enthusiastically support.

I now turn my time to the member for Simcoe North.

Mr Garfield Dunlop (Simcoe North): I rise this afternoon to speak to the second reading of Bill 25, the Fewer Municipal Politicians Act. I take a special interest in this act. As a member who has spent almost 19 years as a municipal politician up in Simcoe county, I take a

keen interest in any legislation that affects any municipal politicians.

As well, I sat on the county of Simcoe council during one of the very first municipal restructurings in our province. In the county of Simcoe it was initiated as a self-driven study back in 1988, with a lot of help from the Ministry of Municipal Affairs. I might add that it was under the David Peterson government at that time.

Honda Canada had purchased land in the Alliston area with the intent to build a large automotive manufacturing plant there. Of course today that's the largest employer we have in Simcoe county. It employs close to 3,000 people and has two huge plants there now.

With the expected growth in the area, most of the municipalities in south Simcoe were proposing annexations and boundary negotiations with each other. There was a lot of problems with planning, sewage, water, and of course they're now building a 24-inch pipeline from Collingwood to Alliston to help feed that plant.

The problems there were unacceptable, particularly with the boundary negotiations and a plan was put into place to amalgamate eight south Simcoe municipalities into three.

Two years later the balance of the county of Simcoe amalgamated from 33 municipalities into a new total of 16. By the beginning of January 1994, the county of Simcoe had reduced the number of politicians from 175 to 110. The amalgamation this time was under the Rae government, the County of Simcoe Act.

I can tell you that in the early 1990s, county restructuring was a very difficult sell to municipal politicians, as well as to the public. From provincial governments of all parties, municipal governments had continually heard words such as "duplication" and "disentanglement." If you've been at AMO conferences or NOMA or Good Roads, any of those, those were words that were mentioned continuously. All ministries encouraged governments, even back in the late 1980s, to start to look at ways of restructuring or ways of saving costs. We needed to make sure all governments work more efficiently.

In the county of Simcoe the committee in charge did a financial analysis of a proposed new boundary scenario. The analysis projected major savings to the residents of the county of Simcoe, particularly in the administration of each municipality. Although I admit it was a difficult sell, the municipal politicians voted in favour of the plan. The County of Simcoe Act was passed in December 1993.

Today the members of those councils of the county of Simcoe are proud that they in fact were instrumental in being one of the first municipalities to restructure in the county, but they continue to look at cost-saving measures.

I look at all the different areas of the county. All the mayors and deputy mayors and economic development commissions meet on a continual basis to continually find ways of saving more money.

The Harris government, when elected in June 1999, promised the residents of Ontario more change. The

Harris government put in legislation the act to amalgamate the municipalities that were to become the city of Toronto, and as well Bill 26 allowed municipalities to further look at cost savings from municipal restructuring.

I am pleased to debate the Fewer Municipal Politicians Act here today. If passed, the act will ensure more efficient government and better accountability in municipal governments across the province.

A fundamental goal of our government has always been lower taxes, fewer politicians and a promise to build a strong economy, strong enough to support the social programs our citizens of Ontario expect.

When we were elected in 1995, we cut ourselves first and reduced the number of MPPs from 130 to 103. The saving to the taxpayers of Ontario netted out at approximately \$6 million. Yes, we probably all have to work a little bit harder today, but we all knew that going into the June 3 election.

Since 1995, amalgamations have occurred across the province. There are now 586 municipalities, down from 815, and 1,059 fewer politicians in this province.

However, despite a long-standing consensus that government has become too costly, too complex and too inefficient, no reform has occurred in Haldimand-Norfolk, Hamilton-Wentworth, Ottawa-Carleton or Sudbury. In areas of the province where local government has already been streamlined, municipalities have reported total savings that benefit taxpayers by \$220 million annually. It is now time for the people of these four regions to enjoy similar savings and more efficient and accountable services that the other areas have experienced.

1730

Bill 25 promises the people of these regions that change will be in place for the November 2000 municipal elections. I believe that our government is acting wisely to protect the interests of the taxpayers in these regions.

It is disappointing that no action has been taken on the restructuring of these four regions over the years, although it has been debated extensively. This past August, Steve Gilchrist, the former Minister of Municipal Affairs, put an end to the indecision. Minister Gilchrist announced a plan to protect taxpayers in the four regions from the costs of large bureaucracy, increased red tape and inefficiencies. Each region was given 90 days for one more round of local discussion. A special adviser was appointed to each region. By November 26, they submitted their reports. The minister made the tough decisions and introduced this legislation last week.

A little about each new municipality:

In Haldimand-Norfolk there will be two new municipalities, the town of Norfolk and the town of Haldimand. The number of local politicians will be reduced from 63 to 16, at a savings of \$2.5 million a year.

In Hamilton-Wentworth, the new city will have 14 council members and a population of 461,000. The number of local politicians will be reduced from 59 to 14.

Ottawa-Carleton will be one city. The new city will have 21 members. It will be reduced from 84 to 21 politi-

cians, covering a total population of 742,000. Taxpayers could save up to \$75 million annually.

