



**Legislative Assembly
of Ontario**

First Session, 37th Parliament

**Assemblée législative
de l'Ontario**

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**Official Report
of Debates
(Hansard)**

Monday 8 May 2000

**Journal
des débats
(Hansard)**

Lundi 8 mai 2000

Speaker
Honourable Gary Carr

Clerk
Claude L. DesRosiers

Président
L'honorable Gary Carr

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO

Monday 8 May 2000

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO

Lundi 8 mai 2000

*The House met at 1330.
Prayers.*

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

EDUCATION WEEK

Mr Dave Levac (Brant): Today marks the beginning of Education Week across the province. For over 20 years I have had the pleasure and honour of participating in the many activities that highlight what is offered on a daily basis, every week in the classrooms in every school in the province. I stand today to proclaim what I've always known: The teachers of our province provide a lifeline to the future.

To the teachers of our province I say thank you. Thank you for the professional way in which you do your job. Thank you for always challenging yourselves to improve and innovate. Thank you for sharing your gifts and the art of teaching with us for the sake of our children. Thank you for sharing something that all too often does not get mentioned, that is, a thank you for sharing your love. Your love of learning and your love of the children are most appreciated.

From the first time a child learns to zip up a coat, to tie shoelaces, to identify colours and letters and to count to 100, you were there. The mystery of reading and writing was solved with help from you. You taught us to play fair, to share, think critically, problem-solve and much more. You bring light to dark areas.

Let us celebrate Education Week by expressing our appreciation to the teachers of Ontario. Let us celebrate Education Week by dedicating to be the best partners we can be. As parents, students, educators, legislators and communities we must commit to creating a climate of trust, respect and dignity for all partners within our education system.

Education Week represents what happens every week in the schools. Again to the teachers of Ontario, thank you, and you are appreciated.

VE DAY

Mr Raminder Gill (Bramalea-Gore-Malton-Springdale): This is the 55th anniversary of victory in Europe. On VE Day, May 7, 1945, Nazi Germany surrendered to Allied forces. Today we remember the

lessons of the bloodiest war in human history, the Second World War.

I especially want to recognize a dear friend and constituent of mine, Mr Frank Russell, who is just recovering from an illness. Frank Russell took up arms against the forces of Fascism twice, first as a volunteer fighting Franco in Spain, and then again with the Canadian army against Hitler. In two separate wars, Frank left Ontario to cross the seas. He saw dozens of close friends and comrades fall far away from home. In World War II, 1,100,000 Canadians served in uniform. Of them, 42,000 were killed and 55,000 were wounded.

Last week Nellie Templeman, a young Dutch girl living in Rotterdam at the time, wrote a letter in the Brampton Guardian thanking Canadians for their sacrifices. She said, "You paid the highest price for freedom—and you paid it in full."

Canadians like Frank Russell have never shied away from fighting for freedom. He is an example of those Tom Brokaw called the "greatest generation."

I congratulate Frank on his speedy recovery, and I urge all members here to join me in recognizing the sacrifices made by Mr Russell and his comrades in achieving victory in Europe 55 years ago today.

DOCTOR SHORTAGE

Mr Michael Gravelle (Thunder Bay-Superior North): It's with great concern that I report to the Legislature today that the doctor shortage in Thunder Bay continues to get worse. To say that the impact of this crisis is hurting my constituents is a gross understatement, and I want to use my time today to make a plea to the Premier to take some definitive action to deal with this urgent matter.

Last Thursday it was announced that the hours of access to the emergency department at the General Hospital of Port Arthur would be further reduced, largely as a result of the loss of more emergency room physicians.

This decline in services has to stop. It is becoming increasingly clear that this government needs to treat this as an urgent priority. Just 10 days ago Premier Harris, after some prodding, met with several area physicians in Thunder Bay to discuss this crisis. He indicated after the meeting that he had a better understanding of the situation, and for that we are grateful. But the fact is that we need to move beyond talk and into action in order to turn this horrible situation around.

Premier, you have to ease the restrictions on foreign-trained physicians who are keen to practise in the north. These doctors are ready to practise now, and now is certainly when we need them. Let's make the special incentives to practise in the north flexible enough so that they truly attract doctors who will stay. You need to stay on top of this, Premier, as there are decisions you can make that will help us once again provide the care that people used to take for granted.

It breaks my heart to talk to so many constituents who are no longer receiving the care they deserve, especially when I know and you know that the power to improve the situation is within this government's grasp.

JOB CREATION

Mr Doug Galt (Northumberland): I rise in the House today because I am proud to say that since this government introduced its first phase of income tax cuts in July 1996, Ontario has gained more than 667,000 net new jobs. In April alone, Ontario gained more than 2,300 net new jobs.

Tax cuts create jobs, and I am pleased to learn that the leader of the official opposition agrees. In the Legislature on Wednesday, May 3, the Leader of the Opposition stated that his party believes "it is essential that we deliver lower taxes." He must have finally been introduced to Economics 101. He therefore must like the added 67 tax cuts contained in last week's budget. The budget last week contained a brighter future for all Ontarians.

Speaking of our future, it is definitely looking better for our young people. Youth employment rose by a reported 4,800 new jobs. That's 4,800 young people calling home to say, "Hey, I got the job." Overall, the unemployment rate for our youth fell last month from 11.9% to 11.4%, and this is the best it has been since 1990.

It was Edmund Burke who said: "Government is a device of human wisdom to provide for human wants. Men have a right that these wants should be provided for by this wisdom." The people of Ontario have wanted jobs and this government has responded to this want. Ontarians can rest assured that we will continue working hard to create jobs, because people want to work and pursue a better life for themselves and for their families.

LIBERATION OF THE NETHERLANDS

Mr John Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands): Once again this weekend our television screens and newspapers were filled with stories of huge parades and joyous celebrations as the Dutch rekindled their special and unique bond with their Canadian wartime liberators on the occasion of the 55th anniversary of the liberation of the Netherlands by our Canadian forces. As a proud Canadian of Dutch birth, I stand here in full realization that the opportunities and dreams of my own and my parents' generation could not have been fulfilled without

the tremendous personal sacrifices of so many Canadians both at home and abroad.

Over 7,600 Canadians died in the liberation of the Netherlands; the supreme sacrifice the Dutch, both young and old, continue to honour and remember. Many others were permanently maimed and injured, offering up their own hopes and aspirations so individuals like myself and others could benefit from the tremendous opportunities available in this country for a better way of life.

At least two members in this House besides myself were born in the Netherlands, Minister Hardeman and Minister Witmer, and we owe our reason for living here directly to these Canadian war heroes.

As one banner in the parade so aptly stated, "Dying for freedom is not the worst thing that could happen, being forgotten is."

On the 55th commemoration of the liberation of the Netherlands, let us also pay honour and tribute here in Canada to all those heroic men and women who so freely gave of themselves in that struggle to overcome tyranny. Let us never forget so that future generations, too, will always say of these Canadian heroes, "We shall remember them."

NURSING WEEK

Ms Frances Lankin (Beaches-East York): I rise today to acknowledge the beginning of Nursing Week in the province of Ontario. Nursing Week is celebrated across Canada during the week of Florence Nightingale's May 12 birthday. In short, Nursing Week is a celebration of the achievements of the nursing profession, the commitment of nurses to their patients and the dedication of nurses to delivering quality health care. Moreover, this is a week to increase awareness among the public, policy-makers and the government of the significant and continued contribution of nursing to the overall well-being of Canadians.

The theme that will be celebrated this year by the 100,000 nurses in the province is "Ontario Nurses—Leaders in Health Care." Regrettably, it is due to the lack of leadership in health care that these are extremely difficult times for front-line care providers and their patients.

The cumulative effect of underfunding by this government and this government's general negative attitude toward nurses over the past five years has created many challenges for this dedicated, honourable and hard-working profession. Government mismanagement has left the nursing profession struggling with staffing shortages and poor working conditions. In fact, many nurses remain fearful that they won't be able to provide needed care as demands on the health care system escalate.

As Nursing Week unfolds, it is essential that we recognize nurses for the quality care they continue to deliver despite mounting pressure. Let us also acknowledge, however, the urgent, critical need of ensuring that this profession receives the support it requires. I encourage the government to seize this opportunity, take a look

at this week and provide the necessary supports to the nursing profession.

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THORNHILL COMMUNITY CENTRE

Mrs Tina R. Molinari (Thornhill): On April 29 I had the pleasure of attending the 25th anniversary of the Thornhill Community Centre. The Thornhill Community Centre was the first multi-purpose recreational facility to be built in Markham, and consists of a twin-pad arena, library, daycare centre, fitness centre, community hall, lounge and meeting rooms. The centre, located at Bay-view and John streets in Thornhill, also hosts trade shows, corporate meetings and seminars. It is the home of numerous Thornhill sports teams, including the Rattlers Junior A Hockey Club, the Thornhill Community Hockey League, the Thornhill Islanders Hockey Club, the Thornhill Figure Skating Club and their many, many collective hockey tournaments and figure-skating competitions. The Thornhill Golden Fifties Senior Club also enjoys the centre's fine facilities.

Like the other residents of Thornhill, I have often taken advantage of the multiple facilities of the Thornhill Community Centre. The mayor at the time, Tony Roman, was very instrumental in making sure a multi-purpose recreational facility be built in the town of Markham. In those early days the Thornhill Lions Club, a non-profit organization, spearheaded a fundraising campaign that raised \$250,000 toward the community centre.

I would also like to acknowledge the vision and the leadership of Robert Adams, the former Lions Club president, for his incredible contribution in the fundraising campaign. The success of this community centre is proof that substantial benefits can be derived when all levels of government work together.

ONTARIO POLICE MEMORIAL

Mr James J. Bradley (St Catharines): I was privileged to join with colleagues from the Legislative Assembly, police officers from across the province and the United States, the families and friends of police officers who had lost their lives in the line of duty, and members of the general public in attending the dedication ceremony of the Ontario Police Memorial on Sunday, May 7, 2000.

When members of the Legislative Assembly, on November 15, 1999, gave unanimous approval to a resolution endorsing the expenditure of public funds for a memorial honouring those brave officers of Ontario's police forces who had been killed while protecting our homes and communities, there was a recognition that the government of Ontario should, as the government of Canada did in March 1994, erect a memorial in honour of fallen police officers.

With the national memorial in Ottawa and now a provincial memorial in Toronto, the families and friends of police officers killed while carrying out their duties

will be assured that the people of Canada and the people of our province will remember their loved ones who made the ultimate sacrifice while dedicating their lives to helping their fellow citizens feel safe and secure.

As the MPP for St Catharines, I was particularly proud of the representatives of the Niagara Regional Police Service and OPP officers from Niagara who were in attendance and on parade, and the Niagara Regional Police Male Chorus, which joined with police choruses across Ontario to provide the musical voices that added so much to the ceremony.

Those of us who were present in person and those who were present in spirit were deeply moved by the solemnity and emotion of the occasion, and will never forget the sacrifice made by our brave police officers.

PALLIATIVE CARE

Mr Bob Wood (London West): As many members of the House know, May 8 to 14 is National Palliative Care Week. Hospice palliative care is aimed at relief of suffering and improving the quality of life for persons who are living with or dying from advanced illness. Hospice palliative care offers social, emotional and spiritual support to the person as well as their family by members of a diverse team which includes physician, nurse, social worker, home care planner, volunteers and other therapists.

The Canadian Palliative Care Association is a national association which provides leadership in hospice palliative care in Canada through collaboration and representation, development of national standards of practice, support in research, advocacy for improved policy, research allocation and support for caregivers.

In 1998, this House showed its commitment to hospice palliative care by passing my resolution on the subject. I am confident that significant progress is going to be made in Ontario over the next few years.

I ask all members of the House to join me in commending the dedicated professionals, caregivers and volunteers who provide palliative care to the Canadian Palliative Care Association and its Ontario affiliates, the Hospice Association of Ontario and the Ontario Palliative Care Association, all of whom are working to ensure the comfort and dignity of the dying.

MOTIONS

HOUSE SITTINGS

Hon Norman W. Sterling (Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, Government House Leader): I move that, pursuant to standing order 9(c)(i), the House shall meet from 6:45 pm to 9:30 pm on Monday, May 8, Tuesday, May 9, and Wednesday, May 10, 2000, for the purpose of considering government business.

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. Carried.

COMMITTEE SITTINGS

Hon Norman W. Sterling (Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, Government House Leader): I believe we have unanimous consent to move a motion without notice regarding the sitting times of the general government committee.

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

Hon Mr Sterling: I move that the standing committee on general government be authorized to meet on the evening of May 15 at Queen's Park and May 12 and two days during constituency week for travel for the consideration of Bill 68, An Act, in Memory of Brian Smith, to amend the Mental Health Act and the Health Care Consent Act, 1996.

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

VISITORS

Mr Bart Maves (Niagara Falls): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: I'd just like to recognize today the students and staff from Niagara District Secondary School who are here today to see the proceedings, from Niagara-on-the-Lake in my riding.

The Speaker (Hon Gary Carr): It's not a point of order, but we welcome the students.

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

EDUCATION LEGISLATION

Hon Janet Ecker (Minister of Education): Today marks the start of Education Week in Ontario, an annual event that has schools across this province celebrating the value of education. The theme of this year's Education Week is "Reaching for Tomorrow." In many ways, this theme captures the essence of what the driving force should be for a strong public education system in Ontario, a system that helps our young people prepare for their tomorrows, that helps them reach their own personal goals.

This theme also encompasses the goal of the work that this government has undertaken since 1995 to reform Ontario's education system. We are building the foundation for quality education in this province by ensuring we have a public education system that strives for excellence.

Last week's budget talked about Ontario's growing prosperity and laid out more tax cuts and key investments to keep it that way. Making sure this prosperity continues means having an excellent public education system to give our students the knowledge and skills they need to be successful in their chosen careers and as individuals.

I know there are many good things about our public education system. There are many excellent, committed teachers, staff, parents and volunteers whose dedication contributes greatly to the quality of our education system. But that dedication and commitment alone cannot do the job without a system that sets higher standards of quality, that helps our students meet those standards and is prepared to be more accountable to the parents who depend on that system to educate their children and to the taxpayers who pay for it.

1350

Those are the goals of our government's education reform: quality and accountability. The education system we inherited in 1995 was in serious need of repair and revitalization. It was outdated. It lacked focus. It needed a new direction.

The electorate recognized the problem. The electorate told us that Ontario could not reach for tomorrow with yesterday's education system, so we developed a comprehensive plan for our education system, a plan that emphasizes quality and excellence through higher standards and through more accountability. It is this plan that outlines the commitments we made to parents, to students and to taxpayers in 1995, and again in 1999. It is these commitments that we are moving forward with.

In our first mandate we accomplished a number of significant things:

We established a fair and equitable way to fund our education system; funding based on enrolment and student needs, rather than on the tax base of local communities.

We defined, protected and increased classroom spending.

We renewed the focus on learning by bringing in a more rigorous and challenging curriculum backed by standards and regular assessments of basic skills.

We established school councils to increase parental involvement in education.

We standardized and simplified report cards so that parents can clearly understand how their children are doing.

But we knew going into last year's election that the job was not done, so we laid out in the Blueprint, very clearly, the things that we would undertake in this mandate. We said we would continue to find savings in administration, where possible, and reinvest those in the classroom. We said we would continue to make new investments in key priorities identified by parents and teachers. To this end, in early March I announced increased investments totalling \$190 million in new dollars for our classrooms this September.

Again, in last week's budget we committed more important new funding: \$171 million to create new

reading support programs and to shrink class sizes for students in junior kindergarten through to grade 3; an additional \$70 million for special education programs—a very important increase. This, coupled with the increase I announced earlier in the year, means a 12% increase in funding for special education for this coming school year, an important investment.

We are also moving forward on another commitment we made to the voters by putting in place a code of conduct for our schools. We recognize that teachers can't teach and students can't learn if they are in fear for their safety. In too many classrooms in the province this is the case, so during this session we will be introducing the legislation required to give force to the new code of conduct I released last month. It will be another key step to make our schools safer and to create a more respectful learning environment.

To ensure that we keep our commitment on accountability to both the students of this province and their parents, we are moving forward with some other changes to make sure that school boards implement these necessary reforms. Parents have told us we need to provide more direction to the school system to ensure that students come first. The reports of the Education Improvement Commission have reiterated the need for greater accountability in our system.

It is our intent to act to close the loopholes that some boards and teacher unions have used to avoid meeting the government's requirements on teaching time for secondary school teachers. We want to ensure that the instructional time standard of four hours and 10 minutes a day, a standard that the government set two years ago and saw strikes over, is actually met.

We also intend to propose to give the province the authority to intervene in the interests of students if a school board is not meeting its legal and educational responsibilities in a number of key priority areas.

As the importance of education grows, so too does the importance of other activities in schools. Some teacher unions may view these things as extra, but parents, students and those many teachers who do participate believe they are an integral part of a student's educational experience. This government agrees.

In response to parents, students and communities where such activities have been threatened or withdrawn, it is our intent to ensure the government has the necessary legislative authority to ensure that these activities are not used as bargaining tools.

One of the foundations of quality education is quality teaching. This government and I recognize very clearly that Ontario has many excellent teachers. But as many other professions have recognized, in today's technological and competitive world, a top-quality public education system is not an option; it's a necessity. As a result, the need to ensure quality in the teaching profession has never been greater.

Students, parents and taxpayers must be assured that our teachers' knowledge and skills are as up-to-date as possible and that they are doing the best job possible. I

will soon release the details of our government's teacher testing program. Let me be clear: What this government has always said it would do is put in place a comprehensive teacher testing program, not a test for teachers.

Our government has consistently laid out for the voters our agenda for comprehensive and long overdue changes in our education system. We promised students, parents and taxpayers that we would undertake the reforms necessary to ensure quality and accountability so that our public education system would better prepare our students for their tomorrows. Much has been accomplished, but much more needs to be done.

Today is the start of Education Week. I and my caucus colleagues are once again pledging our commitment to ensure that our students can indeed reach for their tomorrows through a strong public education system. Our students deserve no less.

YOUNG OFFENDERS

Hon Jim Flaherty (Attorney General, minister responsible for native affairs): Making our communities safer is one of this government's top priorities. People are justifiably concerned about crime. Violent youth crime increased 77% between 1988 and 1998, which is the most recent year for which we have statistics. Parents are fearful for the safety of their families, especially their children.

Ottawa's response to this situation has been woefully inadequate. The federal Liberal government is not listening to the concerns of the people of Ontario. I say that because Ottawa has ignored Ontario in their deliberations on the Youth Criminal Justice Act, the so-called replacement for the Young Offenders Act. Unfortunately, what the Liberals are proposing is the same book, but with a new cover.

Earlier this year I, along with my colleagues the Solicitor General and the Minister of Correctional Services, asked to appear before the federal standing committee on justice and human rights, which is considering this new bill. We were refused. The co-chairs of the Ontario Crime Commission also asked to appear before the standing committee. They too were refused.

It wasn't just the government of Ontario that was denied the opportunity to speak to the federal government; it was the people of Ontario who were denied a voice, denied the opportunity to deliver their serious concerns about an important piece of legislation.

1400

I understand that a number of amendments are being proposed to the Youth Criminal Justice Act in response to Quebec's concerns. Our government is concerned that these changes do not even come close to improving this legislation. In fact, these changes could weaken the act by softening the language. We are concerned that this federal bill will not increase jail sentences; will not automatically try 16- and 17-year-olds as adults when they commit adult crimes; will not require mandatory jail time for youth convicted of offences involving weapons; will

not guarantee that youth convicted of serious crimes such as murder will serve adult sentences; and will still force prosecutors to prove that an adult sentence is necessary for most serious violent offences.

The proposed Youth Criminal Justice Act fails to hold young offenders accountable for their actions. Consequently, the federal government is failing to protect Canadians from violent young offenders. They have not opened their eyes to the problem, and they won't listen to the public's concerns or to the people's elected representatives.

If this federal bill is passed, Ontario will be required to enforce the legislation even though they ignored all of our major suggestions for making it more effective. Clearly this is unfair and unjust. The issue is too important to the people of Ontario for us to give up on. That's why today I am tabling the following resolution:

Resolved that the Legislative Assembly of the province of Ontario,

(a) Condemns the weakness of the current federal Young Offenders Act and urges that it be scrapped and replaced with a tough new law that holds young offenders accountable for their actions;

(b) Rejects the changes proposed by federal Bill C-3 because they do not go far enough to address the concerns of law-abiding citizens but merely repackage the flawed, weak Young Offenders Act under a new name;

(c) Further rejects any proposed amendments to Bill C-3 that would weaken and soften legislation that is already inadequate;

(d) Particularly condemns the federal government's attempt, through its legislation, to shorten some jail sentences for crimes committed by young offenders;

(e) Believes the 16- and 17-year-old persons charged with serious, adult-type offences should automatically be tried as adults; and

(f) Believes that young people convicted of violent, adult-type crimes should be subject to adult-length sentences.

