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**Official Report
of Debates
(Hansard)**

Tuesday 6 June 2000

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des débats
(Hansard)**

Mardi 6 juin 2000

Speaker
Honourable Gary Carr

Clerk
Claude L. DesRosiers

Président
L'honorable Gary Carr

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO

Tuesday 6 June 2000

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO

Mardi 6 juin 2000

The House met at 1845.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

SAFE SCHOOLS ACT, 2000
LOI DE 2000 SUR LA SÉCURITÉ
DANS LES ÉCOLES

Mrs Ecker moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 81, An Act to increase respect and responsibility, to set standards for safe learning and safe teaching in schools and to amend the Teaching Profession Act / Projet de loi 81, Loi visant à accroître le respect et le sens des responsabilités, à fixer des normes pour garantir la sécurité des conditions d'apprentissage et d'enseignement dans les écoles et à modifier la Loi sur la profession enseignante.

Hon Janet Ecker (Minister of Education): Mr Speaker, I'd like to alert you to the fact that I'll be sharing my time with my caucus colleagues from Barrie-Simcoe-Bradford, Niagara Falls and Brampton Centre.

Respect and responsibility are certainly important parts of ensuring that our schools in our publicly funded education system are safe. With the introduction last week of the proposed Safe Schools Act, our government is taking the steps necessary to ensure that Ontario's school system is the safest and the best it can be.

If this Legislature approves this legislation, Bill 81 will give authority to the provincial code of conduct that I released in April. It will also give the government the ability to proceed with a number of other initiatives that will promote respect, responsibility and civility in our classrooms.

I am certain that students, teachers, staff, parents, every member here, regardless of where they live in Ontario, all agree that a safe school environment contributes to student learning and to quality education. This legislation will do what we all want. Recent public opinion polls indicate that the vast majority of Ontarians support the government on this issue and support passage of this bill by the Legislature. The bill directly addresses what people have been telling us they want for their schools. We have heard the concerns over and over again about behaviour, about discipline and especially about safety in our schools.

We promised in our Blueprint election platform last year that we would take action to ensure that respect,

responsibility, civility and safety were a fundamental part of our education system. With Bill 81, we are doing what we said we would do. If passed, this bill will have a code of conduct and the code of conduct will provide everyone involved in publicly funded schools with a set of clear expectations for behaviour. The code also sets out clear, mandatory consequences for students who commit serious infractions.

We all know our rights as citizens, but these rights also come with serious responsibilities. Whether you are a student, parent, teacher, principal, school board official or community member, the code of conduct makes your role and responsibilities abundantly clear. When the rules are clear to everyone, students can concentrate on learning and teachers can concentrate on teaching.

It is the case that schools in Ontario, we know, are already required to have various rules and various codes, but we've heard very clearly that there are many inconsistencies across the province and that these codes do not always work as well as they should.

If passed, this bill will ensure that there are clear, province-wide standards, especially for the most serious infractions. School boards will have to meet these expectations of the new provincial code of conduct, as they do with other provisions in the Education Act.

I am confident that boards will support these efforts to create a safer school environment. In addition to the province-wide code of conduct, boards will continue to establish their own procedures and set consequences for less serious infractions.

I think it's important to note that the code of conduct reinforces the principles that we first put forward in our Ontario Charter of Education Rights and Responsibilities. The charter states that every student has the right to a safe learning environment; that students have the responsibility to respect themselves and others within the education system; and that teachers have the right to be able to maintain order in their classrooms.

With these principles in mind, we have developed a code that holds everyone to the same high standards of accountability. The code would make an expulsion hearing automatic for students who bring weapons to school, who provide drugs or alcohol to others, who commit physical or sexual assault, or use or threaten serious harm with a weapon. Suspension would be the minimum penalty for possessing illegal drugs or alcohol, for threatening or swearing at teachers, for vandalism, for uttering threats of harm to others in the school community.

This government believes that parents and community members are important partners in the education system. Their involvement makes a major difference in their schools and in their child's education and in their child's achievements. This legislation clearly recognizes that role by ensuring that the school council be involved when a school board is developing its code of conduct and its safe school policy.