In Sudbury, the new city will have a 13-member council, a population of 163,000 people, and local politicians will be reduced from 48 to 13. The savings would reach at least \$8.5 million annually.

In summary, the number of municipalities in the four regions would be reduced from 34 to five. Remember, that is 34 sets of administrations to five administrations. I believe we have the technology in 1999 to handle the reduction in administrations. I also have the confidence in municipal politicians to be able to implement the regulations of Bill 25.

The total number of politicians would be cut from 254 to 64: 190 fewer politicians. Taxpayers could save almost \$121 million a year, including the savings already found by merging the administration of the city of Hamilton and the region of Hamilton-Wentworth.

I support the contents of Bill 25. I commend the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing for having the leadership to introduce it, and I thank you for the time you've given me today to speak to Bill 25.

Mrs Lyn McLeod (Thunder Bay-Atikokan): I am pleased the member for Northumberland took the time to re-emphasize the concerns that we on this side of the House have with the Harris government's constant attack on the principles of democracy.

The Toronto Star did an editorial in which they raised two issues in this municipal restructuring bill that further erode the democratic principles. One, of course, is the clause that's in the bill that gives this government the power to amend or change any act. Through regulation, by cabinet, they can change any act, any regulation, that is deemed to be necessary to be changed in order to implement this government's grand design.

There is also, as the member for Northumberland mentioned, the concern we have that 75 people who object to the policies of their elected municipal representatives can ask this government to send in a commission and basically take over the municipality. The member says, "It's permissive"; it says "may." But we know full well that when this government gives itself permissive legislation, it's for one reason only, and that's because they fully intend to use it. This gives the government, with the request of 75 people in any sized municipality, the clout to come in and impose its will on a community.

The Toronto Star editorial says: "Is this all incompetence? They say they need this power now and they're going to fix it later. Did they put this in by accident or is this something entirely unprecedented in the erosion of democracy?" I want the Toronto Star to know it's not unprecedented.

Justice Cummings, looking at Bill 104, an education bill, talked about the Henry VIII clause by which the cabinet would give itself the power to override other acts and regulations.

In Bill 161 there was a clause that would have given the government total power to amend any other act, any other regulation, including—I say to the Minister of

Labour—any labour laws in the province. Unfortunately, the government gave, by mistake, its crib notes to the committee looking at Bill 161, where it said, “The Ministry of Education’s lawyers advise this is unconstitutional. However, the Ministry of Education believes they need it anyway.” But because they were embarrassed by the fact that they were recommending a clause that was unconstitutional, they did at least withdraw that one. This clause is not unprecedented.

Mr Christopherson: I just want to reflect on the comments of the member from Northumberland who, as is the case, spoke to the facts at hand—he got a little off-track in terms of some of the issues, but don’t we all?—and why he’s supporting Bill 25. It’s unfortunate that his colleague from Stoney Creek felt the need to start talking personalities and bringing in what individual members are doing and almost impugning motive, which is unfortunate, because I know that myself and the member from Hamilton East, from the Liberal Party, have gone out of our way during the whole course of this—and I do believe that the member from Wentworth-Burlington can speak to this—to avoid getting into any kind of personal accusations about why anyone is doing what they’re doing. Certainly, Speaker, you would appreciate that there’s been ample opportunity on the part of the member from Hamilton East and myself to do that had we chosen to.

Just within the last couple of weeks we were on the Roy Green show, all of us together, and we dealt with the issues at hand. I really think that all of our constituents in the broader Hamilton-Wentworth community are best served by that. We don’t have the greatest numbers in this place. It’s important, when we’re talking about local issues, as much as possible, if we can’t agree, to at least stay with the facts.

I didn’t get enough time to comment on this, but I have had considerable problems with the fact that the suburban constituents in the new city of Hamilton don’t have as much representation as I think they ought to have in the new city. That is not a personal thing to anyone. In fact, as I comment on the number of seats, I’m reminded that it was the member from Hamilton East and myself who, in opposition at that time to our own caucuses, were prepared to support the Church accord, which would have supported something the government wanted to do that wasn’t in the best interests of opposition members.

Mr David Young (Willowdale): I appreciate having an opportunity to enter this debate. I want to particularly thank the members from Northumberland and Simcoe North for their insightful comments this afternoon. It’s quite clear that there are essentially two ways in which one can govern in this province. We have seen examples of both over the last 10 or 20 years.

The first involves studying and sending things out to committees and ultimately shelving reports that come back from those particular committees. The government, albeit with the best of intentions, then finds itself in a state of paralysis. Nothing, but nothing, gets done.

The other way of doing things is to go out to the people in an election campaign to set out very clearly, unequivocally, just what it is that you want to do, just what it is that you’re asking for a mandate to perform. We did that. We did it in 1995 and we did it again in this past election. We’ve come back and we are continuing what we started, and that is to reshape this government, to stop the tax-and-spend ways, to make government more streamlined.

Over the last number of months in this Legislature, we have brought forward a series of bills that have tried to address these very issues, one by one. Over the last four and a half years you’ve seen this government do a great deal to bring this province from being the 10th-best province in terms of economic performance, from being a very inefficient body of government, to being the best in this country.