I call on all members to speak up and speak loudly so that Ottawa will hear that the people of Ontario want youth crime legislation with teeth.

Mr Michael Bryant (St Paul's): The Attorney General asks all members to speak up and speak loudly. If only the pen were mightier than the sword when it comes to crime, if only fighting justice were about speaking up and speaking loudly, then we wouldn't have a problem with the safety of our streets here in Ontario. If only our job here was to blame everybody else for crime but ourselves, then in fact maybe there wouldn't be any problems with the safety of our streets here in Ontario.

But I've got some news for the government. Fighting justice is not just about the grandstanding and the speeches and the resolution. Fighting justice is about doing something, and I can tell you, notwithstanding all the noise and deflection and blame that this government would like to pass on to Ottawa, I can assure you that there is some business to be done in this House when it comes to crime.

If this government was serious about justice, they wouldn't be before the Supreme Court of Canada trying to shoot down gun control legislation alongside the gun lobby. If this government was serious about justice, they wouldn't have put guns in the hands of 12-year-olds, against the advice of victims. If this government was serious about justice, they would take seriously those constructive proposals such as the private member's bill to get phony guns off our streets that was so arrogantly dismissed by this minister.

There's more that this House can do. This House could pass legislation mandating trigger locks, going after the gun manufacturers for what they've done in terms of the economic and health costs. Instead, this government is in the holster of the gun lobby and is trying to distract Ontarians by pointing up to Ottawa, but nobody is going to be fooled in this House, I can assure the Ontario Attorney General.

If this government was serious about justice, they would be making investments in enforcement. Do you know how many young offenders were tried in Ontario as adults in 1997-98? In Manitoba, it was 23; in Quebec, it was 23; in Ontario, it was nine. So if the Attorney General has a problem with the number of youth being tried as adults, I suggest he stop talking about it and start doing something about it.

EDUCATION LEGISLATION

Mr Rick Bartolucci (Sudbury): The Minister of Education's statement today is clearly about a government that doesn't trust or respect the school boards or teachers across Ontario. Clearly, their idea of a fair and equitable way of funding is to underfund everybody—every board at every level. Class sizes in Ontario have grown. Without a doubt, special education children have been forgotten because of this government. Clearly and without a doubt, schools have closed in unprecedented proportions across the province over the course of the last three years. It is evident that this government has not listened to its own experts, because junior kindergarten and early childhood education programs have been decimated because this government doesn't believe an investment in early childhood education is an investment in the future.

Let's not get sucked in by our theme about building for tomorrow. This government has tried to wreak havoc on tomorrow at the expense of the education system in the province of Ontario. Do you know what has kept this system together? It has been the teachers in Ontario who, over the course of the last five years, have been railed against by this government. But the teachers haven't listened to the government. They've decided to be dedicated, they've decided to be committed and they've decided that love of students, love of their children and love of their profession are certainly a lot better than buying into this government's agenda to wreak havoc and to Americanize our public education system. You know what? This will not happen, because the teachers in

Ontario are committed. They're dedicated, they love the system, they love their students.

Trustees—those same trustees who you over the course of the last five years have said have not done their job—have fought at the local level to save the local identity of schools so that truly the schools across the province are schools with a difference and reflect the local flavour of the community. You people do not understand it yet. You haven't got the idea. One size does not fit all. You people are guilty of destroying the public education system in Ontario.

Mr Rosario Marchese (Trinity-Spadina): I couldn't help observing how this minister was very smug and smooth and sugary. To the unsuspecting electorate, she'd almost be convincing if it weren't for a number of different facts that I'm going to try to lay out in the few minutes I've got.

Bill 160 was designed to squeeze money out of the education system. It was designed to suck money out of our schools into the coffers of the provincial government to give the tax cuts they've been giving for years. That's what it's all about.

Some of you fine Tories who go to your schools, if you do enter them from time to time, will have noticed that you've made cuts in adult education, you've made cuts in education assistants, you have now more extra user fees in our elementary and secondary system than ever before. We now have fewer library teachers than ever before. We now have fewer custodians in our schools than ever before. Art programs have been cut; teachers of art have been cut. The list is exhausting, but there is a lot more that could be said about it.

This minister says, "We established a fair and equitable way to fund our education system." Yes, you have whacked everybody fairly, and in fact you have whacked the teaching system equitably in the public and the Catholic systems. That you have done.

You say, "We defined, protected and increased classroom spending." Listen to this study. A study issued this month by the Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario demonstrates that since 1997, class sizes in elementary schools have increased significantly, from 20.2 to 23.1 in kindergarten alone; from 22.1 to 24 in grade 2. In other words, there are more students and fewer teachers in our classrooms, and that's why you're making this pitiful attempt to put back a couple of teachers before people notice.

In special ed you added \$40 million a couple of months ago and you added \$100 million just recently. Why? Because you knew there was money to be put in special ed, but you, Minister, denied it all along. Every time we raised that question, you denied there was a problem in special ed, until you were caught, and now you have to put in a few dollars. But you don't say, "We acknowledge it was a problem." You have to deny it. I have to tell you that teachers are demoralized; parents are fundraising now more than ever before. We have a system in crisis, and unless the parents fix this, you're going to bring us into further crisis.

1410

YOUNG OFFENDERS

Mr Peter Kormos (Niagara Centre): To the Attorney General: Forgive me for being somewhat skeptical about the sincerity of this government when it comes to issues of crime and prevention of crime and indeed the interests of victims. Has this government not lived with their zero Victims' Bill of Rights, the Victims' Bill of Rights that the courts in this province told us a year ago had no impact whatsoever on the rights of victims, wasn't worth the paper it was written on?

My skepticism is fuelled by a government that wants to talk a big game about law and order and crime control yet, when it has the capacity to do something, passes legislation that will go out busting squeegee kids trying to earn a couple of bucks on the streets of Toronto because of their poverty and destitution; a government that, rather than addressing the needs of families who are crippled and troubled and torn apart by a delinquent child, rather than providing them with the community supports, mental health programs for youngsters and for adolescents, rather than providing their schools and high schools and other parts of the educational system with those supports that could help get delinquent kids back on track, wants to hold parents responsible, even though they've expended, in most cases, tens of thousands of dollars and even though their families have been impacted in the most serious way by a delinquent kid; this government that chooses to privatize not only its adult but now all of its young offender facilities.

This government doesn't have the power to write criminal legislation; we understand that. But in those areas where they do have jurisdiction, they have failed the community in terms of public safety, they've failed victims, and they've failed those young people who find themselves in trouble with the law.

I'm looking forward to the debate on this resolution. I quite frankly can tell you that we share some of the concerns that the vast majority of Ontarians have about how young people are being dealt with in our criminal justice system. But this government abandons its role in the treatment and rehabilitation of young offenders, turns them over to for-profit American corporate boot camps, which have no impact other than to lock them up and throw the key away, not understanding that sooner or later they're going to get out. Let's debate this resolution and let's talk about this government's failure to enact any programs regarding community safety.

ORAL QUESTIONS

ONTARIO REALTY CORP

Mr Dalton McGuinty (Leader of the Opposition): My first question today is for the Chair of Management

Board. I want to return to the sorry saga of the Tory land scam. I want to have a page bring to you a copy of a mortgage given back to a buyer in connection with a particular deal. You sold some land on April 30, 1999, for \$13.27 million. When it came to this deal, you decided you were going to play banker. So you gave a mortgage back; you loaned \$10.77 million to the buyer.

The interesting thing is that when it came to interest to be charged on this loan for the first 18 months, do you know what you charged this buyer? Given that prime at the time was 6.5%, do you know what this minister charged this buyer in connection with a loan for \$10.77 million? Zero. Not a penny in interest. That works out to a cost of \$1 million for Ontario taxpayers.

Minister, tell us, why was this \$1-million expense in the interests of Ontario taxpayers?

Hon Chris Hodgson (Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet): As the Leader of the Opposition knows, there is an investigation underway into the past transactions at the Ontario Realty Corp. I would caution him that some of these deals, although they might not have closed till 1999, might have been entered into years ago. I don't know the details on this particular one, but I can tell you there's a board of directors of the Ontario Realty Corp which is accountable for their actions and, second, we have done the right thing by trying to get to the bottom of all past transactions by having an investigation take place. It's being conducted by people who are knowledgeable and competent and capable of carrying out this full investigation.

Mr McGuinty: Oh, we know; you've told us several times before, Minister, that you are nothing less than a saint when it comes to these matters.

I want to remind you: It says here that the person who loaned this money—you'll find it in section 14 of this mortgage—"Her Majesty the Queen in right of Ontario as represented by the Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet." This is your deal. That's you. You can't now pretend that you know nothing about this and that you take no responsibility for this matter.

Let me tell you something else about this deal. The buyer in this matter was Mavis Valley Developments and the president there is Nick Cortellucci. It turns out that since 1995, Mr Cortellucci and his business partners have made 342 donations to the Mike Harris party here in Ontario. That works out to \$463,000 in contributions to this minister's party. This is another special deal for another special friend. This is a case of this government looking after those that brung ya to the dance. We've got a \$1-million discount given to one of your largest contributors.

Again I ask, Minister, how is this deal in the interests of Ontario taxpayers?

Hon Mr Hodgson: As the Leader of the Opposition preaches in his sanctimonious tone to this House, he should be aware that we are doing the proper thing. We don't share the luxury you have in opposition to slander and carry on with all your mudslinging, but we can tell you this: We are doing the proper thing to get to the

bottom of these important questions. We've asked for the auditors. They have asked for forensic auditors, people who are qualified to look at past transactions, and they have called in the police who, you are well aware, are investigating past transactions.

Mr McGuinty: Our concern on this side of the House is that this minister failed to do the proper thing before entering into these deals. It's not a matter now of closing the barn door after the horses have escaped. Why didn't you do the right thing before you entered into this deal?

Although it's hard to imagine, this deal gets worse. There is a special provision in this loan that gives the buyer a 7% discount on the cost of the loan. That provision in and of itself will save this buyer \$753,900. If you add up all the special deals, all the special clauses, something the likes of which nobody could possibly imagine being part of a usual arm's-length commercial transaction, Minister, this buyer gets a total discount of \$2,251,000.

We have searched the Common Sense Revolution, we have looked at all the party documents, and there is no reference anywhere to a political rewards program where you reward those friends who make contributions to you and your government. Why don't you just stand up and tell us now why you didn't put it before the Ontario public at the time of the last election? Why didn't you tell us you intended to—

The Speaker (Hon Gary Carr): Chair of Management Board.

Hon Mr Hodgson: To the Leader of the Opposition, maybe you could answer this for the House and for those watching on TV: Do you think you're more qualified than the police to investigate these past transactions or do you just not trust the police?

Interjections.

The Speaker: New question.

1420

Mr McGuinty: Minister, this deal was made on April 30, 1999. That's when it closed. It involves a loan from you, in your capacity as Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet, for \$10.77 million, and it provides for 18 months interest-free.

Tell me, Minister, have you ever heard of such a deal in your life: \$11 million, 18 months interest-free? Do you support this deal? Do you think this is a good thing? Do you think this in the interests of Ontario taxpayers? Just answer those questions.

Hon Mr Hodgson: As the people of Ontario know, real estate deals sometimes are complicated. He mentions the deal. I don't have the particulars of when it was entered into or when it wasn't. I know the closing date because he has handed me this piece of paper.

I can tell you that this government is being open. We've asked for the auditors and the forensic auditors, people who are qualified, to look at these things, and they've asked for the police to investigate all past transactions. We want to get to the bottom of these issues, and that's the proper process to be undertaking. I hope he is not suggesting that they are not qualified,

because they are, and they are conducting an investigation that he is well aware of.

Mr McGuinty: This is one of the largest ORC deals struck in the last three years. This buyer is one of the largest two donors to your party: 342 donations made to your party during the last five years. The total donations again are \$463,000. The total loss to the taxpayers here in connection with this deal is \$2,251,000.

This all happened on your watch. You tell us that you're trying to get to the bottom of this. Our concern over here is that you're at the bottom of this. So tell us one more time: Why is it in the interests of Ontario taxpayers that somebody who contributed \$463,000 to your party should obtain a loan discount of \$2,251,000?

Hon Mr Hodgson: We are going to get to the bottom of all these questions through the proper process, and the police are involved in investigating it. He asked if this was a deal that served the taxpayers well. We don't know, but we will find out in terms of the proper process through the police.

I can tell you that your record on land deals and what is proven fact for all to see—a proven fact, not an allegation—is the Ataratiri lands, where the Liberals, when they were in power, cost Ontario taxpayers \$340 million. That's a proven fact of your mismanagement when it comes to lands.

Mr McGuinty: This minister just utters words which tell us more than anything else about his connection with this matter. I asked him whether this is in the interests of Ontario taxpayers. This minister, whose office appears on this document in connection with one of the largest deals in the last two years, tells us he doesn't know whether this is in the interests of Ontario taxpayers. That says more than anything else about the state of this government and their refusal to assume responsibility for the people who sent them here in the first place, Ontario taxpayers.

One more time, Minister: How could it possibly be, a deal this large, a sale to a contributor that large involving this many millions of taxpayer dollars? How could this happen on your watch? Why will you not stand up now and take responsibility for this and finally do the right thing, which is step aside?

Hon Mr Hodgson: Everyone in this House should know or ought to know that this government, the Mike Harris government, is taking the proper steps. You want to blame the whistle-blowers. We have put in place a process to get to the bottom of all these past transactions to make sure they served the interests of the taxpayers. If there has been wrongdoing, that will be accounted for through due process. That's the responsible thing to do. That's a responsibility we have to the taxpayers. We don't have the luxury that you have in opposition to act irresponsibly and throw around accusations.

NORTHERN HEALTH TRAVEL GRANT

Mr Howard Hampton (Kenora-Rainy River): My question is for the Minister of Health. I want to return to

your government's discrimination against cancer patients from northern Ontario.

Today in the gallery is a cancer survivor, Anna Watson. Last year, Anna Watson made 11 trips to the cancer treatment centre in Thunder Bay. Because your government doesn't provide assistance in terms of air travel, she had to drive four hours to the cancer treatment centre, receive treatment and drive four hours home. She estimates that she and her husband have had to pay \$1,000 a month out of their own pocket to access cancer treatment.

If Anna Watson were from southern Ontario, you'd pay the full air fare, the taxis, the hotel room, the food, everything, to take a cancer patient from southern Ontario to the same treatment centre in Thunder Bay.

Minister, can you tell Anna Watson and the hundreds of other cancer survivors in northern Ontario why you treat them like second-class citizens in their own province?

Hon Elizabeth Witmer (Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): I might ask the leader of the third party the same question, why you didn't make any changes to the northern health travel grant. In fact, it was your party that actually tightened the criteria and it was your party that decided patients were required to access the specialist nearest to them. It was the Liberals who introduced the initiative; it was you who tightened the criteria.

In 1999 we did review the entire issue of the northern health travel grant, and I'm very pleased to tell you today that we are prepared to review it again this year.

Mr Hampton: Minister, this isn't about the northern health travel grant. You, your ministry, gave Cancer Care Ontario a special allocation of money, a special allocation above and beyond their budget, to pay for the costs of southern Ontario cancer patients to get cancer treatment in Thunder Bay, in Sudbury, in Detroit, in Buffalo. That's what you did for southern Ontario cancer patients.

All we're asking is that you do the same thing for northern Ontario cancer patients. Why should one cancer patient have the air fare, hotel accommodation, taxis and food paid for, and another one is told, "If you want to get to cancer treatment, you drive four, five, six, seven hours"—sometimes over an ice-covered highway—"and you pay \$1,000 out of your own pocket, find your own hotel room and go out and pay for your own meals"?

This has nothing to do with the northern health travel grant. If you can provide a special allocation of money for southern Ontario cancer patients to access cancer treatment, why can't you do the same thing for cancer patients from the north? We're all in the same province.

Hon Mrs Witmer: As the leader of the third party knows, our government has responded to the needs of people in this province more generously than any other government. We have added to our budget. We've gone from \$17.4 billion to \$22 billion this year. We have continued to do everything we can to take the services closer to home, to the people in all parts of the province.

I just repeat again, for the member here today, that we are quite prepared to review the information that we have regarding the needs of people in the north. I know you didn't hear me the first time, but we do understand and we will be responding.

The Speaker (Hon Gary Carr): Final supplementary, the member for Nickel Belt.

Ms Shelley Martel (Nickel Belt): Minister, there is no need for a review. For 13 full months now your government has been discriminating against northern cancer patients, because 13 months ago your government saw fit to provide additional special funding to Cancer Care Ontario to cover 100% of the costs of travel, accommodation and food for southern Ontario cancer patients who have to travel from their communities for cancer care.

Here we are 13 months later, and northern cancer patients, who regularly have to travel far from home for cancer treatment, can only get a small portion of their travel covered—nothing for accommodation, nothing for food.

Minister, isn't it about time you ended this discrimination? All it requires is some political will to ensure that northern cancer patients are treated the same as southern cancer patients. Will you today establish a special fund in northern Ontario to be administered by Cancer Care officials in the northeast and the northwest so that cancer patients in northern Ontario will be treated the same as you treat southern cancer patients now?

Hon Mrs Witmer: Our government has added \$155 million to the cancer budget. Cancer Care Ontario, the agency that coordinates standards and guidelines, is the group that recommended that costs be covered. However, I indicated in my very first response that we would review the issue.

1430

SCHOOLTEACHERS

Mr Howard Hampton (Kenora-Rainy River): My next question is for the Minister of Education, but I would say to the Minister of Health that at a time when your government is giving away \$1 billion in corporate tax cuts—

The Speaker (Hon Gary Carr): If it's a question for the Minister of Education, please place it to the Minister of Education.

Mr Hampton: Minister, I heard your statement today and I want to ask you a specific question. The Rainy River board of education reached an agreement last week with the secondary school teachers which will actually see some money taken out of administration and out of the budget for board governance and put into the classroom. That money will provide that teachers will be available on a regular basis, through the day, to provide for students who have special needs, or students who need to catch up on a subject, or students who are in danger of falling behind. It's an agreement that provides the very best for students. They're being told that your government doesn't like that agreement.

Minister, can you tell the students, the parents and the teachers there and across Ontario why an agreement that takes money out of administration and money out of board governance and puts it toward teachers providing help to students isn't going to be allowed by your government?

Hon Janet Ecker (Minister of Education): Thank you for the question. First of all, I certainly haven't seen this agreement. I have no idea if it is in compliance with the regulations and the legislative amendments we'll be introducing shortly. If it is in compliance, this board has nothing to worry about.

The Speaker: Supplementary?

Mr Rosario Marchese (Trinity-Spadina): We think they have a lot to worry about, because we have an inkling about where this minister's thinking is at and we'll get it shortly, obviously, in terms of some presentation, of some statement they'll be making very soon. The fact of the matter is this: Rainy River District School Board has come to an agreement; Thames Valley, Metro Toronto, Metro Separate, York and Peel have shown similar agreements. These agreements fall within the regulations that you have established, but we get from you or your staffers that this is unacceptable to you people.

The reality check is this, Minister: The government's cuts to education and the new funding formula mean there are not as many teachers as before. Since 1995, there has been a 13% reduction in the number of teachers per 1,000 students in Ontario. It was 63.1 teachers per 1,000 in 1995; it's projected to be 52.4 teachers per 1,000 in 2000-01. That's the reality. You don't like this. You don't want people to know that.

I would have some, if not more, respect for you if you admitted your true intentions—if you admitted, for example, that your politics is to do more with less, meaning more students being taught by fewer teachers. That's part of your agenda. If you could admit this, I might have some respect for you, if not more. Can you do that and make me feel better?

Hon Mrs Ecker: I'm not prepared to admit anything that is not true. First of all, as the honourable member may know, we just increased the number of elementary teachers by 1,000 by bringing down the class size for kindergarten to grade 3. We think that's a very important improvement.

Second, for the first time, we actually recognize that remedial programs, remediation for students who need extra help, and teacher-adviser time are two very important quality initiatives. Not only did we recognize that specifically in our regulations, and that continues to be there, but we've actually backed it up with almost 90 million new dollars for those school boards to help deliver both of those programs.

What we're not prepared to do is to allow certain boards and certain unions to engage in creative non-compliance to get around provincial standards.

OAK RIDGES MORaine

Mr Dalton McGuinty (Leader of the Opposition):

My question is for the Minister of Municipal Affairs. During the course of the weekend we got some news about your apparent movement in connection with the Oak Ridges moraine. You will know that in our party we've been very concerned about the future of that unique bioregion, very concerned about the fact that it acts as the greater Toronto area's rain barrel, bringing cool, clean water. What we want to ask you then is, given your new-found commitment to the moraine, when exactly will you introduce a bill providing comprehensive protection to the Oak Ridges moraine? And when exactly will you put into place a freeze on all development pending passage of that same legislation?