People have also told us that they want classrooms that are conducive to a respectful learning environment and schools that promote responsibility on the part of our students. To accomplish this, we believe that teachers need to have the appropriate authority to take action in their own classrooms to keep their students and themselves safe. We believe that principals need to do the same for their schools. That is why, if this legislation is approved, Bill 81 would give teachers the authority to suspend students for one school day. Suspensions that warrant more than a day will be referred to the school principal. Principals, as is the current practice, will continue to be able to suspend students for up to 20 school days. This bill will also extend to principals the right to expel students for up to one school year. Depending on the circumstances, a principal may also continue to refer students for expulsion by the school board as is currently the case. We have taken this important step, we have extended this authority for both teachers and principals, because we believe it will help promote safe classrooms and safe schools. Our plans are, to have this authority extended, that this will take effect over the next year.

As I said when I first introduced the code of conduct, every use of authority must be balanced with the appropriate checks and balances, with the appropriate due process. That is why we have built in those checks and balances, we have built that due process into these legislative proposals.

If it passes, Bill 81 would give parents or guardians the right to appeal an expulsion by a school board or principal and a suspension issued by a principal.

Our consultations over the past two years have told us that people not only want consistent standards and respect and responsibility back into the classroom, but they also want supports for students who have been expelled or suspended. We certainly agree. Sending these kids out on the street only puts the problem somewhere else and actually creates additional problems, not only for those students but also for the community. That is why Bill 81 will also set out mandatory requirements for students who have been expelled to attend strict discipline or equivalent programs in order to earn their re-entry back into the regular school system.

We know that most expelled students want to continue their education despite the challenges or difficulties they may be having. By making a strict discipline program or equivalent program a condition of re-entry into the regular school system, we are providing the structured approach needed to help these young people turn their lives around. In addition, studies have shown that these

kinds of programs may reduce an expelled student's further involvement in violent or disruptive behaviour.

The amendments in Bill 81 will allow us to develop a strict disciplined schooling program that would include the appropriate mix of academic and behaviour skills training. We will continue to consult with our education partners as we design and develop these programs further. Our plan is to fund a number of demonstration projects over the next year to see what works best before phasing in such programs province-wide.

Parents and guardians also want to see appropriate programs for students who have been suspended, because suspended students can often fall further behind in their schooling. If passed, Bill 81 would give us the authority to make sure that all school boards are providing the structures and supports for suspended students so that they can keep their heads in their books, correct their behaviour and stay out of further trouble. Some school boards in Ontario already offer different kinds of programs for suspended students, where they can keep up with their studies and gain valuable life skills, such as anger management and conflict resolution. But we want to make sure that we have the best programs and that every school board is in a position to offer them for suspended students and also for expelled students.

We certainly recognize that teachers can't teach and students can't learn if they are in fear for their safety. As I said when I first introduced the Safe Schools Act last week, in too many classrooms across the province, this is still the case. Bill 81 would allow for such things as criminal background checks for anyone working in a school, to better ensure the safety of our students, our staff and also our volunteers. This requirement, like the standards of behaviour in the provincial code of conduct, will begin to take effect this fall.

Bill 81 would also allow the government the authority to issue guidelines to school boards, guidelines which would allow for a majority of parents at any school in Ontario to have a dress code or to require a uniform for their children, something that I found in my consultations and meetings to be extremely important for parents. Many of them want to do this at their schools. Many parents, students and teachers have told me that they believe a school dress code or a uniform is not only one good way to encourage respect and responsibility in schools, but it can also contribute to a safe school environment, so the students know clearly who is part of their school family and who is not.

Principals would also be given the authority under this legislation to ensure that anyone who poses a threat is denied access to school property; another important step to ensure the safety of our students.

To instill pride and respect, the proposed amendments would also require our schools to include the singing of O Canada as part of their daily opening or closing exercises. Schools may also, at the discretion of their school councils, of their parents, include the daily recitation of a pledge of citizenship or some other such reading or recitation.

Bill 81 is about making the rules of behaviour and consequences clear to everyone. It is about clarifying the roles and responsibilities we all share to better ensure that our schools are safe, respectful places to teach and to learn. This legislation is about everyone involved in the publicly funded system—from the board, to its staff, to the principal, to the teacher, to the student, to the government—all of us being accountable for our actions.

The amendments in Bill 81 build on the previous reforms we have made to help Ontario schools deliver the best education possible for all of our students. Since 1995 our education reform agenda has aimed at ensuring that Ontario students have access to the best-quality education. We laid out very clearly, both before that election and before the election last year, the key elements of improving our education system for better quality and more accountability, those key elements, important things like a more equitable student-focused funding formula that makes sure we have more dollars in our classrooms, more resources in classrooms.