It has not been easy. The decisions have been difficult, but they have been necessary. They have involved the restructuring of municipal council. They’ve involved the restructuring of our education system to eliminate grade 13. My friends on the other side, this government came forward and said, “No, we’re not going to talk about this for another three decades. We’re going to move quickly. We’re going to get something done because this province needs to stop this juggernaut”—

The Acting Speaker: Thank you.

The member for Kingston and the Islands.

1740

Mr Gerretsen: I would first of all like to congratulate the member from Simcoe North for sticking to the facts, which is much more than can be said for the member from Northumberland, who basically engaged in 10 minutes of personal attacks. He didn’t say anything positive about the bill or why he’s supporting the bill.

But I will say this, that once again we got a letter today from the Association of Municipal Clerks and Treasurers of Ontario. You may recall, this is exactly the same group of civil servants that works in each one of our municipalities throughout the province, that represents some 97% of all the municipal clerks, treasurers and city managers, who are saying exactly the same thing they said about all those taxation bills that were brought in some two or three years ago. You may recall at that point in time they said: “Work with us. You tell us what your political objectives are and we will help you implement them, Government.” The government totally rejected them and, as a result, seven different tax bills had to be passed because the government couldn’t get it right. As a result, the people of Ontario were totally confused. They were still getting tax bills in 1999 for 1998 etc.

Today, they are saying that this bill is totally wrong. They say in their letter, which is dated today to the Minister of Municipal Affairs, “We have determined that there are serious negative implications for municipalities in this bill.”

They say it’s “unprecedented” for the minister to have a clause whereby basically he can change any act as it

relates to these four municipalities without ever having to come back to this Legislature. They say it represents "a clear contradiction of the principles espoused by this government, namely public accountability and transparency of the process."

Why doesn't the government listen to our municipal clerks and treasurers? They can help them implement whatever they want. Without them, it's going to be totally—

The Acting Speaker: Thank you. In response, the member for Northumberland.

Mr Galt: I'd first like to compliment the member from Willowdale for some just absolutely brilliant comments in recognition of the presentations that have been made. The members from Thunder Bay, Hamilton West and Kingston and the Islands didn't do nearly as well in their two-minute responses.

It's interesting that the member from Kingston and the Islands was talking about this letter from the clerks and treasurers in connection with AMO. All four of these municipalities that we're talking about here with the restructuring, other than Toronto, had asked for help. They had asked for a special adviser, as 10 counties, and I think maybe now 11 counties, have asked for a commissioner. It is outstanding and certainly something that I'm sure the minister will be addressing in the very near future.

I think it's interesting that the member from Hamilton West was talking about trying to avoid personalities. I'll tell you, with the kind of flip-flop that's been going on in this House with the Leader of the Opposition, it's awfully hard to steer around that, because that does get kind of personal when you keep changing your mind. I don't know what else you can do in response.

The member from Thunder Bay was talking about permissive legislation and what the government might or might not do. I can understand why she'd be trying to distract from the kind of spending frenzy that went on in this province. When her government was here back in the late 1980s, it was spend, borrow, tax and put people into debt. It was just horrendous.

The NDP was bad enough. I can understand the way they drove us into a recession. They were trying to do something.

Interjection: They were socialists.

Mr Galt: We knew they were socialists and we knew their direction. We had no idea where the Liberals were going from 1985 to 1990, particularly 1985 to 1987, when that unholy alliance was in this province of Ontario. The flip-flops at that time were absolutely exceptional.

Thank you very much for the two minutes.

The Acting Speaker: Further debate?

Mrs Marie Bountrogianni (Hamilton Mountain): Mr Speaker, I'd like to share my time with the member from Ottawa Centre.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to be part of this debate on Bill 25. I'd like to start by acknowledging the integrity of the member from Wentworth-Burlington.

He represents his constituents well. I'm one of his constituents. He's honest and he was put in an untenable position by his own colleagues.

Indeed, I respect the member from Stoney Creek for supporting him, although I am a little disappointed in the member's analogy of the dancing. I've noticed as a new member that there's a lot of dancing going on in these walls, and there are sometimes good reasons for the dancing. I know you've had a dance before becoming a Tory, and there were good reasons for that as well. I'd like to say that to the honourable member.

Interjection: The McGuinty two-step.

Mrs Bountrogianni: The McGuinty two-step. Let me remind you, and Mr Clark and Mr Skarica were there, that before our leader stated he could not support this bill in its present form, all five Hamilton-Wentworth members were on the Roy Green Show. I stated, and they nodded in agreement, that in this form it would be difficult to support this bill. If it was just a Hamilton-Wentworth bill, three of us would support it unanimously.

I think we served as very poor role models by treating the member for Wentworth-Burlington the way we did. I've spoken to a number of young people in the constituency and they're just shaking their heads. It's no wonder we're not trusted and it's no wonder we're sometimes not respected.