Hon Tony Clement (Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing): I think the position of this government is that in a province of prosperity and in a province where growth and opportunity are happening, we should always seek to balance properly the interests of present and future generations, when it comes to biodiversity and ecological protection, with the growth, including housing growth and development that occurs in the greater Toronto area and indeed throughout all of Ontario.

Our position has been clear. We have a Planning Act. We also have a provincial policy statement pursuant to the Planning Act that we instituted in 1996. We also have the 1991 guidelines that are specific to the moraine that were instituted by the previous NDP government. All of that is on the table. We had a requirement from the board to respond in scientific language as to how to flesh out the definition of that protection. We responded, and that is now a matter of public record before the board.

Mr McGuinty: The Minister talks about trying to strike a balance. You tell me, Minister: This new directive or opinion you've offered to the OMB is going to provide some minimal protection, if it's successful, to a full 1% of the moraine; 99% will be unaffected by this opinion that you've offered. Let's put this in some real perspective. This wasn't legislation that's going to be introduced by the minister, it wasn't a ministerial order and it wasn't a policy directive. It was a recommendation. It was an opinion. It was a passing thought.

You have seen the latest polls when it comes to this issue and how your government is perceived in its refusal to take responsibility to save the Oak Ridges moraine. If you were serious, if you were genuinely committed to saving the Oak Ridges moraine for future generations, then you would pass and make into law this bill that has been put forward by Mike Colle of my party. That's what you'd do. It's ready to go right now.

Why don't you just stand up and admit that you are not interested in saving the Oak Ridges moraine? You're interested in doing nothing more than saving your political hide.

Hon Mr Clement: The honourable member seems to have a fixation with polls, which is understandable, but the only polls that I saw indicated that if a vote were held

tomorrow in that catchment area of the community, 60% would vote Progressive Conservative under a Mike Harris government and only 30% would vote for the honourable member. I think those polls speak louder than his rhetoric.

I hope the honourable member is not suggesting that this honourable member or this government should interfere with the quasi-judicial process that is before the board. I hope the honourable member is not suggesting that.

This government had a requirement to respond to the board. We consulted with the Ministry of Natural Resources; we consulted with hydrogeologists; we consulted with the conservation authorities. We had an obligation to render an opinion. We rendered an opinion, nothing more, nothing less. The honourable member can infuse all he wants into this, but we are responding to a board request, and now it is up to the board, as it is their right and responsibility, to render a decision.

1440

SPECIAL EDUCATION

Mrs Tina R. Molinari (Thornhill): My question is for the Minister of Education. School boards throughout the province are trying to serve the growing number of students within their communities and are realizing that there are numerous challenges with serving these exceptional students. I am aware that the ministry is working closely with boards to determine the pressure points and to identify some of the areas that need to be addressed in order to better serve those students who require special education. School boards that offer excellent special education programming are realizing increasing enrolment due to the excellent reputation in the special education services they provide.

Minister, my constituents want to know what is being done to address the pressure points that our school boards in York region are experiencing with respect to special education.

Hon Janet Ecker (Minister of Education): I thank the member for Thornhill for the question. I think every member in this House has heard stories from parents who were told that their child would never learn, and yet they have seen and we have seen that these children, with the right support, are able to do exceedingly well in their educational career and in their future career. That's why we've taken the steps we've taken to improve delivery and to increase resources.

One of the first priorities to address that I heard from all groups in my consultations last year, whether it was teachers or boards or whatever, was to improve special-needs funding, so we have indeed done that. We increased funding by another 12% this coming school year, the \$40 million I announced earlier this year, the money that the finance minister so kindly put in the budget—another 12% increase in special-needs funding. For the York Region District School Board that will mean another \$2 million specifically for special ed, and

for York Catholic there will be another \$1 million to help these students.

Mrs Molinari: I thank the minister for the answer, and I'm pleased to hear about the funds that are being put toward both boards. My question again is, how is the government going to ensure that students are getting the special education supports they require?

Hon Mrs Ecker: The member is quite correct; simply pumping more money into the system is not going to solve the problem if the special-needs programs are not being delivered appropriately. So the new money is there, more money than has ever been available to school boards for special needs in the history of special-needs funding, quite frankly. With that new money, we are working with boards and those organizations that represent special-needs students to ensure that there are appropriate program standards, not only for the way boards allocate the money and set their programs for special-needs children but also for those very important individual education plans that help the school specifically design the supports that special-needs student requires. With the new money for the third year in a row, plus better standards, plus better design for delivery of the programs, we are beginning to make this system the way parents and students want and need it to be.

NORTHERN HEALTH TRAVEL GRANT

Mr David Ramsay (Timiskaming-Cochrane): To the Minister of Health, I'd like to return to the cancer travel question. Minister, I brought this question up previously to you in the House. I want to return to it and say to you that just reviewing the northern health travel grant is not going to rectify the situation that northern cancer patients find themselves in when they find out that they have this catastrophic illness called cancer. The reason that you gave such an enriched travel grant program to southern Ontario cancer patients is, of course, because of the frequency of travel that is required to the treatment centres. When a southern Ontario person has to go to Thunder Bay and Sudbury, all of a sudden you realize, "Gee, they have to travel a long distance for this treatment."

But we in the north have had to do this for years. Over the years we've been able to go to Thunder Bay and Sudbury, but many still have to go to Toronto. Yet you pay us in a very different fashion than you do people from southern Ontario. When are you going to rectify this inequity and treat northerners fairly?

Hon Elizabeth Witmer (Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): As the member knows, it was Cancer Care Ontario that actually recommended to the Ministry of Health that they should cover all the costs in association with patients who were receiving radiation treatment. I will tell you that this government has undertaken a tremendous number of initiatives to bring services closer to the people in northern Ontario. In fact, we have been able to see the recruitment of 138 specialists since 1995. We're also updating the cancer

care centre in Thunder Bay. As you know, we have announced that we will be building a cancer facility in Sault Ste Marie, and we are also providing \$10 million toward the expansion of the centre in Sudbury. So we are moving forward in order that the people in northern Ontario will have those services closer to home than ever before.

Mr Ramsay: Today you allow an inequitable position to exist. You know there are patients in Thunder Bay who still have to travel to Toronto for specialized cancer treatments and they get the maximum of the northern health travel grant, \$415. At the same time, they cross paths in the Thunder Bay airport with couples from southern Ontario who get their airfare, hotel and meals completely paid for. It is unfair. This was brought up to the Treasurer on a CBC call-in show this week, and he said, "I think Lori has a point, it is somewhat inequitable."

I think it needs to be fixed. I think it's unfair. Northerners feel it's unfair. The Deputy Premier of the province believes it's unfair. When are you going to fix the situation and treat northerners the way you do southerners?

Hon Mrs Witmer: I indicated in my response to the leader of the third party that we would be reviewing the situation. Obviously the member didn't hear it then, but I'll repeat it for the fourth time.

SEX OFFENDER REGISTRY

Mr R. Gary Stewart (Peterborough): My question is to the Solicitor General. Constituents in my riding have consistently told me that they take the issue of community safety very seriously. While attending local events, being on radio open-line shows and going door to door, people I've talked to in Peterborough all believe we should be able to live in our communities free from the fear of crime.

Public safety is one of our government's top priorities, but it appears it is not the top priority of the federal government. Could you tell my constituents in Peterborough and the people of Ontario some of the initiatives you have participated in to fight crime, especially our proposal for a sex offender registry?

Hon David H. Tsubouchi (Solicitor General): I believe, as does everyone in this House, that one of the most important things we have done was to pass Christopher's Law, which is the sex offender registry. This is the first time in all of Canada that there is a sex offender registry, which covers pedophiles, rapists and other sex offenders. Unfortunately, when this originally occurred, this was the result of a jury trial after young Christopher Stephenson was sexually abused and murdered. The recommendation clearly asked for a national sex offender registry. This did not occur, and because that didn't occur, we brought forward this measure. I'm proud to say that all members of this House supported this measure. It was very important. Members of the policing community,

members of the communities, victims' groups all supported this, I think, very important bill.

Mr Stewart: Like you, I believe everyone in Ontario has the right to be safe from crime. We should be able to walk in our neighbourhoods, use public transit, live in our homes and send our children to school free from the fear of criminals.

Minister, you mentioned that the jury in the Christopher Stephenson inquest recommended that the federal government establish a nation-wide sex offender registry, but the federal government has refused to do so. As well, I understand you recently wrote to the federal Minister of Justice and the Attorney General of Canada, the Honourable Anne McLellan, urging the minister to take action to create a national registry, to allow persons throughout the country to be better protected from the most vile of offenders. What is your opinion on the lack of action by the federal government?

Hon Mr Tsubouchi: As we all know—and it's not rocket science—sex offenders do not respect borders between provinces. That's one of the reasons why the jury recommended a national sex offender registry. I was greatly disappointed, if I could understate my position, when we approached the federal government with this request to do a national sex offender registry. It says here in an article:

"Ms McLellan's office would not comment on the Ontario request, turning the matter over to Lawrence MacAulay, the federal Solicitor General.

"Dan Brien, a spokesman for Mr MacAulay, said Ottawa was not interested in creating a national registry because it believes the Canadian Police Information Centre ... already does the job."

Can this be the same system that the federal Auditor General criticized because the technology was outdated and not responsive? Clearly, we need to take these steps. Clearly, the federal government has to do something to protect the rest of the country. We are doing our best in Ontario, but I think we should do something across the country.

1450

ST PETER'S HOSPITAL

Mr David Christopherson (Hamilton West): My question is to the Minister of Health. Your health care decisions and policies continue to create a health care crisis in Hamilton, one after another after another. Today it's St Peter's Hospital. In May 1998, your Health Services Restructuring Commission made a decision, which was soundly criticized in our community, that St Peter's Hospital was to shut down effectively April 30 of this year as a chronic care hospital. Under your rule, they should have taken no other patients after April 30. However, much to their credit, this hospital has decided to defy your order that hurts Hamilton seniors, and they are now accepting new patients. They've taken in 11 new patients since April 30, and I can tell you that number is going to continue to grow.

My question to you is, will you extend the deadline for St Peter's Hospital to close as a chronic care facility to allow these new patients to receive the service they need and the hospital to receive the funding that they need to do the job?

Hon Elizabeth Witmer (Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): I have been in conversation with St Peter's Hospital—in fact, I was a couple of weeks ago—and I'm very pleased to indicate to you that we have granted an extension of the date of closure for the hospital in Hamilton.

Mr Christopherson: Minister, you didn't tell me how long you've extended it for. If it's merely a matter of six months or a year, that's not going to solve the problem. St Peter's is responsible for managing all the chronic care beds in our community. They also happen to have, at \$238.55, the lowest patient day rate in Ontario. Right now, if you shut down St Peter's as a chronic care hospital, before the Hamilton Health Sciences Corp has a chance to build the new chronic care beds, that means six Hamilton elderly will be turned away at the door of their hospital.

Minister, I need to hear you say that the extension will continue, regardless of the time line, until such time as there are other chronic care beds built, up and operational, in the city of Hamilton. Anything less is unacceptable.

Hon Mrs Witmer: We have been meeting, and we're going to be continuing to meet, with the facility and the people at St Peter's as to the conversion. We have indicated to them that we will continue to ensure that the time line takes into consideration the needs of the residents and the surrounding community. The terms of the extension are presently being finalized by the ministry. In fact, they might even be meeting with people from St Peter's at the present time. But I can assure you there will be no closing of the facility until all of the patients can be accommodated safely elsewhere.

PROVINCIAL SALES TAX

Mr Monte Kwinter (York Centre): I have a question for the Minister of Finance. In your budget documents you state that the government will introduce legislation exempting educational CD-ROMs purchased by schools, community colleges, universities and public libraries—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon Gary Carr): The member is trying to place his question. Sorry for the interruption.

Mr Kwinter: Minister, your budget documents say you're going to exempt schools, community colleges, universities and public libraries from retail sales tax. There's a small business in my riding that has been there since 1992 and employs 24 people. This company sells instructional computer books which are exempt from provincial sales tax. Your provincial sales tax auditors have done an audit of this firm and maintain that any of these books that contain a demonstration CD-ROM as part of the training component must pay provincial sales

tax on the value of the CD-ROM. To give you an example, here's a typical book that they sell. This is a book that addresses the system we have at Queen's Park. In the back it has a CD-ROM. Without that CD-ROM, this book is virtually useless. It's like trying to teach someone to drive a car with a manual and saying, "If you want to get into the car, you're going to have to pay extra."

What is happening is this: To add insult to injury, the auditors are going back four years in sales, and the resultant PST liability could be in excess of \$150,000, enough to potentially put this company out of business, since they have no way of going back to the individual purchasers to collect the tax.

Minister, could you tell us why a computer training book that has as an integral part of the book an instructional CD-ROM shouldn't be PST-exempt in its entirety?

Hon Ernie L. Eves (Deputy Premier, Minister of Finance): Obviously, we believe that the CD-ROM component of education should be exempt from provincial retail sales tax, which is why we made the changes we did in the budget. If the member would kindly send the information over to me, I would be happy to look into it on behalf of his constituents.

Mr Kwinter: On Friday I went to the University of Toronto bookstore and purchased this book, and it also has a CD-ROM in it. When I went to pay for it, they didn't charge me PST; they just charged me GST. After that I went to Chapters, where I saw a book that really attracted my attention. It was called McAfee Anti-Virus for Beginners, and I thought it would be a good choice. This book also has a CD-ROM, and they also didn't charge me any provincial sales tax.

I'm not advocating that these bookstores should be paying the PST. On the contrary, I think that your officials have got to be brought into the cyber-age and realize that instructional material printed on paper and instructional material in a CD-ROM should be treated exactly the same way as far as the PST is concerned.

Mr Minister, could you give me your assurance that you will instruct your officials to maintain a level playing field and not treat one seller differently from the other, and would you call off your tax hounds that could potentially put this business out of business and get rid of 24 jobs?

Hon Mr Eves: It is quite possible, I suppose, that there were officials in the Ministry of Finance in the retail sales tax collection division and the auditing division who weren't up to date on what was going on. The member notes that his experience on Friday was different than it was prior to the budget, perhaps.

I have told him that I would be glad to look into the entire matter and take it back to the ministry and get him an answer.

RURAL TELECOMMUNICATIONS

Mr Doug Galt (Northumberland): My question is directed to the Minister of Energy, Science and Technol-

ogy. It's hard to believe that we're now in the new millennium. Time is moving quickly and so is the development of new technologies. With all the advancement in the world of telecommunications, one can be on holidays overseas and still check if one has e-mail back at home.

This leads me to the issue of the increasing number of people coming to Toronto to work. The city's growing population means an increase in the number of people commuting to work each day, and we've all had the experience of being stuck in traffic. We don't need to have everything in Toronto, so by expanding telecommunication services into rural Ontario, more businesses could then relocate outside the greater Toronto area and still have the ability to stay in close touch with their daily contacts.

Minister, what are you doing to make sure rural Ontario areas such as Northumberland have the same level of telecommunication services as those in large urban centres?

Hon Jim Wilson (Minister of Energy, Science and Technology): I thank the honourable member for Northumberland for his question. I think it follows quite well on Mr Kwinter's question about bringing people into the cyberworld, which, by the way, I thought was an excellent exchange between the finance minister and the honourable member across the way.

The same is true with this question. Honourable members should know it wasn't many years ago that those of us in rural Ontario and small-town Ontario were on telephone party lines. Throughout my lifetime, the telephone system has never been upgraded in rural or small-town Ontario.

Last year we undertook—through the data services improvement program we spent \$11.5 million—along with private sector partners like Bell Canada and many of the public and private sector phone companies, to upgrade the rural and small-town telephone and telecommunications infrastructure so that people in those areas can have the same level of telecommunications, telephone and Internet services that people in large urban centres like Toronto and Barrie and Kingston and Ottawa have enjoyed for many years. So I'm happy to report to the honourable member that we're well on our way. It's a very positive investment. And yes, no longer will Internet service providers or those who do digital media or those who work on a computer at home have to be located just in the city.

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

1500

Mr Galt: Thank you very much for helping establish high-tech assistance for rural Ontario. Back in March, when the Task Force on Rural Economic Renewal, which I chair, was travelling Ontario, we heard about the importance of infrastructure in general in rural Ontario, but particularly the high-tech infrastructure. It's greatly needed and we certainly look forward to more initiatives.

I'm concerned about communities particularly in my riding. Communities such as Colborne, Brighton and

Campbellford need this support if they're to flourish in the 21st century. Minister, when can we expect to see them up and running in areas east of Toronto, like in my riding of Northumberland?

Hon Mr Wilson: I'm pleased to report to the honourable member that 193 of the 310 telephone exchanges have now been upgraded since we started this initiative in the middle of last year. By June 30 of this year, we expect the rest of the 310 exchanges to all be completed. That includes Colborne, Brighton, Campbellford and the rest of Ontario. As I said, this is the most extensive upgrade of the telephone switching system in this province that we've seen in the last 40 years, and it will bring Internet services to the same level that we see in our large urban centres.

If you're like me in Wasaga Beach, it takes almost five minutes for an Internet Web page to load up on my computer. It is so slow it isn't worth it. It's that way in about 75% of the land mass of Ontario. This government recognized that through reports from the economic development people. Economic development officers and commissions around this province have been telling successive governments to upgrade the telephone system. The business case wasn't there in the past. With a little help from the taxpayers, the business case is there. I'm pleased to report that this major initiative is moving ahead on schedule and for the benefit of the people of rural and small-town Ontario.

WATER EXTRACTION

Mr Ernie Parsons (Prince Edward-Hastings): In the absence of the Minister of the Environment, I will direct my question to the Minister of Natural Resources. Waterlief Management Inc is a company with its management offices in Tweed, Ontario. According to its Web site, its goal is to obtain as many spring water permits as possible and develop these sources into water-bottling facilities. Waterlief has been granted a permit by the Ministry of the Environment to take 1.3 million litres of water per day for 10 years from Rawdon Creek, an aquifer that supplies drinking water to thousands of homes downstream.

As part of the application process, a site evaluation must be done by an independent expert. The assessment accompanying this application has been completed by Ian D. Wilson Ltd, consulting geologists. However, Ian D. Wilson Associates is also listed as part of the management team of Waterlief Management Inc, the applicant for the permit.

The preservation of our water in Ontario is very serious business. Surely the government sees a conflict of interest in this situation, when a member of the company applying to the ministry for a water-taking permit is also completing the required review for the application. Will the government assure me that absolutely no non-farm water-taking permits will be granted or allowed to continue unless a neutral third party has assessed the impact of the water withdrawal?

Hon John Snobelen (Minister of Natural Resources): As the member knows, various ministries in this government have been concerned about the situation regarding water quantities and qualities in Ontario. We've answered questions in the House prior to this date. Speaking about water quality and water quantity in the province, we have Ontario Water Response 2000, which we have been working on with municipalities and others, and that includes water-taking. I'm sure the member opposite understands that the Ministry of the Environment is responsible for water-taking permits. I'd be more than happy to advise my colleague of the concerns of the member opposite.

Mr Parsons: We're no longer hewers of wood and drawers of water in Ontario. We need to recognize the value of our water. The reality of math is that 10% of an unknown number is an unknown number. The Ministry of the Environment grants permits with a condition that the water withdrawal not exceed 10% of the flow, yet no one—not the ministry, not the conservation authorities, no one—knows what the current flows are in our rivers and streams right now, let alone over the next 10 years.

I ask again whether this government has the fortitude to stop issuing water permits for non-farm use until the current water situation is evaluated.

Hon Mr Snobelen: I'm pleased to inform the member opposite of a couple of issues. One, for a water-taking permit to be issued in the province, not only does a hydrogeological study have to be submitted to the ministry, but the ministry then reviews that with their expert opinions and makes sure it's accurate. I can also assure the member opposite that for the first time in the province, the ministries co-operatively—the Ministry of Natural Resources, the Ministry of the Environment and other ministries concerned with water-taking and the use of water in the province—have got together and put together their databases. We have put a budget together for that purpose. So we'll be informed not only in our decisions this year but in future years. I can assure the member opposite that we are taking those steps. We're taking them now in response to the needs of the province.

ASSISTANCE TO FARMERS

Mr Brian Coburn (Carleton-Gloucester): My question is for the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs. Minister, I was surprised—in fact, shocked—last week to read a press release from the president of the Ontario Federation of Agriculture indicating that he felt there was no support in last week's budget for Ontario's hard-working farmers. Minister, would you please explain to us the opportunities and the programs that were in the budget for the benefit of Ontario's farmers?

Hon Ernie Hardeman (Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs): Thank you very much to the member from Carleton-Gloucester for the question. Indeed, the 2000 budget was good news for all Ontario farmers. With all the other good things that were in the budget that affect all the people of Ontario—not just

farmers but people who live in rural Ontario, people who live in urban Ontario—all the people will have great benefits from the budget.