We are seeing that shift happen very clearly; a new, more rigorous curriculum, so our students are learning more in earlier grades, more of what they need to succeed after they leave high school, whatever their destination—university or college or directly into the workplace; regular standard tests across the province to ensure that our students are indeed learning that curriculum, so we know if there are problems so we can fix them; standard report cards so that our parents clearly understand how well their children are doing and so they too can be involved in the process of making sure that their own students get what they need in order to succeed. These have all been investments and key steps in promoting better quality and more accountability in our school system.

All the while we have been hearing from parents, from students, from taxpayers that there is a need to build in more accountability. This bill, and the provincial code of conduct that it would give force to, along with our other recent educational quality reforms, will do precisely that.

If we want our students to strive for excellence, we owe them nothing less than our own best efforts to ensure that their schools are respectful places, places that inspire and challenge them, without any fear for their own safety.

I invite all of the members here today to join me in making Ontario's publicly funded education system not only the safest that it can be for our children and our teachers, but also the best that it can be for our children. I believe that supporting this legislation will very much contribute to doing that. Thank you very much.

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Mr Joseph N. Tascona (Barrie-Simcoe-Bradford): I am pleased to join in the debate on second reading of the Safe Schools Act, Bill 81.

Respect and responsibility are important parts of ensuring that schools in our publicly funded education system are safe. With Bill 81, the proposed Safe Schools Act, our government is taking the steps necessary to

ensure that Ontario's school system is the safest and the best that it can be. If approved by the Legislature, Bill 81 will not only give authority to the provincial code of conduct released in April, it will also allow the government to proceed with a number of other initiatives that will promote respect, responsibility and civility in our classrooms.

I am certain that students, teachers, staff, parents and every member here, regardless of where they live in Ontario, all agree that a safe school environment contributes to student learning and quality education. The proposed amendments to the Education Act directly address what people have been telling us they want for their schools. We have heard their concerns over and over again about behaviour, about discipline, and especially about safety in our schools. If the recent polls are accurate, the vast majority of Ontarians are united on this issue and would support the passing of this bill.

We promised in our Blueprint election platform last year that we would take action and that we would take responsibility to ensure that respect, responsibility and safety are a fundamental part of our educational system. With Bill 81, we are delivering on that promise.

The code of conduct that this bill would give force to, if passed, will provide everyone involved in the publicly funded schools with a set of clear expectations for behaviour. The code also clearly sets out the mandatory consequences for students who commit serious infractions. The code of conduct makes everyone's rights and responsibilities abundantly clear. Whether you are a student, parent, teacher, principal, school board or community member, you will understand your role in the education system. When the rules are clear to everyone, students can concentrate on learning and teachers can concentrate on teaching.

Schools in Ontario are currently required to have their own codes of conduct. But there are many inconsistencies across the province, and these codes do not always work as well as they could. This bill, if passed, will ensure that there are clear province-wide standards, especially for the most serious infractions. I am confident that school boards will support our efforts to create a safer school environment.

In addition to the province-wide code of conduct, boards will continue to establish their own procedures and set of consequences for less serious infractions. The code of conduct reinforces the principles outlined in the Ontario Charter of Education Rights and Responsibilities. The charter states:

(1) Every student has the right to a safe learning environment;

(2) Students have the responsibility to respect themselves and others within the educational system; and

(3) Teachers have the right to be able to maintain order in their classrooms.

The code would make an expulsion hearing automatic for students who (1) bring weapons on to school property (2) provide drugs or alcohol to others, (3) commit

physical or sexual assault or robbery, and (4) use, or threaten serious harm with, a weapon.

Suspension would be the minimum penalty for (1) possessing illegal drugs or alcohol, (2) threatening or swearing at a teacher, (3) vandalism, and (4) uttering threats to harm another.

This legislation clearly recognizes the role of parents, guardians and community members by ensuring that school councils be involved when a school board is developing its code of conduct and safe school policy. I think that's a fundamental right of parents, guardians and community members, that school councils have a role in the development of a code of conduct and safe school police. That's what we've heard is wanted.