I was part of the constituent assembly a few years ago, as a citizen, and I was on the social services committee and I heard the same message from people who were either for one tier or not. I heard that we needed to be more efficient, that we lacked co-ordination and that it would be impossible to truly find a solution without some help. Indeed we had four proposals and they were rejected by the local politicians. I'm sure some of them have regrets today because, in comparison, what is being imposed on them now is much less than what they would have got had they been more compromising.

I applauded the appointment of Mr O'Brien—and, yes, we had a similar platform, an almost identical platform of how we would solve this problem—to gather information locally and give his recommendations. Unfortunately his recommendations were not implemented in the bill. Although I didn't agree with some aspects of the report, such as two seats to be shared by Flamborough, Dundas and Ancaster, I thought by and large it was a good report and going in the right direction.

Mr O'Brien, however, did not recommend that the Hamilton-Wentworth situation be voted on with four other regions. That is setting a very dangerous precedent and I think some members across the House should worry about their own regions and the precedent this is setting for their constituencies.

Five MPPs in Hamilton-Wentworth have at least two differing views on what is good for the region. Why would we assume that what is good for Hamilton-Wentworth is good for the rest of the province? It's not that simple. It's not a flip-flop. It may be a dance, but it's not that simple.

Bill 25 does not implement, for example, the Shortliffe report's recommendation for bilingual status for the new city of Ottawa and it doesn't do it for Sudbury. So if I vote for this bill, which may be in the best interests of Hamilton Mountain, I would be voting for something that discriminates against the francophones in Ottawa and Sudbury. This is the type of position we're put in. This is the reason we're dancing.

Some members across should think about this because by the grace of God go I and you, and it may be your area next.

The other area which I cannot agree with is the sweeping dictatorial powers the government is about to give the cabinet, the power to change or scrap any law without any debate or vote in the Legislature. Such as the debate has become, it's still debate. The member for Hamilton West cited Professor Morgan's belief that this is a fundamental reversal of the way things are supposed to work in our system of government, and that this would also be open to constitutional challenge. Professor Magnet of the University of Ottawa is almost certain that this can be opposed constitutionally.

The other thing that I oppose, even if it should be at a very limited level, is the lack of public hearings. Details of the bill need and deserve public hearings. Everyone who works for organizations knows that in a proper process the final thrust of a report has to be vetted one more time by the stakeholders so that the details can be discussed.

The other unknown here is the industrial and commercial tax base. There are no references in the bill to what will happen. There is one reference in the report that taxes will go down. We've heard this before on Hamilton Mountain, in 1995. This isn't rhetoric, this isn't a dance. Taxes went up in the businesses on Hamilton Mountain: Limeridge Mall, Upper James. And I believe the member for Hamilton West has to begin to worry about the businesses in Westdale.

We'll hold the government to the promise made in the report that taxes will go down.

1750

It's been mentioned that a transition board will have humongous powers. It's almost scary what this board will have. They will be appointed. Are they going to be former unsuccessful Tory candidates? That'll be an objective process. Who pays for this? If it's imposed by us or by the government, shouldn't the government pay for this process? The Minister of Labour is rolling his eyes. I'm just asking the question.

Hon Mr Stockwell: I was listening to Tony. I wasn't listening to you.

Mrs Bountrogianni: OK, thank you.

The process is estimated to cost \$50 million. Should Hamilton-Wentworth pay \$50 million?

Mr Christopherson: No.

Mrs Bountrogianni: Thank you, member from Hamilton West.

This was imposed by the Harris government and it should be paid by the Harris government.

I support one tier as the member representing Hamilton Mountain but find it very difficult, and I said this before our leader said it, on the Roy Green Show with all the members present from the Hamilton-Wentworth region, because it is undemocratic, very possibly unconstitutional and financially not in the best interests of the region.

If the government separates the bill into five bills, if it holds public hearings, and if it pays for the transition process, I will vote for it.

Hon Mr Stockwell: The sun doesn't come up tomorrow.

Mrs Bountrogianni: The sun doesn't come up tomorrow, no, not in this place, that's for sure.

I'll vote for the bill then and only then. In its present form and on principle I cannot in good conscience vote for this bill. I resent being put in this dilemma, and on behalf of my constituents will monitor the transition process very keenly and aggressively and fight for their best interests.

Interjection: Dominic will tell you how to vote on this.

Mrs Bountrogianni: Dominic will not tell me how to vote and I resent your insinuation, that you think I can be moulded that easily. I have actually not decided how I'm going to vote. I just don't want to vote for an undemocratic and unconstitutional bill, but I repeat that I resent being put in this dilemma, where something I have stood for is opposite to what I may have to do. And, member for Stoney Creek, if you consider that a dance, then I'm a good dancer.

Mr Richard Patten (Ottawa Centre): I'm pleased to participate in responding to this piece of legislation. It's very significant to my community and I want you to know that I've been a vocal proponent of a single-tier, unified city of Ottawa, publicly and privately. I believe that most of the people who have made representation to my office—indeed I'd say about 20 to 1—also stand on that.

This was reflected in a presentation that I made to Mr Shortliffe on a personal basis. I made a number of recommendations, some of which were not in his particular recommendations, but by and large I was pleased with what he had.