Specifically for the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs, I just would like to point out to the member's constituents and to the farmers and the people across the province that the budget was increased by 50%. One of the things that we will be doing for the farmers with that money is, we will increase the safety net money by \$40 million a year to help those farmers most in need. On top of that, we will be making the retail sales tax on farm building material exempt at source. This will mean that farmers will be able to reduce the red tape involved. When they go and purchase products to build farm buildings, they will get their tax exemption. They will no longer have to apply and wait for months to get a return of their own money. That will be a great benefit to rural and farming Ontario.

Mr Coburn: Last week's budget touched many and varied programs right across the province, not the least small-town and rural Ontario. Minister, would you explain to us some of the initiatives that have been taken through the small-town and rural Ontario strategy?

Hon Mr Hardeman: I'd like to indicate that I was delighted that the Ontario government and Finance Minister Eves are putting in \$600 million over the next five years to help Ontario's small-town and rural development through a fund that will be set up to build rural infrastructure. Two thirds of the fund, some \$80 million a year, will be invested in rural infrastructure, and an additional \$40 million will go into rural economic development. The infrastructure component of the program will focus on strategic infrastructure critical to the future economic growth of the quality of life in small-town and rural Ontario. It will encourage them to work together to address those challenges.

I have been in contact with the president of the federation of agriculture. He's looking forward to working with the government on the criteria to make sure that all of rural Ontario and the farming community benefit from that program. He believes it is a good program that can be tapped into by all of rural Ontario, including our farming community. I thank the member very much for the question. We look forward to working with our farmers to the benefit of all of agriculture.

OAK RIDGES MORaine

Ms Marilyn Churley (Broadview-Greenwood): To the Minister of Municipal Affairs: Minister, you're taking the right position at the OMB when it comes to the Oak Ridges moraine, but there's a big problem. If you win at the board, it won't cost the province anything beyond the legal costs, because the developers don't currently have the right to build there. But you've left taxpayers wide open to huge costs if you lose. If the OMB gives the developers the right to build on the moraine, it will cost big bucks to take those rights away if you legislate later.

Richmond Hill's planning commissioner, Janet Babcock, has estimated that it would cost \$1 billion to expropriate all the land on the moraine, and that's just in Richmond Hill, Minister. So I'm asking, will you save the province \$1 billion and legislate now?

Hon Tony Clement (Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing): I would love to engage in a public policy debate with the honourable member. I think she knows that I would engage in that debate fully. However, we are before the board. I'm not in a position to speculate on what would happen after the board renders its decision.

It is not my place to do so at this time because that would perhaps be seen as influencing the board's position, so I cannot do that. All I can tell the honourable member is that the board requested from my ministry that we articulate how best to protect the ecological, the environmental, the biodiversity, the water interests of the moraine. We have rendered our opinion after consulting with conservation authorities, after consulting with MNR, after consulting with scientists. We have done so. I support my ministry and that's as far as I can go.

1510

Ms Churley: Minister, let's engage in a little public policy here. You know as well as I do that you have the power right now, despite what's happening at the OMB, to legislate. That is something your government can do, and you know it. You've chosen not to.

I want to believe that you sincerely want to protect the Oak Ridges moraine, but your action to date is not compelling. Your government, which by the way has no trouble legislating people's rights away in other situations, is suddenly getting all timid when it comes to the Oak Ridges moraine. What's going on here?

You know that the developers do not have the right to build now, but you seem too keen to wait and see what the board determines. You're acting like a stakeholder, Minister, rather than a government with the power to legislate. Do you hear what I'm saying here? If you lose at the OMB, in order to save the Oak Ridges moraine, which you say you want to do, it's going to cost the taxpayers, the people of Ontario, at least \$1 billion. That's just in Richmond Hill, and as you know, the Oak Ridges moraine is a lot bigger than that. Are you taking the position today that you are going to take that risk and, in order to save the Oak Ridges moraine, cost the taxpayers over \$1 billion?

Hon Mr Clement: We are before the board. We have identified a public interest—a public interest, incidentally, which is contingent upon and respectful of the 1991 guidelines which her government instituted, announced and supported. We're simply before the board pursuant to the Planning Act, pursuant to the 1996 provincial policy statement, pursuant to the 1991 NDP guidelines. We're pursuing the public interest before the board; I can say nothing more than that.

JUDICIAL INDEPENDENCE

Mr Michael Bryant (St Paul's): My question is for the Attorney General. Minister, today the Globe and Mail stated that what is "astonishing" about the transformation of the judiciary into a kangaroo court under Bill 66 is that "Attorney General Jim Flaherty would leap on to the back of this sick donkey of a bill and whip it toward passage." The president of the Advocates' Society said, "In close to 30 years of practising law in this province, I have yet to see such a blatant attempt to undermine the independence of our judiciary."

Attorney General, you're a civil litigator. You are vested with special responsibilities to check judicial independence. Victims of crimes do not want a kangaroo court; they want an independent, impartial judiciary. How could you of all people support this bill?

Hon Jim Flaherty (Attorney General, minister responsible for native affairs): I assume that the member opposite has read the bill. It is a private member's bill and it attempts to do two things. The first is to require some statistical reporting of information that is already available through the court system. The second thing it does is give this Legislative Assembly the opportunity to pass a resolution with respect to appointments to the Supreme Court of Canada. Those are not revolutionary ideas, except perhaps the second one about the province having some role in appointments to the Supreme Court of Canada.

The independence of the judiciary relates to the ability of someone to enter a courtroom and be satisfied that they will have an impartial hearing by an impartial judge, which is what we have and safeguard in Ontario.

PETITIONS

NORTHERN HEALTH TRAVEL GRANT

Mr Michael Gravelle (Thunder Bay-Superior North): We're pleased to hear that there will finally be a review of the northern health travel grant, which we know is inadequate, terribly unfairly funded and discriminatory. I have more petitions, which we continue to read every day.

"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 am pleased to sign this petition. I would also like you to know that Brian Frost from Thunder Bay is one of our new pages here.

OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH AND SAFETY

Mr David Christopherson (Hamilton West): I have petitions forwarded to me by Wayne Marston, president of the Hamilton and District Labour Council, signed by citizens from all across the region of Hamilton-Wentworth.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

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

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

"Therefore we, the undersigned, ask the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to amend the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act to allow compensation for family members who develop occupational illness as a result of workplace toxins inadvertently brought home."

I'm in agreement with these petitioners and add my name accordingly.

NORTHERN HEALTH TRAVEL GRANT

Mrs Lyn McLeod (Thunder Bay-Atikokan): 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 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.”

Once again I have the signatures of many constituents who share our concern and our frustration that there’s no change in this program.

MUNICIPAL RESTRUCTURING

Mr Michael Gravelle (Thunder Bay-Superior North): I have a petition here from the people of the township of Nakina who are very concerned and upset about the forced amalgamation of their community into a massive community called Greenstone. Basically stretching from Barrie to North Bay would describe the size of this municipality in northern Ontario. Let me read the petition.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the corporation of the township of Nakina is an incorporated municipality; and

“Whereas the corporation of the township of Nakina has continued to operate as a community in its own right since 1923; and

“Whereas amalgamation with other distant communities could prove to be detrimental to the individualistic lifestyle associated with living in the township of Nakina; and

“Whereas the economic justification for the creation of Greenstone no longer exists, and its creation may result in a loss of local services and an increased tax burden on the residents of Nakina; and

“Whereas the residents of the township of Nakina would like to continue to be the municipality known as the corporation of the township of Nakina;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly to ensure that the corporation of the township of Nakina continues to be a separate municipality in the province of Ontario.”

I’m pleased to sign this. This is a remarkable community in my riding.

1520

NORTHERN HEALTH TRAVEL GRANT

Mr Rick Bartolucci (Sudbury): This is 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 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.”

As I am opposed to any form of health care apartheid, I sign this petition as I am in complete agreement with it.

HIGHWAY 407

Mr John O’Toole (Durham): I am pleased to present a petition on behalf of my constituents of the riding of Durham to the Legislature of the province of Ontario.

“Whereas the province of Ontario exempted Highway 407 east from a public hearing and then passed the Highway 407 Act to further exempt the proposed highway extension from important provincial environmental laws, such as the Ontario Water Resources Act, the Lakes and Rivers Improvement Act and the fill regulations of the Conservation Authorities Act; and

“Whereas heavy equipment is now being used to clear the eastern path of the highway, without any environmental guidelines, controls or monitoring;

“We, the undersigned, respectfully petition the Legislature of Ontario, as a matter of extreme urgency, to put in place such environmental monitoring procedures and controls as are necessary to prevent extreme degradation such as bulldozers working in stream beds, and numerous other environmentally destructive acts that have been

witnessed since the 407 east extension was permitted to go ahead.”

I'm pleased to submit this petition.

ROAD MAINTENANCE

Mr Michael Gravelle (Thunder Bay-Superior North): I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario, and I have read many of these related to the Black Sturgeon Road and the fact that the Ministry of Natural Resources is not doing the work they should.

“Whereas the Black Sturgeon Road in the district of Thunder Bay is an important access road for fishing and hunting to area lakes and forests;

“Whereas the Ministry of Natural Resources is attempting to block access to this road by refusing to implement upgrades;

“Whereas a vast area will be rendered inaccessible unless the government maintains responsibility for this road;

“Whereas the government has recently increased fees for hunting and fishing yet still has considerable funds left in its special purpose account;

“Therefore we, the undersigned citizens of Ontario, petition the Ontario Legislature to use funds from the Ministry of Natural Resources special purpose account to maintain the Black Sturgeon Road as an important access road to protect the rights and freedoms of fishers and hunters in the district of Thunder Bay.”

I'm very pleased to sign my name to this petition.

PROTECTION OF MINORS

Mr Rick Bartolucci (Sudbury): This petition is to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

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

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

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

“To enact legislation which will:

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

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

I am in a complete agreement with this petition. I therefore affix my signature to it and give it to Amber Beattie from London to give it to the table.

HIGHWAY 407

Mr John O'Toole (Durham): I'm pleased to present a petition. I'm just looking at some of the names of people from Durham who have signed this and I'm not sure if some of these people have read this. There's a name here, Troy Young, and Steve Cooke, and John

Mutton. All of those people are running in the next municipal election. I thought I'd mention that here as they're signing a petition to the Legislative Assembly of the province of Ontario.

“Whereas the province of Ontario exempted Highway 407 east from a public hearing and then passed the Highway 407 Act to further exempt the proposed highway extension from important provincial environmental laws, such as the Ontario Water Resources Act, the Lakes and Rivers Improvement Act and the fill regulations of the Conservation Authorities Act; and

“Whereas heavy equipment is now being used to clear the eastern path of the highway, without any environmental guidelines, control or monitoring;

“We, the undersigned, respectfully petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario, as a matter of extreme urgency, to put in place such environmental monitoring procedures and controls as are necessary to prevent extreme degradation such as bulldozers working in stream beds, and numerous other environmentally destructive acts that have been witnessed since the 407 east extension was permitted to go ahead.”

I'm pleased to present this petition on their behalf.

NORTHERN HEALTH TRAVEL GRANT

Mr Michael A. Brown (Algoma-Manitoulin): I have a large number of petitions from my constituents all the way from Manitouwadge straight through to Killarney:

“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 their communities.”

Obviously, I agree with these petitions and have signed them.

ABORTION

Mr John O'Toole (Durham): It doesn't appear that many people are making presentation of petitions today, Mr Speaker, so I thank you for allowing me to present as many as I am. From my riding of Durham I have one here from the Mother Teresa parish CWL, located in Courtice, which of course is in Durham. It's from a number of people. I know most of them personally.

"To the Parliament of Ontario:

"Whereas we have recently learned that our tax money is being used to pay the rent on the Morgentaler abortuary; and

"Whereas by the end of his lease this amount will be \$5 million;

"Whereas we strongly object to the use of our tax dollars for this purpose;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Parliament of Ontario to immediately cease these payments."

I'm pleased to sign my name to this petition.

PHYSIOTHERAPY SERVICES

Mr Michael Gravelle (Thunder Bay-Superior North): "Whereas it's the government's plan to remove G467 therapeutic physiotherapy services from the OHIP formulary; and

"Whereas the only recourse for patients will then be to go through hospital outpatient services that already face waiting lists of three to four months; and

"Whereas these same services are provided in the other areas of the province through schedule 5 clinics, which are funded through a \$39-million allocation by the Ministry of Health; and

"Whereas of that \$39 million none has been allocated for northwestern Ontario; and

"Whereas if the delisting of G-code physiotherapy services goes forward, because there are no schedule 5 clinics in northwestern Ontario, there is a real fear that a two-tier system for physiotherapy services will be the norm in that one system would accommodate those who have private insurance or enough money to pay out of pocket, while the other tier will be one where those in need wait for months on waiting lists while continuing to suffer; and

"Whereas as our population ages, those requiring physiotherapy will increase and without these services the strain on our medical system will only increase as people aggravate old injuries that were not properly treated through modern physiotherapy treatments; and

"Whereas the delisting of G-code physiotherapy services is further indication that there is a real erosion by this government of sound medical services in northwestern Ontario;

"Therefore, we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to stop the planned fee

schedule delisting of G467 therapeutic physiotherapy services and provide northwestern Ontario with a portion of the \$39-million Ministry of Health allocation for physiotherapy services."

I'm pleased to sign this. I'm pleased, once again, that Brian Frost from Thunder Bay is here to take my petition.

1530

ORDERS OF THE DAY

2000 ONTARIO BUDGET

Resuming the debate adjourned on May 4, 2000, on the amendment to the amendment to the motion that this House approves in general the budgetary policy of the government.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Bert Johnson): I believe when we left off the member for Sarnia-Lambton had finished her debate, so the format will now be that we will have questions and comments. We will then return once more to the member for Sarnia-Lambton for two minutes to respond. Going in rotation, questions and comments.

Mr David Christopherson (Hamilton West): Having had a chance to review as well as watch some of the comments of the member from Sarnia-Lambton, I want to echo much of the concern that she has raised. I think she did an excellent job of articulating some of the concerns that those of us who are looking past the headlines have about this budget.

Certainly, one of the key topics of discussion that I found over the weekend—the beautiful weather we had gave people an opportunity to be outside and to talk. I was around my community a lot over the weekend, and virtually everywhere I went people were talking about this \$200 charade. I didn't have to prompt the discussion. I didn't have to lead anybody anywhere. People were saying to me: "This \$200, I don't get it. Is this supposed to really help my family in some way?" What surprised me the most was that the next statement was always, "Wouldn't all that money together have done something more?"

They didn't know the figure, and when I reminded them that the individual \$200 cheques in total are worth \$1 billion, without exception—and I'm talking about people who are in poverty, all the way to people who are doing very, very well in our society—all said that the \$200 concept was the wrong way to go and that it made a lot more sense for the government of Ontario to take \$1 billion and put it—certainly in Hamilton we were talking about Hamilton's health care system. Put our share of that in Hamilton-Wentworth toward the funding we need for Henderson hospital, the funding we need for St Peter's Hospital, the funding we need for home care; put it into the education system. Put it somewhere where it will do some good, but get off this public relations exercise and get on with governing.

Mr David Young (Willowdale): I heard and was somewhat surprised by the comments of the member from Sarnia-Lambton, undoubtedly well intentioned and perhaps a reflection of the fact that she hadn't had an opportunity to reflect upon the budget in its totality but did have an opportunity to speak to it, and I appreciate that she took that opportunity. Nevertheless, as I considered her comments over the weekend, I also considered some of the policy statements the party she represents has made over the years. So you'll understand my surprise at the following quote, which was made by the Liberal Party in the 1995 election: "A Liberal government will repeal the 5% tax on auto insurance premiums and work to make auto insurance more affordable."

Obviously I was somewhat surprised by the omission in her comments of the praise that one would have thought would be forthcoming from that member, from that party, for what is an initiative that very much echoes what the Liberals said they wanted to see happen, because in fact it is now going to happen. It didn't happen when the Liberals were in power, but fortunately it will happen now. Undoubtedly when the member has an opportunity to speak again she may well wish to address that point, and I would be very pleased to hear from her in that regard.

Similarly, I'd like to remind her of the policy commitment made in the 1995 provincial Ontario Liberal policy document that said: "A Liberal government will reduce the corporate tax rate for small businesses"—just what we did. "A Liberal government will ... reduce the number of small businesses required to file for the corporate minimum tax"—just what we did.

Undoubtedly when the member has an opportunity to reflect upon what stand or stands her party has taken over the years, and the details of this budget that has by and large been accepted with great applause from the people of Ontario, I'm sure she will add her applause to the cheering that has been coming from various parts of this province.

Mr David Caplan (Don Valley East): I'd like to comment on the speeches by both the member from Sarnia-Lambton and the member from Toronto Centre-Rosedale, whose comments were very much in line with those of the mayor of Toronto, Mr Lastman, who said that this budget which we're debating today did nothing for the city of Toronto. In fact, the member for Toronto Centre-Rosedale talked about public transportation, talked about the homeless and the affordable housing crisis that we have in Ontario today. I'm surprised that the member from Willowdale wouldn't acknowledge that the mayor of Toronto has made these comments about this budget, not about something that happened 15 years ago, 10 years ago, five years ago but that happened in this House just this very last week.

In fact, the member for Sarnia-Lambton quite rightly pointed out that we now enjoy for the very first time in Ontario a triple-digit debt. Now, for my friends opposite and for the viewers at home, I know that they would want to know what it means to the operating budget that we

are now paying more in interest costs, monies that go not toward programs, not toward any of the much-needed areas of health care or of education in this province, but are going strictly to pay the interest on the debt because the Harris government has added \$24 billion to the debt. I know that my colleague from Sarnia-Lambton mentioned this fact and I'm surprised that the member for Willowdale and none of the government members wish to talk about this aspect of the budget which we're being asked to approve.

The facts and the figures that members of the government wish to draw out and the quotations that they wish to extol about the budget seem very selective, yet they refuse to address this very serious problem. In fact, the crisis is not only in public transit but affordable housing, the cuts to the environment and the cuts to the Ministry of Natural Resources were also mentioned by the member for Sarnia-Lambton. They were very astute comments and I think she said it very well.

Mr John O'Toole (Durham): I was here on Thursday when the member for Sarnia-Lambton, Ms Di Cocco, stayed at length and at much inconvenience I'm sure, on a Thursday, when you'd like to get home, to make her comments toward the budget, and I respect that. Where we part company is in what I'm about to say. Technically, she's really not paying much attention. She has a job, and I understand that, which is to criticize our government. But really, broadly speaking, this is good news and I'll be waiting for her two-minute response to take issue with my observations.

But I think she should listen. She did ask, "How does the budget deal with this?" talking about post-secondary education, and that primary, secondary and post-secondary systems have been under siege.

I'll just respond to some of the comments that have been said to my constituency office. This is from Brock University, where my son is a student. President David Atkinson said: "We are obviously very pleased. We are waiting to hear more details, but it is the message we wanted to hear. We're pretty excited..." and it goes on.

I know that our own Durham College president is very excited by the amount of investment.

Fanshawe president Howard Rundle chairs a committee of presidents of Ontario's community colleges. He welcomed the plan to pop more money, 286 million, into capital funds for post-secondary, calling it "a significant and much-needed investment." These are very strong, ringing endorsements for a budget that has been widely accepted as a landmark opportunity.

I'm looking at what the municipal response has been to this budget. I'm looking here at the comments of the regional chair of Ottawa, Bob Chiarelli, a former Liberal member in this House. What did he say about the budget? He said, "The budget gives local taxpayers an average of \$69 savings on the provincial portion of their tax bill." That, combined with the average \$45 property tax cut the region delivered in its budget, is \$114 per family. Clearly, there's one Liberal who's got the message. There are more, I'm sure.

The Deputy Speaker: The member's time has expired. The member for Sarnia-Lambton has two minutes to respond.

Ms Caroline Di Cocco (Sarnia-Lambton): I must say that I premised my discussion on the quote that this budget is a deliberate instrument of social and economic guidance. In that context, I talk about sustainable economic prosperity and sustainable development, which, as all the members in this House know, is more than just tax cuts. It's more than just taking care of business interests, because good government is also about taking care of people development. The fact is that the environment is at the bottom of the list. Because the environment directly jeopardizes the future of sustainable development, if we don't put the environment at the top of the our priorities, we're going to jeopardize our future.

The member from Willowdale suggested that I didn't have a chance to truly view the document. Again, I find that sometimes there's a patronizing tone from across the way to the members on this side of the House.

I would like to suggest that competitiveness through a well-educated population is what this is all about. Yes, education has been under siege; the attacks continue. That suggests to me that you are saying, "We do care about a well-educated population, but we continue the attacks on the educators." That undermines sustainable development.

Frankly, the fact that you only talk about the deficit and not the debt suggests that even fiscal responsibility is not balanced.

1540

The Deputy Speaker: The member's time has expired. Further debate.

Mr Christopherson: I appreciate this opportunity to have my 20 minutes, which I would remind everyone is all the government's new House rules will allow—20 minutes to debate a budget that has the kinds of implications that this one and in fact all have. It's definitely a real curtailment of democracy.