People have told us they want classrooms that are conducive to a respectful learning environment and schools that promote responsibility on the part of our students. To accomplish this, teachers need to have the authority to take action in their own classrooms, and principals need authority within their schools. If approved, Bill 81 will give teachers the authority to suspend students for up to one school day. Principals will continue to be able to suspend students, as is now the case, for up to 20 days. In addition, a principal will be given authority to expel students from their school for up to one school year or they may continue to refer students for a board expulsion.

Every use of authority must be balanced with the appropriate process. That is why we have built in checks and balances in the form of due process, for these consequences, in the bill. If passed, Bill 81 would give parents or guardians the right to appeal an expulsion by a school board or principal and a suspension by a principal.

Our consultations over the past two years tell us that people not only want consistent standards and respect and responsibility in the classroom, but they want support for students who have been expelled or suspended. Sending these kids out on the streets only puts the problem somewhere else and creates other problems. That is why Bill 81 also sets mandatory requirements for students who have been expelled to attend strict discipline or equivalent programs in order to re-enter the regular school system, if Bill 81 is passed. Most expelled students want to continue their education. By making a strict discipline program or equivalent a condition of re-entry into the regular school system, we are providing the structured approach needed to help these young people turn their lives around.

We recognize that teachers can't teach and students can't learn if they fear for their safety. In too many classrooms across the province this is just the case. Amendments in Bill 81 to the Education Act will allow for such things as criminal background checks of anyone working in a school, to better ensure the safety of students, staff and volunteers.

Bill 81 would allow the government the authority to issue guidelines to school boards which would allow a majority of parents at any school in Ontario to have a dress code or require a uniform for their children. Many

parents, students and teachers believe that a school dress code or uniform is a good way to encourage respect and responsibility and that it contributes to a safe school environment.

To instill pride and respect, the proposed amendments to the Education Act would also require schools to include the singing of O Canada as part of their daily opening or closing exercises. Schools may also, at the discretion of their school councils, include the daily recitation of a pledge of citizenship.

The amendments in Bill 81 build on previous reforms we have made to ensure that Ontario schools deliver the best education possible for all students. Since 1995 our education reform agenda has aimed at ensuring that Ontario students have access to the best quality education. I would say this is their right—a quality education.

The key elements of education reform have been, firstly, fair student-focused funding; secondly, more resources in the classrooms; thirdly, new rigorous curricula; fourthly, regular tests to show how students are doing; and finally, standard report cards in the assessment of students' achievements.

We want our students to strive for excellence. We owe them nothing less than our best efforts to ensure their schools are respectful places that inspire and challenge them without any fear for their safety.

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On that note, dealing with the bill itself, there certainly are roles played by the minister not only in establishing and setting out the legislation and regulations, but also in setting down clear policies and guidelines in terms of a code of conduct and the implementation.

The purposes of the code of conduct are set out in the bill. I will recite those for clarity:

"1. To ensure that all members of the school community, especially people in positions of authority, are treated with respect and dignity.

"2. To promote responsible citizenship by encouraging appropriate participation in the civic life of the school community.

"3. To maintain an environment where conflict and difference can be addressed in a manner characterized by respect and civility.

"4. To encourage the use of non-violent means to resolve conflict.

"5. To promote the safety of people in the schools.

"6. To discourage the use of alcohol and illegal drugs."

We're requiring that "Every board shall take such steps as the minister directs to bring the code of conduct to the attention of pupils, parents and guardians of pupils and others who may be present in schools under the jurisdiction of the board." Certainly a notice requirement to make sure that the individuals I have just mentioned understand what is expected of them with respect to safe schools is fundamental, obviously, to a policy that will work in the school system.

The board obviously plays a key role with respect to the implementation of the code of conduct, through

principals, through teachers, and also through school councils. Everybody's working together with the same objective: to provide a safe working environment not only for the students but also for the teachers and the staff who work at that school. There is also flexibility in Bill 81 to deal with local codes of conduct in terms of governing the behaviour of persons in the school, but that has to be consistent with the provincial code of conduct.

We're trying to deal with activity that happens all around the school premises. That's why measures have been put in place with respect to the appropriate checks in terms of individuals who come in touch with the school, and the activity which takes place on the school premises, in terms of giving the principal the powers necessary to make sure the school premises are used for the purposes they're there for and not for illegal activities.

When we look at Bill 81 and safe schools, we are proposing some authorities in terms that are new for teachers and for principals. Teachers must apply the provincial code of conduct for infractions and those that have been set by boards as mandatory suspendable offences. That suspension power is up to one full school day and all related school activities for that day, or to refer that person to the principal.