I supported the basic concept that was contained in the recommendations by Mr Shortliffe, but I'm disappointed that the government didn't listen to certain recommendations he made and added some of their own that cause me difficulty now to support this bill. Why? Because I am the representative for Ottawa Centre and I have a responsibility obviously to represent the people from that area. Many of them said they wanted one bill. They believed this was going to be something that would lower taxes. They also believed this would be something that would be more efficient. We have a representation to the outside world that it would be Ottawa rather than a confusion of a whole variety of municipalities. Fair enough.

I'm sad to say that I have some very serious doubts, and I want to tell you what those doubts are. In my opin-

ion the government has done a disservice because now we're in an awkward position. I don't believe I'm the only one; I think some of the members on the other side also share some of my concerns.

The first thing is this tax differentiation. Mr Shortliffe recommended that there be a pooling of resources. That meant pooling of liabilities and assets, pooling of debt and capital assets, whatever they may be. That was acceptable. Back in my community that is acceptable, especially in Ottawa. Now we find there's a very serious problem with this. How come we have now a differentiated arrangement according to each municipality? If they have a debt, they're going to have to carry it, but their assets will be pooled.

What does that mean? What it essentially means for the sake of this bill is that Ottawa will get burned. It means that Ottawa, for example, will be required to sell its city hall. We won't need two city halls. We'll have to sell most of the city halls. Will they be able to write that off on the debt that they carry in the municipality? No, they won't. Can you imagine? The people of Ottawa paid for the city hall. They're paying for this year in and year out. So there's a basic flaw in all this.

Why is this so? The reason it's so is because you have a minister from Nepean who is very proud to say: "We have reserves in Nepean and we have no debt. Why should the people from Nepean provide support for any other area?" So Nepean becomes more important than Ottawa and the whole rest of the region, because Ottawa isn't alone in its debt.

The mayor of Ottawa, Jim Watson, quite correctly dubbed this bill the thumb in the eye bill, a thumb in the eye to the city of Ottawa taxpayers. He said: "If we sold our city hall, it's worth an estimated \$85 million to \$90 million. All of that money would go in and everyone in the new area would share in that, even though we're the ones who paid for it. With transfer payments, that's going to be shared by everyone, but our debt stays with us."

This is like saying: "Thank you very much. Keep the mortgage on your house. We're taking your house and selling it and we're sharing it with whomever else." That's what it amounts to. How can I support that? Obviously I can't support that. The CFO of the city of Ottawa has come out and done an estimate and said that if this is the case, they're stuck with their debts and none of the assets, none of the library buildings, whatever they may be, all their computer systems, whatever. If any of that is not taken into account and we have to absorb everything and we lose all our capital assets, we're talking about an average of \$160 to \$180 a year per property taxpayer. The property taxpayers did not expect that for the city of Ottawa, but that's what's going to happen. That's one provision.

John Baird, of course, thinks Nepean is more important than the rest of the region and he wants to stand by it. He wasn't supportive of one-tier government, he was supportive of three, and he wants to maintain, I suppose, his own particular position, so now he's going to make it

very difficult for the largest municipality in the whole area.

The other part that's really important is that it's not only the city hall. I'm reading from the city's report:

"In the year 2000, for example, the city's savings account, their reserves, will grow significantly as a result of the city's investment in Ontario Hydro and the subsequent recapitalization of the utility. This will result in a payment of \$105 million to the city. Council has decided to place all of these funds in reserves and not to spend them. These assets will be brought to the table in any municipal restructuring and the values of the reserves with the \$105 million from Ottawa Hydro would be sufficient to offset the city's total debt in any governance scenario where reserves and debts are attributed back to the originating municipality. In other words, the money received from Ontario Hydro effectively means that by the end of 2000, in a year, the city's outstanding debt of \$106 million will be matched by cash reserves and in fact would not be a cash liability in any other municipality."

I ask you, why is this being done? I warn the citizens of Ottawa: You've got to hear this message, because when you see it and realize—you thought you would get lower taxes and you thought you would find savings in this. I'm telling you that under this particular scheme you will not get any savings.

Transitional funding: Why is the government not providing transitional funding? Perhaps it intends to. Let's hear what it is before we pass this piece of legislation. They provided it for Toronto when it was amalgamated, so they know it's the right thing to do. There's no question about that. Using the same formula that was used for the Toronto transition costs, Ottawa should have been budgeted about \$75 million from the province—maybe it's a little less, maybe it's a little more, I don't know, but at least look at that formula. That's money that could be well used by the municipality.

I shouldn't have to detail to the members all the implications of this for employee payouts, for capital losses, for inventories and accounting, new records, databanks, capital projects, communication strategies to inform the public etc. The government provides for transition costs in Toronto and in Chatham-Kent. The responsible thing to do here is also to help and ensure a smooth transition in Ottawa-Carleton.