At the outset, I want to point out that the government continues to take all the credit in the world for the booming economy, and yet virtually every economist from every walk of life is coming forward and saying, "Look, the economy in Ontario is so overheated and revved up right now because of the US economy; in particular the auto industry." In fact, it's primarily the exports out of Ontario into the United States that are giving us the economic demand that we have in our communities to keep the factories and offices supplied with what they need to build or provide a service that is then exported down to the United States. There has to be a demand somewhere to create that demand for supply, and it's in the United States.

A US citizen making a decision about buying a new car doesn't care a fig about what the personal income tax rate is in Ontario. You could eliminate it entirely and pay absolutely no income tax to the province of Ontario, and that is not going to change by one iota how a US family makes a decision about buying a new car. That family in

Kansas doesn't care at all about the tax system in Ontario. What they want to know is, "How much does the car cost and does it meet my needs?" Not only do our workers here in Ontario build the finest automobiles in the world, we also do it cheaper. Why? Primarily because of our universal public health care system.

It's important for us to remember two things: First, the reason there's money available right now is not because of anything this government did—unless you want to give them the credit for being brilliant in terms of the timing of when they became government; 90% of the economic growth in Ontario is directly attributable to the booming auto demand originating in the United States. The second thing we have to remember is the reason these plants exist in Ontario is that our health care system, in addition to the skill level of our workers, means that we are hundreds, if not thousands, of dollars cheaper in terms of our labour costs.

Here you've got one of the most skilled, reliable, trained workforces in the entire world linked with the fact that our universal health care system is money that the auto makers don't have to build into their wage rate, and you have a huge economic incentive for the auto industry to originate plants and offices in Ontario. So when the US economy takes off, as it has—biggest economic boom in North America in history—linked with what I've just described in terms of what we have going for us in Ontario, guess what? You couldn't screw up this economy if you tried. There is so much demand for the goods that create jobs and circulate money in our economy that it's a slam-dunk. And yet the government wants to tell everybody: "Oh, it's because of us. It's what we did. It's our tax incentives and our this, that and the other."

The fact is you've made more people poor and in greater poverty than they've ever been before, our health care system is in complete chaos and crisis, and our education system is exactly the same way. You're slicing and slashing away at the social safety net that we as Canadians, for most of our lives, have all been so very proud of. The environmental laws that protect the health of our citizens as well as create the kind of environment where people want to live and raise their family and invest money—you've savaged those at the altar of more benefits to the corporate side of our economic equation.

There's nothing wrong with making sure that we've got a corporate community that works and wants to do business here, but my goodness, you don't need to bend over and hand away everything that's in the treasury when we've already got a booming economy. You serve that same purpose when you cut our environmental laws. You serve that same purpose when you slash and cut our labour laws. You serve that same purpose when you, in an inconceivable way, damage the people who are most vulnerable in our society, who derive the least benefit from a community that was chosen—I believe five times—by the United Nations as the best place in the world to live.

We didn't get that because we slash more environmental protection laws than any other country in the world. We didn't get it because we treat our poor more shabbily than anyone else. We didn't get it because we freeze out people who earn minimum wage from any kind of a decent standard of living, because you froze their wages for over five and half years. I might point out parenthetically that the United States felt comfortable enough in raising their minimum wage twice. It certainly didn't affect their economy, and yet you've said that's part of your agenda. You attack and dismantle our public, universal health care system, the same in our education system, and somehow you seem to think that that's going to allow us to continue to have the title of being the best place in the world to live. It's not.

What exactly happened during this budget? First of all, if you're really, really wealthy, once again, thanks to Mike Harris, you're about to get a lot richer. If you made better than \$330,000 a year—and believe me, there is a growing number of people who do, not as many, mind you, as the number of poor that are growing in Ontario, but there is a growing number of people who are getting rich, thanks to your tax policies. These very comfortable—dare I say wealthy—individuals, at an income of \$330,000 a year, get \$10,000 a year out of this budget. That's just this budget; it's not even talking about the 30% tax break that this same group of Ontarians got, thanks to Mike Harris.

If you made \$30,000 in this budget, do you know what you get? A hundred bucks. So if you make \$330,000 a year, you get \$10,000—this is after-tax dollars, obviously, because the tax system is being changed—and \$100 if you make \$30,000. In fact, the top 5% of income earners—that's people who earn \$95,000 a year or more—are going to get \$733 million to share. That's 27% of all the money that's available in the tax cuts. So the top 5% get five times their fair share. How is that supposed to be good for the majority of Ontarians?

1550

Then this 200 bucks—I'm not going to spend too much time on that, because we've even got a separate bill coming for that one. That's going to be fun, because I'll tell you, if ever there's an issue that you called wrong and that there's a growing backlash against, it's this 200 bucks. First of all, let's point out again that the same pattern as before is in place with your 200 bucks. That would be that if you're the poorest in our society, you get the boot from this government. In this case, if you don't make enough money to pay \$200 or more in income tax, you don't get it. The formula provides that if you paid \$150, you'd get \$150, but believe me, if you're only paying \$150 in income tax, you're not making very much in this province, certainly not compared to the \$330,000-a-year people, who just got an extra \$10,000 a year. They'll get the full 200 bucks, no problem.

Some 20% of the population don't make enough money to receive the full 200 bucks. That's a million people, a million of the poorest people in Ontario, who don't get your \$200 giveaway. They are further, I argue,

discriminated against because that's a collective \$1 billion, if you total it up, that could have gone to education, to health care, to our social services. Because believe me, for these one million individuals, if there isn't a public health care system, they're not going to have health care. If there isn't a decent, highly skilled, credible education system that is public and funded adequately, their kids don't get an education. That's the way you treat Ontarians: You divide them up between those who have and those who don't.

What happened with health care, still the number one issue in Ontario? You put in one cent. For every dollar you gave in tax cuts, you put one cent into health care. For those who are interested in these things, that happens to work out to a 0.000002% increase in real money for health care. Billions of dollars—I feel like Carl Sagan—for the corporate sector and the very wealthy; 0.000002% for the public health care system that everyone else absolutely has to have. Quite frankly, those who have that much money could afford the private insurance if there wasn't a public system. That's not a problem for them, but for the rest of us in Ontario it's either a public health care system or nothing.

It does absolutely nothing to deal with the question of the nurse crisis that exists right now. There aren't enough nurses. You fired most of them who are gone, and they went to other jurisdictions looking for work. When you were called on your bungle, you decided to make an announcement that you're going to hire X thousands of nurses. The problem is that a study you paid for shows that by 2011 we will need between 60,000 and 90,000 nurses. You made no provision whatsoever in this budget for the hiring of those nurses. That's 8,000 a year. Where are they going to come from? How are they going to be paid? Do you care?

The hospitals are running deficits—unprecedented levels of deficits unheard of before—to the tune of \$1.8 billion right now. Nothing in this budget speaks to what you're going to do about that. Certainly there's not enough new money in the health care budget; 0.000002% doesn't take you too far when you're already starting \$1.8 billion in the hole for our hospital system.

Believe me, I know of what I speak. We went through a nightmare scenario in Hamilton around the Henderson hospital, and it was only because of the pressure that the Hamilton MPPs brought to bear in this place and the fact that you've got a by-election—I don't want to puff up my own self-importance or that of the other Hamilton members by saying that did it all. I think it played a significant role, but what really helped was the fact that you've got a by-election coming in our community and you didn't want the closure of Henderson hospital wrapped around the neck of your Tory candidate.

In Hamilton we know all about hospital deficits and what they mean, and to their eternal credit, I say this to the board, given the amount of hits they're taking these days—and I understand unfortunately that Scott Rowan has stepped down, and I consider that to be a severe blow to our health care system. I think Scott Rowan did the

best possible job anyone could do under extremely difficult circumstances and he's going to be missed. They made the decision that they were going to make sure that the service delivery in the emergency ward and in the wards and rooms across that hospital came first and your budget cuts came second. I say bravo to them.

The same thing with St Peter's Hospital. I asked a question today of the health minister. It sounds like we might get the assurance we want. I went over and talked to her after. I'll be pleased when I hear her articulate very clearly the quid pro quo that there will be no beds closed in St Peter's until such time as these new chronic care beds elsewhere in the community are built and in place and ready to be filled. If we hear that, then that's at least something. But bear in mind that it's a lousy decision, a stupid decision to make in the first place, to shut down St Peter's. It's one of the finest chronic care hospitals in the entire country and it happens to have the lowest per day cost of any chronic care hospital in all of Ontario. But you're shutting it down. So even if you give us the extension we want, you still haven't done what should be done for the seniors in the Hamilton area, who by the way support St Peter's solidly. I support the fact that before today's answer was given in the House, the board had directed that patients were to be admitted after April 30 into St Peter's Hospital even though the government wasn't providing one penny of funding. Bravo, I say to that board of directors and that management that said the health care needs of Hamilton's seniors come first and Mike Harris's phony budget numbers and deficit slashing come second.

I'll tell you, quite frankly, that the school board did that not long ago, joining with other school boards when you tried to force them to shut down hundreds and hundreds of inner schools across the province. They all united together and you backed down. Bullies usually do when they're finally confronted with something they can't overcome. They just turn and run. We all know that from our schoolyard days. I hope more and more boards stick together at the school level and at the hospital level and unite together, because if they do—there are only a handful of you in here; you can't take on and overrun every single board for every education system and every hospital, and for that matter municipality, in the province of Ontario. As much as you're the most highly centralized government we've ever had, even you can't do that.

I've only got a couple of minutes left. In terms of education in the elementary and secondary system, for a government that says they are focusing on "student-focused funding," you have effectively cut \$810 per student per year since 1995—thanks a lot—and further cuts in this budget. Billions of dollars for the very wealthy and the corporate sector when they're already making record profits—that's what's so obscene. It's not as if they aren't already making profits. It's good that they're strong, it's good that they're having profits and creating jobs, this is good, but why on earth does there

have to be such greed here? Why so much more when there are so many other people who are hurting?

1600

Let me say directly to a lot of people who look at the headlines, an average working middle-class family, and say, "You know, this is pretty good. This is going to strengthen the corporate sector and all those things," look, that's all hype. Where else would you find a scenario, if you stood back with a blank slate and said, "We've got the best economy we've ever had in the history of this province, we've said debt reduction is the number one priority," and you go and borrow another \$13 billion to pay for your tax cuts? You give away billions of taxpayer dollars, because that's what they are; the tax cuts are tax expenditures, and you are giving that money to the corporations at a time when they are already at record levels of profit. We have more and more people insecure about their future, worried whether they are going to have a job 10 years from now when they are maybe in their early 50s, saying, "Where am I going to be in 10 years if my job is gone?" or "I'm already laid off. What have you done for me in this budget? Where am I going to find somewhere to go? My kids are not getting the education they should get, that they used to get. The health care system isn't the way it used to be."

How does all that add up to being in the best interests of the broader society when the biggest thing you're proud of is giving taxpayers' money to corporations and individuals who are already having the best fiscal years of their lives? Yet, at the same time, at the other end of the spectrum there are more and more people who are in poverty, and those numbers are going up. It's up 118% since 1989—huge numbers since you came into power.

This is not a budget for Ontarians. This is a budget for your corporate buddies, and that needs to be said in this place.

The Deputy Speaker: Questions and comments?

Mr Wayne Wettlaufer (Kitchener Centre): The member for Hamilton West is very critical of a budget that has been favoured by more than 60% of the people of this province. In fact, 60% of the people of this province have indicated they were so much in favour of it that if there were an election held today, they would vote for the Progressive Conservative Party.

Let's look at something he said. He said, for instance, that people of the province do not want the \$200 rebate on their taxes. It's interesting. Bruce Trussler from Kitchener wrote a letter to the editor of the Kitchener-Waterloo Record dated May 5 where he said:

"If you ask people if they want 200 bucks or good, affordable, sustainable health care, they will take the latter in every instance, Ontario Liberal leader Dalton McGuinty says.

"I did an informal poll of 14 people. The replies were unanimous—show me the money.

"How the leader of a major political party can make such a statement is beyond me. It's time the Liberal Party looked seriously at finding a new leader."

Obviously, it's not just the Liberals who are saying this, it's also the NDP, but the important point to keep in mind is that we are not just giving back the \$200; we are also increasing the spending in health care. We have advanced the spending in health care by two full years from what we said in the Blueprint, the document on which we ran in the last election, when we said we would increase health care spending to \$22.7 billion by the end of our mandate. That will be done within two years from last June. This year we're talking an increase to \$22 billion. Not only that, but we've increased spending on special education; we've increased by 10%. That's not enough for you.

If we did everything the Liberals and the NDP say we should, spent everything the way they would do it, then we would have a deficit instead of—guess what?—a surplus, the first surplus we've had in this province in 30 years.

Mrs Leona Dombrowsky (Hastings-Frontenac-Lennox and Addington): I thought the member for Hamilton West raised some very valid points about the budget, the first balanced budget in 10 years, and I'm very happy to respond to some of the points that I thought he made rather well.

I was interested in his comments about the dependence of Ontario's economy on the great growth that there is in the United States. Certainly my colleague the member for Scarborough-Agincourt has very regularly brought to the attention of our caucus and to the attention of this House that as a province we are especially dependent on the healthy market south of the border. I think it's really unfortunate and somewhat foolhardy that the members of the government would neglect the significant impact a healthy American economy has on Ontario's economy. To present so regularly in this House that it has been solely from their tax cuts that we are enjoying the growth in Ontario today I think is really quite irresponsible.

When one considers the developed countries in the world and the percentage of the GDP in exports, I think we need to pay some significant attention to the fact that in Ontario 54% of our GDP depends on offshore activity. When one considers other developed countries, like the United States, only 11% of their GDP is from offshore investments or offshore expenditures, and in Japan, 12%. I think it's important for members on the other side of the House to appreciate that the growth has not necessarily been from their tax cuts but from the very healthy economy. I'm very pleased that the member from Hamilton West raised that this afternoon.

Ms Marilyn Churley (Broadview-Greenwood): I want to congratulate the member for Hamilton West for pointing out to the House and to those watching the fact that we have a growing gap in this country, and in this province in particular, between the very wealthy and the poor and even the middle class. That is documented information. That isn't just coming from the NDP, it's a fact. It's a reality. My God, if there is ever a time to do something about that, it is now in good economic times. That is common sense.

What is interesting and what people don't talk about very much is that when the NDP was in power, yes, there was a huge deficit, which ironically would have been paid back years before this government paid it back, because they've been borrowing money to give a tax cut. What we were doing during the worst recession since the 1930s was not giving it to big corporations and rich people; we were building a cushion to help people, those at the very bottom and in the middle, to buy and have enough to eat and have a house to live in during a very bad recession.

This government had the luck to come into power when the economy had already begun to improve again, and what did they do? Instead of raising the minimum wage in good economic times and sharing some of that wealth a little more, they didn't raise the minimum wage, and in every budget there are more and more giveaways to the corporate world that is making huge profits. There is something wrong with this picture, and that's what the member from Hamilton West is trying to point out. Even the US has raised the minimum wage twice.

I couldn't believe the cuts to the environment. In this budget, again in good economic times, when over \$5 billion has been given to the corporations in this province, the Ministry of the Environment was cut. Up to \$100 million has been cut now. It's outrageous.

Hon Jim Wilson (Minister of Energy, Science and Technology): I appreciate the opportunity to comment on the member for Hamilton West's views on the budget. He's critical of the budget. If we look back at his time in office, everybody in this province, rich or poor, paid more taxes. In Mr Eves's budget of last year, 600,000 low-income people were dropped from the tax rolls totally and more people in this budget were dropped from the tax rolls. The fact of the matter is, the honourable member says that people making \$300,000-plus a year pay \$30,000 less in income tax. Nothing could be further from the truth. In fact, I as a cabinet minister make about \$110,000 and I have yet to receive a tax cut from this government. You forget to mention all taxes in the fair share health levy, which adds 12% tax to anyone earning over \$100,000 in the province, or the 3% surtax which we haven't begun to deal with in this province.

If you read the economic papers, if you read the Bay Street papers in response to this budget and if you read the social papers in this province, every single one of them said this was the most progressive budget seen in decades in this province. People at the lower income get a much larger tax break than anyone at the higher income. It's an average of 30%—slightly more than that, actually—benefiting those at the low end in the 50% to 60% range and those at the high end not at all. I wish the honourable members would stop spreading stuff that simply isn't factual and stick to the facts, give people the entire facts of the entire budget and look at the progressive nature of this budget. Not only that, it pumped money back into priority areas like health care, like education, and that benefits all the people of Ontario. It's a terrific budget.

My colleague the Honourable Ernie Eves should be proud, and is proud I'm sure, that he was able to deliver that budget, correct the sins of the past with these staggering deficits, which penalized everyone in every income bracket and penalized their children and grandchildren, and at the same time make sure those who are less fortunate than ourselves are either taken off the tax rolls or their taxes are reduced significantly.

1610

The Deputy Speaker: The member for Hamilton West has two minutes to respond.

Mr Christopherson: I want to thank the members for Simcoe-Grey, Broadview-Greenwood, Sarnia-Lambton and Kitchener Centre, who listened and commented.

To the minister from Simcoe-Grey who was on his feet last, let me just say that I'm not surprised you want us to stop saying these things. The reality is that we don't pull these numbers out of a hat. We do the same as you. We go to experts in the field, and we ask them, "Take a look at what this budget means, apply it to people at different levels of income and tell us what it says."

You can run away from it all you want, but the fact of the matter is that if you make \$330,000 a year or more you're going to get a \$10,000 benefit, and if you earn \$30,000 you're going to get \$100. You can play with percentages and talk about the fact that the poorest people get the biggest benefit because they get a higher percentage, but in real dollars that you need when you walk into the store you're a whole lot better off under your regime to be very wealthy than very poor. It is very bad luck on your part to be a poor person in Mike Harris's Ontario, because not only do you not get placed first, you're not even in the running.

I want to say to that minister and to the member from Kitchener Centre, particularly when he said—I can't believe he told this. You went and did a personal survey and all these people told you, "Show me the money." So you're telling me that all those people unanimously said, especially if they have a decent income: "Yes, give me the 200 bucks. I don't give a damn about anybody else or anything else."

That's a whole lot different than what's happening in Hamilton and elsewhere, where people are saying: "You know what? This 200 bucks doesn't matter, but my health care system does. How about putting \$1 billion there? How about putting \$1 billion in the education system?" You know what? That \$1 billion would just begin to repair the damage you've done to both.

The Deputy Speaker: Further debate.

Mrs Tina R. Molinari (Thornhill): It's an honour to speak today on behalf of my constituents in Thornhill on budget 2000. This government and its finance minister have much to be proud of with the introduction of this budget. The budget is balanced, as promised. The net debt of the province has been reduced, as promised. Taxes are going down, as promised. Health care is going up, also as promised. We are living in prosperous times, and Ontarians all over this province will share in the prosperity.

The reaction to this budget in Thornhill has been very positive. From an editorial in the newspaper that serves my constituency comes the following quote:

"It is difficult to be negative about Ontario's balanced budget, a fitting way to start the new millennium.

"With its commitment to giving cash back to the people who earn it, its commitment to streamlining the operations of institutions, agencies and boards, its commitment to re-allocating funds to where they do the most good ... the government is simply making good on promises made to the people of Ontario. It is a buoyant time. The economy is rolling. Finance Minister Ernie Eves and his team have worked diligently to provide Ontario with a sound fiscal footing for today—and one on which our children can build a secure future.

"The finance minister announced an increase in spending on special education, \$140 million, and promised to reduce average class sizes in kindergarten to grade 3 ... he has allocated \$5 million to launch a prevention program to help identify children who may be at risk of physical or emotional abuse or neglect.

"There's \$300 million for arenas, golf courses and tourist attractions, a cash infusion that helps fuel the economies of small communities.

"Small businesses will see tax cuts. Major corporations will see their taxes drop over the next six years. There is money for highway development, for programs to help teens with eating disorders, for programs to encourage disadvantaged children to take up sports. There is money to address the problem of child prostitution.

"To be able to do all these things for the people of Ontario, while returning some of their money to them ... is cause for celebration."

That's the editorial in the local paper.

The people of Thornhill are very positive about this budget. As their representative, I congratulate the finance minister on his vision, his courage and his determination to deliver this budget to the people of Ontario.

As I speak to this House, there are many areas of the budget I could focus on, but in the time I have allotted I would like to focus on three main parts, each of which is very important to me and the constituents of Thornhill: health care, education and post-secondary education.

On health care: When the Harris government was elected in 1995, health care spending in Ontario was brought to \$17.4 billion. Truly, this was a lot of money, but Ontarians, including those in Thornhill, said it wasn't enough. Since 1995, health care spending has increased every single year, despite the federal Liberal government shirking its responsibilities. When joint federal-provincial programs were introduced several decades ago, one of the founding principles was that both levels of government would co-operate, each funding fully one half of the program. This is the essence of co-operative federalism. As the federal Liberals slashed funding on this essential service to the bone, our government increased real-dollar funding. This budget brings health care spending up to \$22 billion. Of course, this doesn't include any of the capital expenditures that this govern-

ment is undertaking in order to improve health care delivery in this province. When these funds are included, health care spending is far higher than ever before.