We're looking for a safe environment, control not only for the entire school premises but also in the classroom in particular, empowering teachers to deal with conduct that is just not conducive to a safe working environment, to allow them to teach in that environment, and also for the principal to deal with the school per se in terms of dealing with a safe environment

The principles set out were very clearly delineated in the Blueprint we set out when we were running for election, what was set out in April when we were setting out the code of conduct in terms of what was going to be expected, what were to be the types of infractions that would be dealt with, how they would be dealt with and what the process would be in terms of checks and balances, and other aspects of making a safe working environment, but also building respect and responsibility and dignity for individuals who work within that system, in terms of how they would want to be treated and how they should be treating other people.

Those are my comments with respect to this stage of the debate. I'm very pleased to join in support of Bill 81.

Mr Bart Maves (Niagara Falls): It's my pleasure to rise tonight to speak to Bill 81, the Safe Schools Act. The member from Barrie touched briefly on some of the things that have occurred in the past few years in the education system and I want to reflect on some of that for a bit. Last week we had a discussion on Bill 74, the Education Act. During that I had a two-minute opportunity to speak to one the members, and I had quickly jotted down a variety of things we had done over the past three years to improve conditions in school systems. Granted, anyone who's been here the past four years and followed provincial politics would say that reforms in the education system have not been easy at all times and that

there's been quite a bit of volatility in the sector, and that's the case.

I want to point out some of the things that have happened over the time. In actual fact we have been blocked on some of these things, and there's been volatility and arguments with teacher unions about some of these changes we've made, but now that they've been implemented and there's been some time to get used to them, they're getting wide acceptance, in fact appreciation, within the school system. Although I know that members opposite will probably mock Bill 81 and some others in the system will mock Bill 81, I think it too will come to pass that it will be appreciated over time by those in the system.

One of the things I want to talk about that we did right off the bat when we were elected that improved the lot of teachers across the province was to end the social contract. People have to realize that the social contract froze teachers' salaries. The teachers are paid on a grid. The grid differs a little bit from board to board but basically provides that each year you're in there as a teacher you get about a \$2,000 increase in pay for up to 11 years. Also, the more education you have, you get on a higher grid, and if you take more courses you can move along; with better qualifications, you get a higher rate of pay. The social contract froze people who were at the top of that grid. It also froze people who were on the grid. A first-, second- or third-year teacher would typically be getting a \$2,000 raise on an annual basis; it froze them. We immediately removed the boards and the unions from the social contract situation, and what happened in every board across the province was that the boards restored all those teachers who had been frozen on the grid to where they would have been. If they had been frozen for three years and this was going on to a fourth, they would have moved up four places on that grid. If your salary had been \$32,000, as soon as we came into office we removed that social contract and your salary could have gone up to about \$40,000. That varied, depending on where you were on the grid. But that was a substantial win for teachers and it was important to them.

We hear a lot from teachers about, "I haven't had a raise since 1993." Most people would consider that grid annual raises, but a lot of times teachers don't think those increases in pay are raises and one of the concerns they'll talk about is that they haven't had increases in pay. But as we advanced along, around 1998, when we amalgamated school boards, a lot of the boards became amalgamated together. For instance, in Niagara, Welland county and Niagara district merged into one board. What happened in those instances was that the board with the higher-pay grid—the board with the lower grid automatically moved up and got increases, so they got the higher grid of pay, so all teachers now take on the higher grid of pay. So that was a raise for those teachers who had come from the board with the lower grid.

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Finally, in the last contract negotiations, most boards across the province did have raises, on top of those

movements to the higher grid when boards amalgamated. For instance, in my board there was a 2% increase in the grid as a whole.

So that ending of the social contract and the amalgamation of the boards ended up being of substantial benefit to teachers.

At the same time, I would point out that we brought in an 85 factor, an early retirement package for teachers. There were a lot of teachers, who normally retire on a 90 factor, who were anxious to get on and to end their school careers, and we brought in an 85 factor. There were quite a few boards, mine in Niagara was one, where we had a lot of teachers getting near the retirement age. We brought in an 85 factor so they could retire earlier. That of course opened up positions at the bottom of the ladder for younger teachers.

So there are a couple of things we did that don't usually get mentioned.