1800

ADJOURNMENT DEBATE

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

EMERGENCY SERVICES

Mrs Lyn McLeod (Thunder Bay-Atikokan): I gave notice of my dissatisfaction with the Minister of Health's earlier answer because I have become increasingly frustrated. I don't think "frustrated" is really the exact term; I've become increasingly concerned that this government, through the minister and through the Premier, absolutely refuses to accept any responsibility for the crisis that exists in emergency rooms across this province. Because they refuse to take any responsibility for the crises which exist in our emergency rooms, they are also refusing to take any action, which might be necessary to save lives.

I am concerned more than frustrated because I'm genuinely worried that if this crisis continues to build, as it is building literally daily and weekly, then we are putting patients' lives in danger. We saw that too tragically perhaps with the death in Toronto in the back of an ambulance yesterday.

I think it's important that the government acknowledge that this is not something that is a rare occurrence, that it happens at peak times—flu season, as the Premier tried to suggest. This is a situation which is potentially a crisis day after day in hospitals across Toronto, where a week ago we had a situation in which 23 out of 25 GTA hospitals were either on emergency redirect or critical care bypass.

This is happening at a time when it's not supposed to be a peak time. The peak time is yet to come. The peak time is over Christmas. The peak time is when flu season hits in full force. The peak time is when we have winter driving conditions. If hospitals are experiencing so much difficulty keeping their emergency rooms open to critically ill patients now, what's going to happen when we hit the real peak times?

The government put some money in. They said they would fix the emergency room problem once and for all. So they put some money in and they said: "You can open some beds on a temporary basis to deal with the problem at peak times." First of all, how does the hospital know that the crisis is going to be there in time to get the beds staffed and open? They need to have flexibility to be able to deal with the unpredicted and the unexpected when it hits. That flexibility doesn't exist in our hospital system right now.

It's not just a Toronto problem; it's a problem right across the province. In Ottawa last week, there were 48 patients in emergency rooms waiting to get a bed in an Ottawa hospital, and there was not a bed anywhere in the Ottawa area for anyone of those 48 people. That's a crisis. That means we're running a system that's much too tight to deal with emergencies. That's why emergency rooms shut their doors. It's because the patients are on stretchers in the hallways. They're on beds in the emergency room hallways. They have so many people that they don't have enough emergency equipment to deal with them. Those patients are in emergency room hallways and on stretchers because there isn't a bed for

them in the hospital because this government has cut back on hospital beds much too drastically.

The average bed occupancy in hospitals across the province right now is 95%. The hospitals tell us that anything over 80% occupancy reduces their flexibility to respond to emergency situations. The average now is 95% occupancy.

In the GTA, where they have had growth problems they have been begging this government to deal with now for three years, they are running at 98% occupancy. What did this government do to the GTA four years ago? They gave them their share of the hospital cutbacks of \$800 million, making the problems in the GTA even worse than they already were with their high-growth demands.

The Hamilton Health Sciences Centre has gone through its restructuring. They've followed the directions of the hospital restructuring commission. They restructured along the lines the commission said. The plan the commission put in place still leaves the Hamilton Health Sciences Centre running much too tightly to be able to even keep open the emergency room sites that the commission left open in Hamilton. That's the kind of system this government is prepared to build in on an ongoing basis.

What the minister said yesterday was that we will solve this problem by creating regions and we'll make sure that one hospital in each region is actually open. It wasn't enough that the hospital restructuring commission came through and shut down emergency rooms in all of the 22 communities that it visited; the government has gone one past that and said: "We're not even going to provide enough resources to keep open the emergency rooms that the hospital restructuring commission supposedly left open in its grand design."

I don't think that's adequate. I think regional government is one thing, and we've been debating that all afternoon, but I can tell you, regional emergency departments are not going to fly with the people of this province.

People expect to be able to get emergency care close to home. They expect to be able to get it quickly. They don't expect to have ambulances not just having to go from one hospital to the other looking for an emergency room that's open, but they don't expect the answer is going to be that the government says: "We'll tell you which emergency room is open. It doesn't matter how long it takes you to get there. If it's seven or 10 or 15 minutes further, at least we can tell you there is one hospital that will keep its emergency room open somewhere in your region."

Does that mean somebody from Newmarket is going to have to go Oakville because it's all in the GTA region? That's not good enough. People want to be able to get the health care they need in this province. They have a right to it. They most certainly want to be able to get emergency care when they need it. They want to be able to get a hospital bed when they need one, and this government, after shutting down some 8,500 beds since 1995, is denying that basic right.

Mr Dan Newman (Scarborough Southwest): I am pleased to respond here tonight as the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care.

The issue of prompt emergency care is very important and there are no easy answers, but we, unlike other governments, are doing something about it. I think what's important to note is that emergency rooms are a problem right across Canada. It's not something that's happening just in Ontario; it's happening right across Canada. You have to ask yourself, when you have Liberal governments, PC governments and NDP governments across the 10 provinces in Canada, which government do they have in common? They have the federal Liberal government in common. The federal Liberal government ought to be putting more money into health care, giving it back to the provinces.

The provincial Liberal government in Ontario from 1985 to 1990 had the opportunity to fix emergency room access when they were in power. What did they do? They chose to do nothing. They chose not to address the situation at hand.