In the same editorial from the community newspaper which serves the Thornhill community comes the following comment: "The health care system is seeing an infusion of about \$300 million to deliver more nurses and doctors.... The province is promising free tuition for medical students who agree to practise in northern Ontario, where doctor shortages are having a critical impact on quality of care. There's money for a plan to prevent stroke and money to help foreign-trained nurses and other health care professionals meet Ontario's licensing standards. Health care is the lion's share of the provincial budget at \$22 billion."

This government has chosen to invest money in true reform, modernization and genuinely improved service. It is clear to me and it is clear to many of my constituents in Thornhill that this government is taking the higher ground and is genuinely trying to improve health care in this province. This government is pursuing meaningful reform in the health care sector. We live in the 21st century. We need 21st-century solutions to 21st-century problems. This budget is a means toward that end.

Primary care reform and expansion has been a priority of this government. Recent announcements serve to confirm that. The budget provides ample funds for this project. It is important to note the significance of the agreement reached between the Ministry of Health and the Ontario Medical Association as well as the Ontario Nurses' Association. Labour peace in this vital sector is more secure, and all of the relevant stakeholders can now be brought to the table to ensure the continued improvements of our health care system for all Ontarians, including those I represent in Thornhill.

This budget has truly helped hospitals in the Thornhill area meet the challenges of growth. York region has been growing for years. The size of the community served by the York Central Hospital increases by over 14,000 people per year. York Central's patient cases have increased by almost 9% per year. It has been the fastest-growing hospital in Ontario for the last four years. Something had to be done. As hospital president Frank Lussing noted, the hospital is trying to make up for 20 years of chronic underfunding. He pointed out that the ministry is indeed listening to the needs of hospitals.

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The ministry and the government listened to what Frank Lussing and other hospital administrators had to say. As a result, the budget of York Central Hospital will increase by 15% this year. This expansion has allowed a new vision for the hospital to be developed. This vision will in turn lead to excellence in patient care in York region through a coordinated network of health services.

This government clearly has a vision for health care. The vision is not to rely exclusively on old methods. It is clear that the system, though staffed by dedicated people who care about their work, is not perfect in every respect. As the government, it is our responsibility to constantly

try to improve the delivery of health care in this province. My constituents in Thornhill demand it. I am certain that the people represented in this Legislative Assembly demand it as well.

This government's vision for health care is a system that is accessible to all Ontarians, a system which provides a seamless network of health care providers for Ontarians who need these services, one which addresses serious health issues such as cancer care, cardiac care and kidney disease. This government is one which is determined to provide alternatives, such as toll-free phone lines for health advice, information and referral. Technology is improving and changing rapidly. We truly live in dynamic times. Ontarians demand and deserve a health care system that is everything it needs to be.

On education, in the riding of Thornhill, there are many citizens who send their children to schools that are not in the public or Catholic boards of education. These schools fall outside of the Ministry of Education and, as a result, the children of these schools don't have access to the full range of services that their colleagues in public or Catholic boards enjoy.

For example, until this government's announcement in this budget, special-needs children at denominational schools did not have their medical requirements met by either the Ministry of Education or the Ministry of Health. This budget, this government, however, is providing such funding. The Ministry of Health is going to work to eliminate unfair barriers for the parents of special-needs children who want their children to pursue faith-based education. As the finance minister commented during the budget introduction, "It is the fair and equitable thing to do."

Special needs is a concern of many of my constituents in Thornhill. I am very pleased to now be able to tell them that this government has listened to them and will be acting to address those concerns. This investment is part of the larger commitment of our government to children enrolled in special-education programs; \$140 million is invested in this area. This includes specially trained teachers, reading clinics and reading buddy programs to improve the skills of students just entering the education system. This also includes funding for students with speech and language disorders and learning disabilities, as well as increasing the number of specialist teachers and professional support. This part of the budget is more than a step in the right direction. It is a giant leap toward fulfilling a vision that this government has for education in this province.

There are further indications from Thornhill that the reactions to this budget are strongly favourable. Mr John Sabo, the treasurer of the York Catholic District School Board, commented: "We are extremely pleased with the announcement of additional funding. Clearly, it will help alleviate many of the pressures we are experiencing in our board."

Further, Mr Bill Hogarth, the director of the York Region District School Board, said: "The budget is bursting with money for education. It is great. It will

certainly help this board. As you know, with the growth in (the number of) students in the region, there is now more money to hire additional teachers. Also, there is new money for reading assistance and special education. The budget is great news for our board and the education system.”

Government spending on education is not merely an expense today; it is an investment for tomorrow. Combined with early years programs that the minister for children, in response to the McCain-Mustard report, has announced, this budget is helping to ensure our children start their lives with every possible advantage that will help them live their lives to the fullest.

In post-secondary education, we are encouraged by the \$742 million in infrastructure funding that has been made available through the SuperBuild Growth Fund to help our colleges and universities maintain and even enhance their quality. It is no accident that three Ontario universities are among the top five medical/doctoral institutions in the Maclean’s annual ranking. This government is proud of all of the fine educational institutions and the great work accomplished by their professors, students and administrators.

The president of the University of Toronto, Robert Prichard, was quoted in the Toronto Star last week. When asked about his reaction to the budget promise of close to \$1 billion for research over the next 10 years, he commented that, “(this) is serious money that will have one heck of an impact on our ability to compete internationally.”

The government is working to secure the future of post-secondary education in this province. As the minister announced on April 28, students will soon have unprecedented choice when they make their post-secondary selections. An additional \$286 million in SuperBuild investments to expand and renew our colleges and universities will support an additional 24 capital projects that will create 15,587 more spaces for students.

More students than ever are attending Ontario’s post-secondary institutions, and our government is making the necessary changes to accommodate them. Students recognize that college and university education is a valuable investment in their future through the development of skills that will help them in life. In acknowledging this demographic change, the government is providing funding for universities that increase student spaces.

In the last three decades, there has been no capital investment in colleges and universities as large as this government has made. Some 73,000 new permanent student spaces have been assured, guaranteeing space for every qualified and motivated student in this province. Our children and grandchildren will have access to the higher education that will make them better workers and better citizens—truly essential in a global society.

It is truly an exciting time to be involved in this sector. Not only are buildings being approved and constructed and new student spaces being made available, but also ground-breaking research is being conducted at colleges and universities. This budget will further facilitate this

research. The Ontario Innovation Trust was endowed \$500 million—truly an important investment. This fund is intended for research infrastructure at Ontario institutions such as hospitals, colleges and universities. The purpose is to provide and develop more laboratory spaces and high-technology equipment in order to support research in many health-related fields.

There are six high schools in the riding of Thornhill: Thornhill Secondary School, Thornlea Secondary School, Vaughan Secondary School, Westmount Collegiate, St Robert Catholic High School and St Elizabeth Catholic High School. This government has demonstrated its continuing commitment to these students, and will be providing additional capital funds to colleges and universities, which will allow students to pursue affordable and accessible post-secondary education. I am so very proud to be part of a government that is not only ensuring the success of the economy today but is making the necessary investment to ensure the success of the economy tomorrow.

Before I conclude, I would like to read another column in one of the local papers, by Tracy Kibble. It’s entitled, “If You Don’t Want Your \$200, You Can Always Give It Away.” I’ve heard people in the House talk about the \$200. I quote from the article:

“There are many families out there who could really use a \$200 cheque—or \$400, if both parents work—in the fall, just as school as beginning. It could buy you snowsuits for a couple of kids and maybe even some boots, hats and mittens. It could replace worn tires on your car or pay much-needed repairs. Two hundred dollars could purchase a new bed for your child or some new clothes or supplies. Saying the money is not enough to make a difference for hard-working families is arrogant.”

She goes on to talk about how many different people have commented on the \$200 return, and in the end she says: “The rest of us, however, need our money and will gladly accept it with a smile. Thank you, Mike Harris.”

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In conclusion, I would like to congratulate the Minister of Finance on this extraordinary budget. It contains meaningful initiatives that will enhance the standard of living for Ontarians and will continue to provide the environment that will encourage future economic growth. This budget proves that Ontario will continue to become a great place to live, work and raise a family.

This budget is the first of its kind in many years. I am confident, and my constituents in Thornhill are confident, that Ontario is on the right track. They look forward to seeing how the money that was allocated in the budget will be implemented throughout all of the areas that the money has been allocated to: through education, through health, through tax cuts. All of the communities in Thornhill and all of the residents really appreciate and thank the minister for a wonderful budget.

The Acting Speaker (Mr Michael A. Brown):
Questions and comments?

Mrs Dombrowsky: I'm delighted to have a few moments to comment on what the honourable member from Thornhill has raised in the House today. I found it interesting when she was quoting local media. She obviously lives in a very different part of the province than I do. It's certainly not what all of the media reports in my part of the world presented to the reading public, and I thought I might just take a few minutes to read to the members opposite what was in my local media:

"This week, I tuned in as Ernie Eves was reminding us all how happy we should be at his Tory government giving to health care, giving taxpayers a tax cut and giving, giving, giving. Around him, Mike Harris and the rest of the government side of the Legislature clapped and honked like trained seals.

"You, good taxpayer, are expected to be grateful for the economic foresight of this benevolent government as it saves, saves, saves you taxes and spends, spends, spends tax dollars on health and education infrastructure and rural northern communities. The above-mentioned shopping list just happens to be the same raft of people, things and places the Tories starved, slashed and eviscerated in the first five years of their revolution."

That's what is being reported in my part of the world, ladies and gentlemen.

I also found it interesting when Mr John Sabo was quoted with regard to dollars that are being spent in education. A quote was attributed to Mr Sabo that it would "help alleviate many of the pressures we were experiencing in our board." I would suggest to the members of the government that you have responsibility not to help alleviate the problem but to alleviate it, period. That is your responsibility as a government, and I thank Mr Sabo for the comment he gave to the member.

Ms Shelley Martel (Nickel Belt): I'm pleased to provide some comments in response to the speech made by the member from Thornhill. Since she focused on health and education, I'll do the same.

It's always a good idea to read the fine print of the budget, to go to the budget papers, because then you get a true look at what the government has really done. If you go to the budget papers and look at the estimates, which we will all end up voting on in this House at some point in the future, it's really clear that despite the government rhetoric around a commitment to health care, that wasn't demonstrated in terms of increased investment in health care. The increase in the health budget from last year to this year is a mere 0.0000002%. That's what the increase actually is. In terms of real dollars, the actual increase is \$49 million. When you compare that to the amount of unanticipated revenue that the government brought in last year, which was \$5.3 billion, \$49 million is hardly a significant share of the windfall. The government has no basis whatsoever to say they've made a major investment in health care. It's \$49 million out of a windfall of \$5.3 billion.

If you look at the same estimates and you go to the education budget and look at the investment in education, you will see that the investment this year is actually less

than last year—\$104 million less this year. So despite the government's rhetoric again and despite the windfall in revenue, that's hardly a sound and increased investment in education. The government is going to spend \$104 million less this year to educate our young students. That's not an investment at all.

Mr O'Toole: I want to extend my compliments and congratulations to the member from Thornhill for a very thoughtful review of a very important and I might say landmark budget for the people of Ontario.

On a more personal note, when you look at it from real people's perspective—I think that's what we all have to do, drive this down to, "How does it affect my constituents?" hard-working taxpayers who have been overtaxed for many years. I think all people here would agree with that general observation. I look at real people like Pat Crossman. He's a self-employed person. "It would be nice to knock a few bills down," the 35-year-old father said." This is a case of not just the tax cuts but the \$200 which, as the member from Thornhill said, will allow them to make choices, not some government bureaucrat making choices, about how to spend their tax money. As elected representatives, we're just the temporary custodians here.

"Mrs Crossman, a stay-at-home mom, was happy to hear the province is willing to put more money toward schools. 'If you get these kids off to a good start, it really helps them through the higher grades,' she explained." Mr Crossman is the owner of a small pizza store in Kanata.

If you extend it to general terms, it is really trying to provide a means of getting the taxpayers—"A couple with two children and a net income of \$60,000 would save \$1,870 in Ontario's personal income tax and more than 40% more next year. By contrast, this family will save \$750, only 9% in the federal-provincial tax savings portion announced in Finance Minister Paul Martin's budget. Ontario's tax cuts would be more than twice the amount and four times the percentage of the federal tax savings." So you can see the evidence is in.

Mr Dominic Agostino (Hamilton East): I rise to respond to the comments made by the member from Thornhill. First of all I think what is really significant about this budget is more what is not there rather than what it contains. There was a real missed opportunity here by the government.

The previous speaker said, "How does this impact your constituents?" Let me tell you how it impacts my constituents in Hamilton East. Many of my constituents who live in the shadow of big industry, who live in the shadow of steel mills, are impacted by the environment. Their kids have asthma and can't go out and play on a number of days in the year when you have smog. Seniors who have heart problems are affected by air quality. Let me tell you what it does for those folks: absolutely nothing. You've cut the Ministry of the Environment again, totally abandoning any commitment you had or previous governments certainly had to the environment.

How does it impact my constituents who can't get affordable housing? As my colleague David Caplan has time and again said in this House, you've gotten out of the business of helping to ensure that there's affordable housing. How does it help those constituents? How does it help a single mom with a couple of kids who is living in rundown conditions in my riding because there is no affordable housing, not only in Hamilton but anywhere across this province? You've gotten out of that business. What does this budget do for that individual?

What does this budget do for the hard-working steelworker in my riding who has kids in university, who sees tuition fees going through the roof and who knows he cannot afford to continue to pay those tuition fees, who knows his son or daughter is going to come out of university with a huge debt? What it does is absolutely nothing for those folks. So it impacts average Ontarians in a very negative way.

You had a glorious opportunity. You brag about a balanced budget but you fail to tell us that, with the exception of the disgraced government of British Columbia, everyone else did it before you did. You came to the dance a little late. The band was wrapping up and going home by the time you showed up. But you brag about that. The tragedy here is that in good economic times a real opportunity can make a real impact on people's lives in many ways, to help people, everyday Ontarians, and you blew that opportunity and you wasted it away. It's a real shame and a tragedy that that has happened.

The Acting Speaker: The member for Thornhill has up to two minutes to reply.

1640

Mrs Molinari: I'd like to thank the member from Hastings-Frontenac-Lennox and Addington, the member from Nickel Belt, the member from Durham and the member from Hamilton East.

I want to speak first about the comments made by the member from Hastings-Frontenac-Lennox and Addington about the media reports. Certainly the communities are different and certainly all of the communities in the province differ. This government looks at putting the money and the resources where the needs are, and that is reflected in this budget: Where there is growth and there is need, that's the area that has to be addressed.

The member for Hamilton East commented about what's not there. Well, this is a budget and there is so much there that people have commented to me that this appears to be an election budget, and there's no election. This tells me that this government is committed to doing the right thing and is putting the resources where they're needed.

I want to talk about universities. That was also raised by the member for Hamilton East. This government is doing more for post-secondary education than any other government. There are 24 more capital projects that are being introduced.

Mr Caplan: Less than in 1995.

Mrs Molinari: If the member would listen to the announcement, he would recognize that those are very

positive things. But unfortunately the members opposite are there only to oppose and they don't look at what benefits there are in the announcements being made. We're doing more to provide for post-secondary education. Recently we have engaged in consultation to provide more opportunities for students who are seeking post-secondary education.

This is a government that recognizes that we need to move forward. We cannot stay in the ideas of the past—

Mr Caplan: What does that mean? That doesn't mean anything.

Mrs Molinari: —because they don't work. This is the 21st century. We need to be moving, in the 21st century, ideas that benefit people in the 21st century.

The Acting Speaker: I would remind members that heckling is always out of order, as the member for Don Valley East knows, and he needs to be in his seat.

Further debate?

Mr Rick Bartolucci (Sudbury): I feel privileged to be able to stand here and represent my constituents, and in fact northern Ontario, in discussing this budget. I will share my time with the members from Hastings-Frontenac-Lennox and Addington and Prince Edward-Hastings. If you look at this from a northern perspective, you will see that what the government has been saying is anything but reality in northern Ontario. This isn't a successful budget for northerners. In fact, it robs northerners of some of our basic rights and erodes our opportunities even further. I'd like to outline a few of the ways it does that.

First of all, the \$200 rebate that some of the people of Ontario are going to get hasn't gone over the way this government would have wanted it to go over. If there was one thing that was on the minds of people I talked to this weekend, it was the \$200 but, more important, it was the reason behind the \$200. It hasn't been accepted as a dividend. More often I heard the comment, "This is not so much a dividend, it's a payoff, and we're not buying the payoff." So if the government's motive was to try to get some of those people they've alienated back onside, it has not been successful. Everyone I spoke to talked about how valuable that \$1 billion would have been, had it been placed in different areas such as health care and education. Most of my constituents talked about the almost monumental task our local community has in raising \$45 million for this government's health services restructuring report, which imposed one hospital system on the people of Sudbury and northeastern Ontario as our referral centre. They thought that \$1 billion could have been better spent, without any question of a doubt.

If you look at the inequities in the budget when it comes to the northern health travel grant for cancer patients, you see that in order to fix the problem, all this government has to do is give a \$3-million allocation to the health travel grant for cancer patients and the problem will be solved. There would be equity and balance and fairness between southern Ontario people who suffer from cancer and northern Ontario people who suffer from cancer and have to travel.

Just so the people of Ontario understand, because it's important, we've been debating this. Certainly, David Ramsay brought this up in the House two weeks ago and the members from Thunder Bay-Atikokan and Thunder Bay-Superior North have brought this up in debate. The member from Algoma-Manitoulin has brought this up in petitions and in questions over the course of the last several weeks. The difference is simple: Northern Ontario residents who require the travel grant get partial transportation costs. Southern Ontario people who have to travel in order to treatment for cancer get travel costs, accommodation, meals and, in some instances, the ability to have a partner travel with them. Fundamentally, we in the north feel that that's unfair and discriminatory. The chair of the northeast region of Cancer Care Ontario is the vice-chair of Cancer Care Ontario, Gerry Loughheed Jr, and he most aptly put it: "a form of health care apartheid." He is someone who knows cancer. He doesn't call names generally, but he is very, very concerned about this inequity.

In order to deal with this inequity, the government would simply have to put \$3 million aside. That's not asking too much. When we talk about the economic boom and recovery that's supposedly taking place across northern Ontario, that isn't the case in Sudbury; 17.3% of Sudburians live below the poverty level. That's horrible and this government should be ashamed of that statistic. In fact, the 8.5% unemployment rate in Sudbury is several points above the provincial average, several points above the Canadian average. You know, northern Ontario has always been several points above when it comes to the unemployment rate. When you look at child poverty rising by 118%, food bank usage increasing by 258%, it is very, very evident that this government's budget this year has been a failure for northern Ontario.

The Acting Speaker: The member for Hastings-Frontenac-Lennox and Addington.

Mrs Dombrowsky: I'm delighted to stand in the House and share with the members of the government who would suggest that their fiscal plan for the next year is going to place Ontario on the road to prosperity. I certainly represent a very large part of eastern Ontario and I have to say that in my part of Ontario there are very grave concerns about the lack of attention that this government has provided to some of the very important activities that occur there.

I was listening very closely when the Minister of Finance delivered the budget and I was most disappointed and very seriously concerned that in the minister's 15- to 20-minute dissertation about his plan he did not once mention the word "environment." In my part of Ontario, our environment is very important to us. When I consider important issues, I hear from my constituents regularly about environmental issues. They're concerned about the fact that water-taking permits in this province are given so very freely and without consideration. Why? Because the Ministry of the Environment does not have the resources at its disposal to pay attention, to give the consideration, to do the background, to provide the

quality service in that area. There's an important clean up of the Moira River watershed underway and there's a real worry that there may not be sufficient resources designated to that very worthy project.

There is a proposed dump expansion. In eastern Ontario, where there are a lot of small rural communities and many, many farmers who work very hard to provide all of us with the food we eat, more and more of our agricultural land is being taken for landfill. Yet we don't see any additional resources directed toward the Ministry of the Environment. In fact, the Ministry of the Environment will receive 9% less funding than it did last year—9% less at a time when I would suggest that our environment should be very near, if not at, the top of our list of priorities as a province.

The members across the way have indicated that we need 21st-century ideas. We need to get with it, get ready for the 21st century. I ask you, members of the government, what will be left for those people in the 21st century if we don't work conscientiously to preserve it?

1650

I am very concerned that there is not one additional cent of revenue for agriculture. There is a change in the way farmers do business with regard to point-of-sale tax provisions within the budget, which I know will be welcomed by farmers in my riding, but it goes nowhere near far enough in addressing the many needs that they bring to my attention very regularly. I would suggest that when we're thinking about the 21st century and the wonderful growth that we're planning for in Ontario, how are you planning to feed them? Where do you think we're going to get the food if we do not invest in our agriculture industry?

By the way, while very regularly we hear about the great industrial and commercial growth in the province, the second-largest industry in Ontario is agriculture. How do you plan to sustain the community that we are building in the province if we do not adequately support the agriculture industry? I was again most disappointed that with the \$5.3 billion additional revenues that the government had not planned on, they could not find a little bit more money for the farmers who feed you every day.

If I can go back to what is presented in the media, and we tend to focus regularly on what's in the national media and the media in this part of the world, I'm just turning to one of the articles in my local media: "After Slashing and Burning, Tories Don't Deserve Gratitude." So please don't stand on the other side of the House and suggest to the people in my area, after they have suffered significantly the closures of many government offices that provided important services to the people in Hastings-Frontenac-Lennox and Addington, "We'll give you a \$200 cheque in the mail and you should be happy." People in eastern Ontario are not quite that shallow. They understand that when they pay taxes, they receive services in return for that, and they very clearly understand that now those services are not there for them to access any longer. It has placed a significant burden on them.

I believe I have a responsibility to try and have the members of the government understand that the plan is not broad in its focus; it's very narrow. Geographically, members on this side of House represent a large part of the province that missed the focus. You need to turn your attention to my part of the world and many other parts of Ontario that didn't benefit in terms of improved services.

We're hearing about the northern health care services. People who have cancer will continue to be penalized in this province because of where they live. How very sad it is to think that in the very best economic times that we've had—ever, in the history of the province—people continue to endure that type of discrimination.

I'm very happy to share the rest of this time with my colleague from Prince Edward-Hastings.

Mr Ernie Parsons (Prince Edward-Hastings): The budget presentation last week was a wonderful show. But that's what it was, a show. It reminds me of the old political adage, "Where there's smoke, there's mirrors." There has certainly been a lot of concentration on that \$200 that's going to come back.

There is a phrase used in US politics that refers to "the permanent campaign." I believe this \$200 is part of the permanent campaign. We saw it the last term with this government, when they used \$107 million, which should have gone to hospitals or education, on advertisements in the media.

This is a similar sort of thing: Take the money, give it to the people, send them a letter saying it's coming, put ads in the paper saying it's coming, send it and then put ads in the paper asking if they got it. What better way to use public money to publicize a particular party? It's \$1 billion that most people, certainly in rural Ontario—and I concur with the previous speaker, the member for Hastings-Frontenac-Lennox and Addington, who views it as \$1 billion that should more properly have gone into expenditures.

This government likes to espouse how much it is running the province like a business. What business would overcharge people and then give them the money back after, meanwhile wasting \$3.5 million on postage and administration? The \$200 comes as a result of the people of Ontario being overcharged \$1 billion on their taxes. Certainly, the initial reaction is, "I like the money." Who wouldn't want a cheque sent to them? But that \$200, when it comes to someone, if they need a hospital bed, they can't take that \$200 and get a space in a hospital with it. They can't take that \$200 and get some special education for their child. They can't take that \$200 and get cancer treatment. The strength of that money, the \$1 billion, would come from us collectively delivering the services that the people want. I've not yet heard people in my community say: "You know, the hospital system is too good here. We need to cut back on that." I'm hearing quite the opposite. I'm hearing people talking about being unable to get beds.

Certainly it is a wise political move to give the \$200 back, but the reality for the people of Ontario is that someone pickpocketed our money and now they want

thanks for giving it back to us. I think most would have preferred the money go into something special or simply not be collected. It's grossly inefficient.

The people who are advising the government aren't living in the real world. Unfortunately, the world of politics in Toronto can often not be the real world.

Mr Caplan: Conrad Black.

Mr Parsons: For Conrad Black, it may make some sense to do that.

It would also be nice, though, if we stopped referring to everyone in Ontario as taxpayers, because there are people in Ontario who are not taxpayers but are still citizens. I would prefer we talked about the citizens of Ontario, rather than just taxpayers.

I'm watching where some of the cuts have been made and some of the announcements. I said earlier that the budget was a brilliant piece of public relations, but once you sit down and start to crunch the numbers—

Interjection.

Mr Parsons: Well, I think about some businesses that will advertise on the front cover of their brochure that this particular item this week is \$24.95. The reality is that it has always been \$24.95, or maybe it has been \$23.95.

I started to look in detail at some of the numbers. There's \$1 billion in the budget for provincial highways. Now, is that new money? Well, that was the inference, and that's how it was read, and it was presented so that it would be read that way. But when we actually look at the numbers, it's a little bit less than last year and in fact represents a 7% cut on spending on provincial highways in southern Ontario. These aren't new dollars. Some of these dollars are less than last year.

The SuperBuild fund: Boy, that's inspiring that there's going to be all this money in the SuperBuild fund. But if you take all the capital money that the ministries had in previous years and you put it together, it's actually a little bit less than we used to spend.

Now, I've just committed an error that a lot of citizens in Ontario make when I said "SuperBuild fund." It's actually the SuperBuild Corp. They put some money out—what communities required to produce matching money. Will Toronto have difficulty finding matching money for the redevelopment of the waterfront? No, I don't think so. I think we've got so much money concentrated in this area that they are able to match any money.

What about a small community college in rural Ontario? Will they be able to find the matching funds? With great difficulty and perhaps not at all. So some of that money that's announced for rural Ontario will never actually be spent because of the challenges facing rural Ontario.

I watched some of the impacts by talking to people. I know there are numbers quoted on how we're spending more money than ever, but if we're spending more money, why are there patients in hallways that there weren't five years ago? Why are there children still being kept at home because they have not been approved by the

province for their ISA grant if we're hearing that there's more money?

1700

I was at a presentation by the Ministry of Community and Social Services and got some sense of the government's priorities when I looked at their mission statement, which said that their role was to serve those most in need—not those in need, but those most in need. We wouldn't sit down at a meal with our family and feed those who are the hungriest and not the others. Who defines and decides who's the most in need? What are the criteria? That's scary, because I believe we have a moral obligation as a government to help those in need so that they will no longer need assistance from us at some time, and to recognize for others that we need to permanently recognize them as part of the family and support them. If they live in Ontario, they're Ontarians. We do not go through and prioritize what citizens we think we need to help and what ones we're not going to help.

It's not popular to talk about welfare recipients in the province, but there's been nothing in there to help them. There was an opportunity to cut the gasoline tax to help them look for employment; there was an opportunity to provide some assistance to public transit. Welfare recipients who want to better themselves continue to have the doors closed. This government will not fund municipal transit in any way and yet the people in the lowest economic range need that help. They're the most in need, I believe, and we are failing to recognize that.

The fact is, ignore the figures; look at what's happening in Ontario.

The Acting Speaker: Questions or comments?

Ms Martel: In response to the comments that have been made, let me focus on the following. In the budget, it said there was no doubt that health care is the top priority for Ontarians. I believe that, but if I thought it was the top priority for this government, then I would have expected to see a very significant increase in the health care budget this year, especially in light of the fact that this government experienced a \$5.3-billion windfall in revenues from last year that they didn't expect. So you would expect that if the government really thought health care was a priority, health care would have gotten a big chunk of that windfall. As a matter of fact, if you look at the estimates, the total investment in health care for this year over last year is a mere \$49 million. That's it. That's all.

With respect to northern Ontario, I think it's clear to say that the overwhelming concern has to be with the shortage of doctors in our communities. Three years ago we had 68 communities that needed 100 doctors. At present, we have 99 communities on the underserved area list, with a total need of 415 doctors. So it has increased dramatically under this government's watch.

What did this government do in response to this serious issue of doctor shortage in northern Ontario and now in southern Ontario as well? The government announced \$4 million of free tuition for medical students if they agree to practise in the north and in rural

communities after graduation. What does it take, four or five years to graduate from medical school? We need doctors now. I have three underserved area communities in my own riding where we need doctors now, not five years from now.

The other thing that happens under this is that those doctors go back to northern Ontario and to rural Ontario, so there's no guarantee that we're going to get our fair share of those doctors five years from now, even if they decide to come.

Secondly, the minister said there was \$11 million to have new spaces for medical students. We found out last week that that \$11 million was spent last year. There's nothing new for this year. There are no new initiatives to recruit and retain doctors in northern Ontario.

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you. Before I recognize the next speaker, I remind members that interjections are always out of order, particularly if you are not in your own seat, member for Niagara Falls.

Mrs Brenda Elliott (Guelph-Wellington): I'm pleased to have the opportunity to rise and respond to the comments of my colleagues across the way.

In listening to members of both the Liberal and NDP parties, it strikes me that they are trying to pick holes in the budget from a very specific point of view, whether it be health or rural Ontario. What they have forgotten is the big picture. This is the first time in decades when we've had a balanced budget in the province of Ontario. From the party over here that overspent all the time they were in government, even in boom times, to the party over here that doubled the debt in four years, I would say to the colleagues across the way that I am very pleased to be part of a government that for the first time is not robbing our children of their future opportunities by overspending money we don't have. I am very grateful to be part of a government that is finally living within its means. We have taken priorities very clearly, be they health, be they education, be they infrastructure for the future, and that's where our money is being spent.

This budget is very comprehensive and I particularly like the title the Minister of Finance has chosen. He's calling it Balanced Budgets—Brighter Futures. If you look through this budget document, on every page you will see investments in health care that are going to bring doctors to our underserved areas. I find it fascinating that my colleague from across the way forgot to mention \$600 million in rural economic development initiatives—these are extraordinary—forgot to mention the point-of-sale tax rebate for farm building materials that farmers have been asking for, forgot to mention \$300 million for northern and remote Ontario. These are extraordinary investments that are indeed responsive, because we've been listening.

The key word in this budget that can't be forgotten is "balanced." We've balanced the budget but also in the process of have created 703,000 new jobs in Ontario. That's an extraordinary accomplishment of which I am very proud.

Mrs Lyn McLeod (Thunder Bay-Atikokan): I'm very glad that my colleagues have touched on a number of issues that are of particular concern in health care and particularly in northern health care. Of course, one of the main issues concerning us is the northern health travel grant and the fact that with a \$5-billion revenue windfall this government couldn't find even a few million dollars to restore some equity and some fairness to the northern health travel grant. It's amazing that although the minister today said that there's going to be a review of the northern health travel grants, there's no money to support a review. In fact there's no acknowledgement on the part of the government that there is a basic inequity when southern Ontario residents who have to travel out of their communities to northern Ontario or to the United States to get cancer care have all of their costs of travel reimbursed while northern Ontario residents have a maximum of some \$400-plus. It's amazing that the government is not prepared to recognize even a basic inequity there.

I do want to take this moment to acknowledge that there will inevitably be some financial increase in the spending on the northern health travel grant. It will increase somewhat because the northern health travel grant, such as it is, is going to be extended to residents of Muskoka, because one of the things we discovered in the budget was that Muskoka is now part of northern Ontario. It also happens that Muskoka is part of the new, enlarged riding of the Minister of Finance, so I guess the minister has understood that there are some relatively minor financial benefits if you are defined as a northerner and he's going to make sure that his constituents are going to receive that maximum of \$400 for travel expenses that they may incur. And so be it; we think there should be fairness and equity.

We're a little bit concerned as northerners about what other things in the budget may extend to the new northerners in Muskoka; the transportation budget, for example, which seems to be expanded for northern Ontario but which may now have to cover some very significant highway expansion in the Muskoka area as part of the northern Ontario budget, or it may be the northern heritage—

The Acting Speaker: Thank you. Questions and comments?

Ms Churley: I'm happy to respond to my two Liberal colleagues' comments. I agree with pretty well everything they had to say but I have to remind them and everybody else that the Liberals in Ottawa are gushing over the Harris government budget, a budget which emphasizes tax cuts over investments in health care and child care and education and the environment, on the backs of people who just get a minimum wage. The government refuses to increase that, which would help them participate in this overwhelmingly good economy we're in. Everybody knows it's because of the American economy. God help people if there is a recession under this government. We don't know what will happen to

those people who are suffering now as a result of this budget in very good economic times.

But I do have to remind the Liberals that in fact Finance Minister Paul Martin says that Ernie Eves simply borrowed the federal playbook for their tax cuts budget, and Prime Minister Jean Chrétien said, "The best form of flattery is when a government is copying another government." So here we have a Liberal government in Ottawa and a Conservative government—or should I call it the United Alternative government?—here in Ontario giving tax cuts of over \$5 billion out of the \$8 billion in this budget alone—and that's on top of the tax cuts that were made before the 30% to corporations—to corporations and very wealthy people. In the meantime, no investment in public transportation. Smog season is upon us; people are going to be sick and die. No investments in housing; more and more homeless people. It goes on and on. This government should be ashamed of itself.

1710

The Acting Speaker: Response?

Mrs Dombrowsky: I thank my colleagues and those who commented on the remarks that were made from this perspective. I think it's important—I was really rather concerned when I heard the passionate remarks from the member for Guelph-Wellington, who indicated that we failed to look at the bigger picture. I'm sorry, I take from that that the really valid concerns that have come to me from my constituents in rural Ontario aren't part of the big picture. But they are part of Ontario and they are important. The point we're trying to make on this side of the House is that the bigger picture isn't the full picture. That's what we're trying to do here.

I would suggest to the members with regard to the comments that were made in terms of neglecting to talk about those crumbs that rural Ontario received from this government, when you consider the billions and billions of dollars that have been put toward tax cuts, the billions of dollars that are spent on government ministries, rural Ontario—the Ministry of Agriculture—gets 1%. The second-largest industry in the province gets 1% consideration from this government. I'm here today to say on behalf of the people I represent that they deserve more. I make no apologies for that. The money that this government has put towards rural Ontario is a valuable investment, but I'm saying to you, it is not enough. That's what I'm hearing from my constituents and that's what I'm presenting on the floor of this House. To suggest otherwise is really not to know the full picture of the needs of the people of this province.

The Acting Speaker: Further debate?

Mr O'Toole: It's my pleasure this afternoon to have a few minutes—I may choose to split some of the time—to comment on Finance Minister Ernie Eves's budget of last week. I gather I won't be, so I'll try to use my time expeditiously.

I think it's important to stop the tone here. We've had a kind of round-by-round, blow-by-blow description of the 67 tax cuts, and that's important. I'm sure subsequent speakers will go through the litany of tax cuts, because as

you know, right now it's 166 different tax cuts since we were elected in 1995.

It goes further than that for my riding of Durham. In my case, I like to draw everything back to my riding and try to understand it from that perspective. It's very important for each of us elected by the people of Durham for a second term to be listening and responsive and respectful to their views. Clearly, they spoke last June 1999 and said we're on the right course. But I have to go back further than that. You have to look at the motive of why we were elected. I think the member for Guelph-Wellington, in her passionate way, said it all. She really realized that the previous two governments—I heard the member for Broadview-Greenwood earlier making a slight reference to the coalition between the Liberals and the NDP. I can't really separate which it was. In fact, it's more simple to say it was both of them. They're not able to stand up to the difficult decisions. They're not up to the job, either one of them. Without being personal, they did have 10 years, and we and most Ontarians refer to the 10 lost years.

If we go back here and spend a bit of time on the motive for change—stay with me; it's very important that you get this from the beginning to the end. I only have 20 minutes, so I need your undivided attention. You can get a copy of Hansard later on, and I'll mail it to you directly if you wish.

I think the motive for change is this: Clearly they were spending—get this—\$1 million an hour. It's an easy way to remember the damage they were doing. They were spending \$1 million an hour, and that was just the interest on the debt they had accumulated, from \$50 billion to \$100 billion; 8,460 hours in a year at \$1 million an hour, and that barely covered the interest on the debt.

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker: The member for Don Valley East will take his seat.

Mr O'Toole: They were spending \$11 billion in deficit.

I remember one afternoon in 1996, I believe—

Mr Caplan: Frank, what's Ontario's credit rating?

The Acting Speaker: Excuse me. The member for Don Valley East. There are too many conversations going on here that have nothing to do with the speaker. I am attempting to hear every word very carefully. You may continue. I am hoping that members will respect.

Mr O'Toole: Thank you, Mr Speaker. It's important to try and get the member for Don Valley East to sit, or I'll call his mother and she will provide some response. She knows how to get control.

I would just say that when you get to the motive, you cannot avoid looking at history, otherwise you're doomed to repeat it. That's exactly the whole theory. I have some publications here today but I can pretty well go from memory. The problem with the government—and we've seen Jane Stewart in Ottawa doing the same thing—is they try to solve all their problems by spending money. In fact, there's clear evidence across the country that that's what they're potentially doing as we speak: To

solve a problem they spend money. They don't think through and make the difficult choices.

Going further back—and it makes me sort of melancholy—if you're noticing a slight tear in my eye here, it's because 1941 and 1943 were the last times we had back-to-back balanced budgets. That was the year I was born, so it's very significant for me and it makes me reflect a bit on how far we've come and how far out of control governments were that used to spend their way. Tax and spend became the theory of the 1960s, 1970s, 1980s and 1990s. Now we've returned to planning a fiscal agenda that keeps the taxpayers in mind. That's very important. It's an economy that really empowers people. Most importantly, it empowers them, instead of some bureaucrat sitting in some ivory tower, to make the spending decisions. It's giving taxpayers back the money that we took from them in the first place.

I want to thank the taxpayers of Ontario. That's really ultimately where we should be looking here. We can thank all the various sectors that have contributed to a healthy economy and a strong recovery, the banking and financial sector and the small business entrepreneur, but it's the hard-working taxpayers that I want to extend a word of thanks and appreciation to, because they stuck with us. They saw the vision, they knew the message, and they had the confidence that we would do as we promised. I believe the election in June 1999 was all about promises made and promises kept. Now we've moved to the forum where it's a responsible government by the people. This budget clearly says that.

The best compliment is imitation; the best form of flattery is imitation. I have a lot of respect for Paul Martin in Ottawa. He came out the very evening of the budget and more or less endorsed some of the exciting ideas that were put forward by Finance Minister Ernie Eves, and he said he's thinking of copying it. He has a challenge before him. I don't think the strength and decisiveness is in their leadership to make those tough decisions, to work with the taxpayers. But I commend Finance Minister Paul Martin for recognizing the dedication, the loyalty and the focus not just of our Premier but of Finance Minister Ernie Eves.

I'm going to stop and maybe repeat that several times. Just think how far we've come together since 1995. Just think about it: \$1 million an hour and now we actually have a surplus. In fact, we're committed to repaying the debt. We're paying down \$5 billion, twice as much as we said during the election plan, and we're way ahead of target there. This is more evidence that promises are kept. We've really got back to the starting point, I would think. We're saying that these commitments to eliminate the deficit are now done and we're on our way to paying down the debt. The job is not done. There's more to be done, that's clear.

1720

I had a budget breakfast the morning after, and out of respect for the people who arranged it, and in cooperation, I want to acknowledge those who participated and some of the remarks that were made. One of the

persons there said, "This budget is not only good for the province of Ontario, it's good for the riding of Durham." This is a general comment.

The next one is from Ron Hope, the president of the Newcastle Business Improvement Association, whom I've mentioned several times here in this House. He says: "Every year we see things getting better and better.... It's going in the right direction for sure." That's a direct quote from a small business person in Newcastle.

Another one is from Adrian Foster, a very well informed financial adviser who lives in the Courtice area. It's a rapidly growing community in my riding of Durham. This is his quote: "Tax cuts are always wonderful. And the decoupling of the provincial and federal sales tax will give a lot more flexibility." There's a small business person who knows the drag that taxes have on the economy.

There are some interesting parts here I may get a chance to go to on the capital gains side. We just went one step further beyond the feds. They went to 66% of capital gains that are taxable; we've gone to 50%. It's clearly because he's giving people their money. What are they going to do with it? If they have money, they're going to save it, invest it or make a purchase. The fellow over there, Mr Levine, is saying, "Pay for tuition." They're actually—

Interjection.

Mr O'Toole: Yes, I will get his name to acknowledge it respectfully. It's the member from Brant, Mr Levac.

I would say, yes, they will be paying tuition, but wherever they choose, instead of government choosing. That's the difference. You have to get the mindset switched around here, member from Brant. You've got to move it such that it's the individual family that's making the decision, not some bureaucrat in Ottawa or at Queen's Park. That's the whole plan here. This is what they're saying, that it's introducing more flexibility.

Some members on the other side might know Mr George Khouri, the president of the Clarington Board of Trade, who had this to say: "This community has a lot of small business," which my riding does. "This is a step in the right direction. Lowering taxes for small business when you have a surplus and another balanced budget keeps the engine going to create new jobs and small business is the biggest job creator." Clearly we all know the evidence that small business creates about 60% of all net new jobs.

That brings me to the clear point. If you look at history, when we had record spending and record deficits we also had record unemployment, we had record people on welfare. Where have we come? You should know that our goals are aggressive and they're assertive, but we intend to work towards achieving them. They are ambitious goals. We should be nothing but the best. We've aimed for 725,000 net new jobs. Over 700,000 new jobs have been created since 1995 by small business, the private sector. Do you know what that means? There are 500,000 fewer people depending on welfare cheques. They now have a payroll cheque. This is about giving

individuals and families respect and dignity. It's about hope and opportunity. It's almost like the founding of a new land when you're coming from the dark ages of the lost 10 years.