Health care horror stories were happening when the member opposite was in power, when she was a minister of the crown. I have a list of health care horror story headlines about patients on their way to overcrowded emergency rooms in 1987, 1988 and 1989, and those were years when the Liberal Party was the government in Ontario.

From the Toronto Star, January 5, 1988: "No Room in Metro, Critically Ill Newborn Flown to Buffalo." Toronto Star, June 4, 1988: "Triplets' Mom Flown to Kingston Because Toronto Could Not Cope." The Ottawa Citizen, December 26, 1987, almost 12 years ago: "Diverted From Two Hospitals, Woman Dies." From the Ottawa Citizen, December 24, 1987: "Two Area Ambulance Drivers Criticize Rerouting Patients from Hospitals." It goes on and on. I have literally pages of quotes showing that this problem existed back when the Liberal Party was the government of Ontario.

As I've said on many occasions, Liberals never like to let the facts get in the way of a good doom-and-gloom speech on health care, and a doom-and-gloom speech is what we heard this evening from the member for Thunder Bay-Atikokan. Our government, the Mike Harris government, is actually doing something to alleviate the problem. I know it's her job to criticize, but let's look at the facts. It's this government which is being proactive with new ideas in trying to alleviate this situation.

The Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care has met with several Toronto hospitals, Toronto Ambulance and CritiCall. There are a number of short-term decisions, including establishing a three-cluster system that will look to alleviate the problem of too many hospitals being on redirect consideration or critical care bypass.

The goal of establishing the three-cluster system is to allow hospitals to work co-operatively to maintain access to emergency care; to allow them to better follow redirect consideration and critical care bypass consideration, only invoking that status when it is absolutely necessary; also,

to attempt to be more aware of the status of other, nearby hospitals.

Again, I know it's her job to criticize the government, but I don't understand what her motive is in making me come back here tonight to explain a good news story. I don't buy her argument and neither do others.

Let's hear what Ron Kelusky has to say. Today on CFRB, December 14, 1999, he said: "I don't think the wheels are falling off the system, by any means. If you're really sick, we have a good system to help you." Mr Kelusky also said, "Well, everything is evolving and I think what they're finding is that this system was designed on a model about 30 to 40 years old, and as these reforms are taking place and as the changes and new demands are taking place, they're finding now that different models of administering the system have to be looked at. I think it's part of the evolution process." Ron Kelusky, for everyone's information here, is the general manager of Toronto Ambulance. He, of all people, would know what this government is doing.

1810

Ours ministry is continuing to restructure, continuing with bed expansion and the expansion of community-based services. We've increased hospital funding by \$400 million, made the largest health care reinvestment in the province's history, a \$1.2-billion investment in 20,000 new long-term-care beds, after we saw in our province 10 years of no new long-term-care beds being built.

We saw \$3.2 billion for capital projects like new emergency rooms like the one in Windsor.

I don't know what the Liberal plan is for health care. Quite frankly, I don't think they know what the plan is for health care. As I said earlier, the Liberals never seem to let the facts interfere with a good doom-and-gloom speech on health care, and a doom-and-gloom speech is what we heard from the member opposite this evening.

The Acting Speaker (Mr Michael A. Brown): The member from Sault Ste Marie has given notice of dissatisfaction with the answer to a question given today by the Minister of Community and Social Services. The member has up to five minutes to debate the matter, and the parliamentary assistant may reply for up to five minutes.

CHILD CARE

Mr Tony Martin (Sault Ste Marie): Tonight I'd like to take on the minister or his designate head-on re the tired old rhetoric that we hear from them every time we raise this issue of child care and the reduction in service across this province.

I want to present to the minister or his designate some of the numbers I have that come from the public accounts that this government has tabled, the estimates that this government has tabled and some research that the legislative library has done for me. These numbers don't lie. They tell it like it is, and I want to present them to the minister's designate tonight.

I also want to talk to him very clearly and directly about an example of how this thing is beginning to unravel for them—the Elliot Lake Day Care Centre—and ask him to respond to me in direct terms to that challenge as well.

Child care spending in the province of Ontario was \$583,586,759, according to public accounts, in the year 1994-95. This included \$40 million in capital funds. The Jobs Ontario initiative created 9,000 child care spaces subsidized by the province at 100%. Under the Tory government, so far, according to the research of the legislative library, the Tories cut 10,000 subsidized child care spaces in Ontario.

According to the estimates of the Tories, they are spending \$561,775,100 this year. That's \$22 million less than the NDP was spending. Last year, according to public accounts, the Tories spent \$574,219,514 on child care. That's \$10 million less than the NDP was spending. They counted a \$19-million pay equity expense. It shows up as broader public sector spending and is included in their totals.

According to the Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care, when dollars spent to provide spaces to families in the province are counted, the Tories are spending \$100 million less than the NDP was spending. There are no capital funds in the child care spending of the Tory government. That is why daycare playgrounds will have to close in order to comply with stricter safety standards.

The NDP warned that the downloading of child care to municipalities would result in daycare closures. Now, today, we see the closure of the Elliot Lake municipally funded daycare, the first municipal-run daycare centre in the province to close, and I dare say it's just the beginning of many more.