I would be remiss if I didn't spend some time respectfully responding to the agricultural community in my riding of Durham. I immediately think of Blackstock and Nestleton and Hampton, to name but three. I could name more and perhaps will. Also, it's real people. Jackie Van Eyk and John Van Eyk are pork producers in my riding; Lawrence Van Camp and his wife have a large dairy operation just outside Blackstock; Kirk Kemp, a well-known apple farmer, is also very involved in his growers' association; Charles Stevenson. These people call me with their concerns and they tell me what the agricultural community needs, and everyone here would know how difficult it has been for them, not just in Ontario but indeed across Canada.

This government has known, and our Minister of Agriculture, Ernie Hardeman, is to be commended. He stood up to the federal government. He led the challenge for Ontario farmers to get their fair share of the support payments. I commend him for that because they're real benefits for real people. I'm mentioning here Dave and Leah Frew and their whole family, involved in the agricultural sector in Durham and beyond, because these people grow the food that we eat. Look around. Some of you have eaten the apples that Kirk Kemp has grown or the blueberries that Charles Stevenson has grown. I think of people like Karen and Dennis Yellowlees from the Durham Region Federation of Agriculture. These people are the salt of the earth. They are the ones who led the way. When I think of Durham, a high-growth area, and the pressures on them from growth and urban expansion and some of the changes made by our previous agriculture minister, the Honourable Noble Villeneuve—the Farm Practices Protection Act, the Farming and Food Production Protection Act—they were just excellent and helped these people deal with the issues of municipal bylaw and expansion into rural areas.

What is just, suffice it to say, a small thing, but really amounts to a large convenience for the agriculture sector, is the point-of-sale exemption on the retail sales tax. This goes a long way to eliminating just the red tape alone. When you go into the co-op or whatever the store, you give them your farm number and there's no retail sales tax on that purchase of building materials for the farm.

Recognition goes to some very unusual extent here to look at small-town Ontario. This is something that's been neglected by previous governments. A full \$600 million has been set aside to infuse our rural economy, and \$200 million of this is earmarked for rural economic development. The other \$400 million is used for the infrastructure part, and Minister Wilson today spoke briefly about improving the rural infrastructure so that people can be on-line and connected in this multimedia global village we live in.

There's additional money here for rural and northern communities, but it's all part of helping small-town

Ontario. It's the \$23 million set aside in the transportation budget for the Ministry of Education to allow them in rural and northern Ontario to form partnerships and develop a transportation plan that's more efficient. We've all heard of the old adage of several school buses on the same road. This isn't economically sustainable, so the government has put in place some tools and mechanisms for people to deal with it.

I'm also looking at the transportation. It affects my riding, because of course a lot of my constituents commute to the GTA, different parts of it, north and Toronto mainly. I'm one of them and I know that we need the infrastructure to have a healthy economy. Again, I have to compliment our Minister Turnbull, Minister of Transportation, for insisting at the cabinet table that we have \$1 billion in road dollars.

How does this translate in my area? Well, last year \$10 million was extended to the Durham region for improvement projects and, I might say, a very imaginative partnership with Durham region and the MTO. This will advance ahead of schedule three projects that are absolutely critical to our sustainability: I believe the Stevenson Road interchange probably will be the most important one, but the Lakeridge Road and Pickering Beach Road exits from the 401 are going to allow for a smoother flow of traffic.

I'm surprised that the opposition and the third party haven't mentioned the significant commitment to health care. The history here is clear. We all know that when we were elected it was \$17.4 billion. We know those numbers. And you know that we've committed 20% more and we're going to reach that target two years ahead of schedule. It's going to be over \$22 billion—that despite the federal government pulling out some \$6 billion. Imagine. Say it to yourself several times. It's frightening. They have gone from 50 cents to a mere 11 cents on every dollar.

I paid some respect to Finance Minister Paul Martin, but he missed the ball completely on the health care thing in his last budget. Our Premier and Health Minister Elizabeth Witmer have approached our Prime Minister, and he has refused to meet with them, and yet we're going ahead. We have a vision for health care. We may have to go it alone, but all of Canada is looking to our finance minister, our Premier and our health minister to lead the way for the restructuring and delivery of health care in this country.

In fact, you should put this in perspective. That \$22-billion budget will be the largest in history. I believe it's larger than all but three other provinces' total budgets. We spend more per person on health care, total dollars on health care, than any other province in this country.

1730

Interjection.

Mr O'Toole: No, more per person, member from Kingston and the Islands—

Interjections.

Mr O'Toole: I know numbers are difficult for you.

There are five key areas in health care, and I've got to put it on the record: \$1.5 billion for a drug program, unmatched by other provinces; \$5.9 billion for OHIP; \$7.7 billion for hospitals; \$3.1 billion for long-term care, a growing sector; and \$3.8 billion for other health care initiatives. We provide services in health care that other provinces simply don't have the resources to match.

We shouldn't let the day go by without looking at the importance—as a parent with five children, it makes me stop and think again. It's real people again. What are we doing for children? There's a lot in this budget for helping children, not just the education part—that's reducing class size, that's special education, the speech-and-language money. There's money in there for children at risk. I believe it's \$5 million for children from inner-city schools to participate in sports and summer programming.

There are other speakers who will, I suppose, get into the more mainstream messages. I just tried to bring a bit of history to it, to thank the people of Ontario who were loyal and committed to helping us keep the promises and to publicly thank Finance Minister Ernie Eves and the Premier for having the vision and having the courage to do the right thing, to keep their promises.

I know the evidence is there. The budget is balanced. We now have a surplus. The people of Ontario need to recognize that you have to have a healthy economy to have good education and health care systems. Despite all the pundits who said prior to 1995 that it couldn't be done, that you couldn't cut taxes and increase the growth in the economy, we've done the impossible, and the job is not done.

I appreciate those who have paid attention here today. There is a broad number of people from all parties, which is good. Perhaps they'll pick up on it and do the right thing themselves.

The Acting Speaker: Questions and comments.

Mrs McLeod: I'm sorry that the government is going to close off the debate on the budget within the next half-hour, because I would have appreciated an opportunity to speak and to be able to talk about some of the budget games that were played in this most recent budget. The one I particularly wanted to address is a statement that's found in the document called Building Strong and Safe Communities. It tells us, "The district of Muskoka will now be included in northern Ontario for all government funding purposes." To the best of my knowledge, in all the years I've been involved in this Legislature, nobody considered extending the northern Ontario boundary south of the French River, at least not until that part of Muskoka became part of the new enlarged riding of the Minister of Finance.

My office called the Ministry of Northern Development and Mines to find out why they would want to extend the northern Ontario boundary south of the French River to include Muskoka. My staff were told that since the heritage fund for northern Ontario had been increased and since there had been an increase in northern transportation budgets, it was felt they could extend this

northern Ontario boundary to Muskoka. That is just the most blatant, cynical way of getting money to go into the riding of the Minister of Finance while making it look as though they're responding to the long-standing needs of northern Ontario, a budget game indeed.

It goes hand in hand with the statement in the budget that says this government is going to have new increased medical school spaces, only we find out that there are no new medical school spaces at all, that all the government is doing is referring back to an earlier announcement that would increase the residencies for foreign-trained physicians—all well and good in itself but not the new medical school spaces that this government appeared to be promising in print in the budget. It's a little bit like saying there's \$1.4 billion in new spending for health care, the largest increase ever, except that the government forgets about the one-time funds they've pulled out and the \$1 billion in capital which they're not renewing this year. It all goes hand in hand with what I think is the most innovative part of the budget, and that's the \$1-billion "Your cheque's in the mail" advertising campaign.

Ms Churley: I find it interesting to listen to the member for Durham and other Tory members who chastise the NDP and the Liberals for not pointing out all the good things in the budget; that we're very selective in our comments. I would say to the member that he is extremely selective in what he talks about in the budget. For instance, I don't hear any of the Tories, when they're talking about this budget, mention the environment at all. Why are they not mentioning the environment?

Let me be very selective here for a moment. The total cuts to the Ministry of the Environment now, after previous cuts, is \$100 million. I couldn't believe it when I opened up the budget books in this House and saw another \$16 million cut from the Ministry of the Environment, which brings the total up to \$100 million. That shows their commitment to environmental protection in this province, when we're rolling in money because of the good economy and the US, all of this money coming in.

The minister is in the House now. I'd like to think that he fought for that money, but we all know why he was put in that position, to just toe the government line. The minister even said, when asked a question about the cuts to the environment—the first line written down in his notes in his briefing book and he read it off—"Nothing could be further from the truth," when it's right there in their own budget that this \$16 million is cut.

Mr Peter Kormos (Niagara Centre): That's 40%.

Ms Churley: That's right, 40%, or more, of the ministry cut.

I would like the government to take a good look at the things that we here in the NDP are talking about: the people and the programs on whose backs this budget was balanced—that is very real—the homeless, environmental protection, kids and elderly who are going to suffer from smog now. I'd like them to address those issues.

The Acting Speaker: Questions and comments?

Mr Frank Mazzilli (London-Fanshawe): I've had an opportunity to go back to my riding and discuss budget 2000 with my constituents. Despite what we hear from the Liberals all the time, my constituents like the budget. It has tax cuts, and it's returning some of their money—up to \$200 for taxpayers in Ontario. The people I spoke to in London-Fanshawe, who go to work every day and work hard for their money, can hardly wait to have this money in their hands so they can spend on their children, whether they want to spend it on clothing, on recreation, on some basic necessities. In typical Liberal form, Liberals feel that they can spend my constituents' money better than they can. Well, I won't allow that to happen. I was sent here on behalf of the people of London-Fanshawe to look after their interests, and that's why we had to cut taxes, to continue the growth.

Do you know what's really interesting? The Liberals call any surplus "a windfall." It came out of nowhere. Let me tell you something. It did come from somewhere. It needed the strong leadership of Premier Mike Harris to cut taxes to grow revenues so we could reinvest in our health care and education. So that's what has been done. Dalton McGuinty simply does not get it, and his members do not get it and clearly are not up to the job of governing in this province.

At another point, I certainly look forward to the opportunity of getting into the details of the budget.

On the weekend, I was here for the police memorial, and police officers from across the province certainly liked the \$35-million grant for policing in their communities that's going to be extended on a permanent basis. This is another part of our commitment to community safety across the province.

1740

Ms Di Cocco: When we talk about the big picture in regard to this budget, it has to do with the sum of the many parts that exist in this province. It's that total picture that the government doesn't seem to understand. The environment is that part of the big picture that they have forgotten. We have eroded our standards in this province when we speak to the environment to a point where we lag. We're way behind those of the United States and we are jeopardizing our future. It is not about bright futures when you don't deal with critical environmental issues.

Public transportation in large centres is one of those areas that would move people and it would alleviate the use of cars and eliminate a lot of smog that we are seeing already in May that normally we'd see in the middle of July and August.

I want to highlight that the social and economic guidance that this budget provides is basically about privatization, because most of the money, \$8 billion worth, is going to be spent on tax cuts. Basically we're talking about privatizing jails, privatizing universities, and I believe that we're privatizing health care by stealth. I've heard that often in a lot of debates outside this House.

Good fiscal management, again, is more than just tax cuts. This government has not paid down the debt. It's added \$10 billion to the debt.

The Acting Speaker: In response, the member for Durham.

Mr O'Toole: I only have two minutes. I do appreciate the members responding.

The member from Thunder Bay is a perpetual complainer. I don't know; it's a "sky is falling" syndrome.

The member for Broadview-Greenwood really did speak eloquently about the Liberal-NDP coalition and I recognize her for saying what really exists. That's the opposition.

The member for London-Fanshawe clearly has the right message. He's listening to people.

The member for Sarnia-Lambton is just clearly against tax cuts. That's the Liberal message and I don't blame her for sticking on the message because her leader would put her further back in the backbenches.

Anyway, I think it's important to put on the record a couple of important achievements. I co-chaired the gas price task force and I just thought this was so appropriate, the way Finance Minister Ernie Eves introduced how we're giving a rebate to people on the issue of gas prices. Everyone who drives has insurance and you can see that we've committed to reducing the retail sales tax on automobile insurance. Clearly, this won't go back into the corporate coffers for the giant oil companies. They may be disappointed, but the driving public is getting the money back that they deserve. In fact, the goal here is to eliminate it. One more tax is another benefit that you can see.

I think David MacKinnon from the Ontario Hospital Association was quick to bring forward—a significant step forward.

I would like to put on the record, as the member from Kingston and the Islands would know, that Minister Baird announced \$50 million for helping people with development disabilities. This was announced on May 5 and I'm sure the member from Kingston and the Islands realizes that people and families with children and young adults with disabilities are thankful for the minister to be paying—

The Acting Speaker : Thank you. Further debate?

Mr John Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands): In the last five minutes we have left—and it's too bad the debate is being shut off at that point in time—I just want to bring a couple of points forward.

The first one is that government should be all about fairness to all of its taxpayers, to all of its citizens. If there is one thing that this government has been known for for the last five years it is that it's simply not fair to the people who find themselves in the bottom third of the economic scale. That's the end-all and be-all.

The other thought that comes to mind is that here we've had a government that finds out they've got \$5 billion more in the coffers than what they anticipated at the beginning of last year. I say to myself, "What were all those health care ads against the federal government?

What was that all about? If you really needed the money, why didn't you take some of this \$5 billion and put it into health care?"

I say to myself, "Why is it that only one in three cancer patients, individuals who have been diagnosed with cancer, are getting the treatment within the four weeks prescribed from the time that they have been diagnosed with cancer?" There's something wrong there. Why is it that when we've had all this money around, there still isn't a penny available for social housing? Not a penny has been put into any kind of programs for homelessness. Why is it that even though there may be some new money available, that while we have capital money for universities and colleges in order to deal with the double cohort situation that will be passing through the system in another two or three years, there isn't one extra penny available for operating money? Why didn't they do something about the high tuition increases that students have been suffering from over the last four to five years? Tuitions have increased by 40% to 50%; absolutely nothing.

Why is it that they found \$1 billion to give back to people now? Initially, I thought people would like this kind of thing, and the more I thought about it, the angrier I got. At one time, we used to buy people's votes, or the system did, with mickeys around election time, and now we've taken that system one step further. Now we're giving everybody \$200 back, every taxpayer of the province of Ontario. But it really all boils down to trying to buy people's favour with their own money. I say to the government that if you want to do that, why don't you do it on a monthly basis? It doesn't make any sense when you think that it's going to cost \$3 million to \$4 million just to get these cheques back to people. It is cynical and it is almost contemptuous.

When you look at this budget, is there some good news for some people? Absolutely. If you're a speculator in the stock market or you're getting some stock options, this is a good budget for you. The first \$100,000 that you're going to make this year, you're going to get it tax-free. That isn't fair and it isn't right.

If you're a corporation in Ontario, this is a good budget for you, no question about it, because your taxes are going to decrease from something like 15%. I'll tell you, I have dealt with a lot of small corporations in Ontario over the last 30 years. They've got many complaints about government but they all relate to red tape. There are very few of them who talk about the corporate income tax situation here at 15%. Now, what are you doing to them? You're saying you're going to reduce that to 8%, another \$4-billion giveaway.

With all the problems that we've got in our health care system, that we hear about on a day-to-day basis in this House, in our own constituency offices—the long waiting lists, the treatment that we have to send people to the United States for so that they can get adequate treatment—why wasn't some of that money put into our health care system? Why wasn't some of that money put in our special education system? We all have heard

stories about people who get a special education assistant in a school for maybe an hour a day whereas they used to get one for a whole day. What do we do with these children at the other times? How will they affect the other children in the classes that they are now combined with etc?

The bottom line is, is this budget good? Yes, it's good for some people, but it certainly isn't good for the welfare of Ontarians. It's not a fair budget. It is a giveaway to corporate Ontario. This will come back to haunt these people, there's no question about it, because we have to be fair to all Ontarians. This budget doesn't cut it on that score.

The Deputy Speaker: This concludes the time allocated for debate.

On Tuesday, May 2, 2000, Mr Eves moved, seconded by Mr Harris, that this House approves in general the budgetary policy of the government.

On Wednesday, May 3, 2000, Mr McGuinty moved that the motion moved by the Minister of Finance on May 2, "That this House approves in general that the budgetary policy of the government" be amended by deleting the words following the words "That this House" and adding thereto the following:

"Recognizing that the budgetary policy put forward by the Minister of Finance fails to use today's wealth to secure tomorrow's prosperity, condemns the government for:

"Spending \$200 million less on operating universities and colleges than it did five years ago when higher education is the key to better jobs and a better future for Ontarians;

"Funding our high schools and schools less by breaking its commitment to offset revenue lost to education property tax cuts;

"Failing to modernize front-line health care and demonstrating, as the government's own health reform panel said, that it has no vision for our health care system;

"Spreading any new health care spending so thinly that there is no evidence any aspect of care will improve;

"Claiming it is investing in primary care reform when its deal with the Ontario Medical Association will put that reform off for another decade;

"Cutting the Ministry of the Environment budget another 9%—for a total cut of 40%—when Ontario already has the second-worst environmental record in North America;

"Failing to deliver tax fairness by giving a \$4-billion tax break to corporations, and a \$650-million break for those wealthy enough to play the stock market, but offering little to struggling middle-class and working poor families;

"Spending much more on prisons than on affordable housing when homelessness is increasing;

"Doing nothing to reduce poverty—increasing even as the economy booms;

"Condemning Ontarians to traffic gridlock by abdicating any responsibility for public transportation;

"Failing to balance the budget until after the federal government and every other provincial government but the NDP in BC;

"Adding \$24 billion to Ontario's debt, creating the first 12-digit debt ever in Ontario, a further burden to future generations of Ontarians;

"Therefore, this government has lost the confidence of this House."

On Thursday, May 4, 2000, Mr Hampton moved that the amendment to the motion be amended by adding, following the words "the Minister of Finance fails to use today's wealth to secure tomorrow's prosperity" in the first paragraph, the following:

"and recognizing that the Ontario government's budgetary policy is a carbon copy of the Ottawa Liberals' emphasis on tax cuts over investment in health care and education,"

The first question to be decided is the amendment to the amendment. Is it the pleasure of the House that Mr Hampton's amendment to the amendment to the motion carry?

All in favour will say "aye."

All those opposed will say "nay."

In my opinion, the nays have it. The question is therefore lost.

The second question to be decided is the amendment to the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House that Mr McGuinty's amendment to the motion carry?

All in favour will say "aye."

All those opposed will say "nay."

In my opinion, the nays have it.

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

The division bells rang from 1753 to 1803.

The Acting Speaker: All those in favour of the motion will please rise one at a time.

Ayes

Agostino, Dominic	Conway, Sean G.	Kormos, Peter
Bartolucci, Rick	Di Cocco, Caroline	Lankin, Frances
Boyer, Claudette	Dombrowsky, Leona	Levac, David
Bryant, Michael	Gerretsen, John	Martel, Shelley
Caplan, David	Gravelle, Michael	McGuinty, Dalton
Christopherson, David	Hampton, Howard	McLeod, Lyn
Churley, Marilyn	Kennedy, Gerard	Parsons, Ernie

The Acting Speaker: All those opposed will rise one at a time.

Nays

Arnott, Ted	Harris, Michael D.	Ouellette, Jerry J.
Baird, John R.	Hastings, John	Palladini, Al
Barrett, Toby	Hodgson, Chris	Runciman, Robert W.
Chudleigh, Ted	Hudak, Tim	Sampson, Rob
Clark, Brad	Johns, Helen	Snobelen, John
Clement, Tony	Johnson, Bert	Spina, Joseph
Coburn, Brian	Klees, Frank	Sterling, Norman W.
Cunningham, Dianne	Marland, Margaret	Stewart, R. Gary
DeFaria, Carl	Martiniuk, Gerry	Stockwell, Chris
Dunlop, Garfield	Maves, Bart	Tascona, Joseph N.
Ecker, Janet	Mazzilli, Frank	Tilson, David
Elliott, Brenda	Molinari, Tina R.	Tsubouchi, David H.
Eves, Ernie L.	Munro, Julia	Turnbull, David
Galt, Doug	Murdoch, Bill	Wettlaufer, Wayne

Gilchrist, Steve
Gill, Raminder
Guzzo, Garry J.
Hardeman, Ernie

Mushinski, Marilyn
Newman, Dan
O'Toole, John

Wilson, Jim
Wood, Bob
Young, David

Clerk of the House (Mr Claude L. DesRosiers): The ayes are 21; the nays are 52.

The Acting Speaker: I declare the motion lost.

We now come to the motion of Mr Eves, that this House approves in general the budgetary policy of the government.

Is it the pleasure of the House that Mr Eves's motion carry?

All those in favour will say "aye."

All those opposed will say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

I therefore declare the motion carried.

This House stands adjourned.

The House adjourned at 1807.

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