This minister has stood in this House several times to make ridiculous spending claims. The truth is that in this year, you are spending \$22 million less than we were spending in our last year in government. If you look at dollars spent to provide spaces to families in this province, you are spending \$100 million less than we spent. The truth is, they cut 10,000 subsidized child care spaces in Ontario. The truth today is that your cuts are costing Elliot Lake its daycare centre and that communities across this province will soon suffer the same fate. Fifteen workers in Elliot Lake will lose their jobs; 55 children will be left without care.

I'm asking the minister today to reverse this \$100-million cut that they made to child care before Ontario's child care system is devastated. I want the minister or his designate to think for a second about Elliot Lake, a daycare centre that was started some 24 years ago. I was there. I lived in Elliot Lake at that time and I know of the excitement and the enthusiasm, and so do you, of those folks as they set that centre up and they looked to the future to have it develop and evolve—people like Cathy Haley and Annette Dixon, who have given every ounce of their blood, sweat and tears over the last 24 years to make sure that daycare centre was the best it could be for the folks they serve, for the children and the families they

serve. So many other people in Elliot Lake gave of their time and energy to make sure that daycare centre was one of the best in the province. Alas, today we see that because of a lack of foresight, concern and attention by this government, this daycare centre is going to close down.

The minister has a chance to respond. There was a letter sent to him by the Algoma district services board CAO, Mr David Court. In it, he outlines work that has been done by the community to develop some alternatives and some potential answers to the problem that confronts them.

I would ask the minister to please respond to Mr Court, please respond to this community, please respond to the 15 workers who are going to lose their jobs, please respond to the 55 children who will be left without care, and maintain the funding for this centre that is so valuable to the folks in Elliot Lake.

Mr Bart Maves (Niagara Falls): It's a pleasure to stand here tonight in the minister's stead to answer the question from the member opposite.

The member has brought forward some numbers—he did some research, obviously—from the legislative library. The problem with his numbers is that he's simply not comparing apples to apples, but apples to oranges. Children are such a large priority for this government that we have spent more, and we are spending more today, than ever before in the history in the province of Ontario on child care, that being \$738 million this year alone. The numbers easily bear that out.

The member raised a specific issue earlier today. I'd like to try to address that for him.

You have to understand that child care is funded on a 80-20 basis in the province of Ontario—80% from community and social services. We pay 80% of the gross operating costs of child care fee subsidies. Effective January 1, 1997, a regulation amendment was approved which allowed municipalities to include fees from parents who receive partial fee subsidies towards their 20% municipal share. Prior to this regulation, community and social services provided an 80% subsidy of the operating cost net revenue from parents in need; that is, revenue from parent fees was subtracted from operating costs to determine the municipality's net cost.

At the time of this regulation, we said the use of parent fees towards the municipal share of fee subsidies was simply a temporary measure to help municipalities through the transition to their new responsibilities under local services realignment. We've given that two years and now we're relieving that temporary measure.

It's not a cut to child care funding, you should know. The proposed regulation will require municipalities to pay their mandatory full 20% share and not use parent fees to meet their contribution.

As I said, it's important to note that because of this change to how fee subsidies are used, our budget for child care will not decrease and, in fact, more than likely will increase over the coming years.

I looked at a copy of the local services realignment for the city of Elliot Lake and noted that they were actually a

net beneficiary by an amount of about \$55,000 on the local services realignment, which allows them some leeway because their grant and their education taxation, which they're allowed to keep, exceed their costs during local services realignment by \$55,000.

On top of that, I note that they have estimated OMERS savings in 1999 of another \$273,000. So there's plenty of cushion for Elliot Lake to absorb this change, going back to the original intent of an 80-20 split between the province and the municipalities.

On top of that, I took the chance to look up where the district of Algoma was on their welfare numbers and I noted that, like many other areas of the province, they are down substantially in the number of people who are on social assistance. As you would know, again the funding formula is 80-20 for people on social assistance. So when there is a decline in the number of people on social assistance in any municipality, 80% of that cost accrues to the province and 20% of that cost accrues to the district. There are over 1,000—the number I have, actually, as of October 1999 is 1,084—fewer people on social assistance today in this district than there were in 1995.

There's a lot of different ways, a lot of different cushions that have been built in, through local services realignment, through the decline of the number of people on social assistance, also in the decline of rate that they actually pay people on social assistance, where there's quite a bit of cushion for them to absorb this rebalancing of the 80-20 formula for fee subsidies.

While I have 44 more seconds, I'd like to reiterate. Of the \$738 million supporting parents in their child care needs in this province, some of the ways that we actually do that are: We provide fee subsidies, we provide wage subsidies, we provide resource centres, special-needs resources. We've recently provided \$40.2 million through Ontario Works, another \$25 million through the LEAP program, and \$200 million through the Ontario child care supplement for working families.

What all this means is that since 1995, the actual number of licensed child care spaces in Ontario has increased over 15%. That's an increase of 19,000 spaces.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you. It being well past 6 o'clock, this House stands adjourned until 6:45.

The House adjourned at 1822.

Evening meeting reported in volume B.

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