Another thing we should talk about is the \$100 million that we put in a couple of years ago province-wide on textbooks, science materials and computers. I recall, and I talked about this the other night, that during Bill 160 debate a lot of parents would say to me: "Our kids don't have textbooks" or "My kids are sharing. There are five textbooks for the whole class and they have to share them," or "The textbook is held together with duct tape," and so on and so forth. The textbooks were old, 15 years old or sometimes older than that. To me, when I heard these arguments back in 1997, when we had been there for two years, that clearly spoke to an abdication of responsibility on behalf of the adults collectively, provincially and board-wise and whatnot. It spoke to a condemnation of the way they had allocated funds in the past. I say that because a textbook, forever in education, has been the staple, the primary tool that all kids use when they are in school. For the adults in the education system to have neglected to supply those kids with that most basic of tools really was a condemnation of the decisions they had made over the years.

Immediately following Bill 160, we spent over \$100 million on textbooks, computers and science material. Each year since, with the new funding formula, there is an allotment for more of those materials, because kids need up-to-date textbooks, and kids need up-to-date materials.

That's another thing that has happened over time that I think is vital to note.

An improved curriculum: Again, when this came out we actually hired several hundred teachers at different times of the year to help us improve the curriculum in Ontario. That was met with frustration at the time by many teachers, but the more I speak to, in all grades, the more comfortable they are with that curriculum and the happier they are now with that curriculum. In fact, I've had some teachers, both elementary and secondary, say to me that they would like the standardized province-wide curriculum to be even more detailed, even more defined, so that when one person in grade 10 in one community is reading Hamlet, someone in grade 10 in

another community is reading Hamlet. Now, there are a lot of people within the education sector who don't like that idea. They would prefer to have a little more flexibility from region to region in the province, but it is an area where some teachers have asked us to go. But as I said, that improved curriculum took a lot of work. Hundreds of teachers were involved in writing it, and it wasn't necessarily met with glee, but it is now.

Equalized funding: One of the things that was primary about Bill 160 was equalized funding across the province, where we used to have a system—we had 24 studies over the years in Ontario that said we should attempt to remove education funding from the property tax base. There were a lot of areas of the province, wealthy areas with a high property tax base, that were funding their students on about \$8,000 or \$9,000 a year. They were spending quite a bit of money per person on school. In other areas of the province where they didn't have such a large base they were maybe spending \$4,000 a year on a student's education—or less.

Bill 160, the new funding formula, equalized that. It took a lot of school funding away from reliance on the property taxes and it gave more responsibility to the provincial government, and we have equalized that. It equalized not only from region to region but it equalized funding from Catholic to public boards. I know my public board has been getting dramatic increases in funding in the last three years, every year since we've brought that in. Again, that's not something a lot of people in the education community will readily admit but it's certainly the case. That has been a major benefit for Catholic boards and for some small, rural areas across the province in better funding for education.

More resources for the classroom are part of that new funding formula. We've had about a \$700-million increase. The Minister of Education will correct me if I'm wrong, but I think it's about a \$700-million increase in funding in the classroom, because we've taken the funding formula and divided it up into classroom funding and non-classroom funding and we've said they have to spend that classroom funding in the class. They can't take classroom funding—teachers, textbooks and so on—and spend it on administration. That's protected funding for kids so it goes in the right places.

Special education funding is over a billion dollars now; yet more announcements this year about increased funding for that. That's protected. That's a line in the budget and they cannot spend that on anything but special education. Quite frankly, I remember an article in my local paper. You know, we heard a lot of hue and cry that there wasn't enough there, and in some cases that may have been true. I can't speak for every single board across the province, but I know there was a recent article in my board in Niagara where they had a million-dollar surplus at the end of the year in their special-ed funding. On top of this, we're going to add more money for special education.

The Education Improvement Commission, which advises on a lot of these changes, asked us a long time ago

to freeze average class sizes across the province at the levels current in 1997. We did that with Bill 160. Now, in the Education Accountability Act, Bill 74, we're lowering that yet again. We've gone above and beyond what the Education Improvement Commission has asked us to do. As you can see, all of these things are very beneficial to teachers in our school system today.

Province-wide testing: Something we ran on in 1995, something that was very important. I had one teacher, a grade 9 teacher, tell me that he had a kid come in who couldn't do very basic math, very basic addition. How did that kid ever get to that point, when he's going through that system, where he could get to grade 9 and couldn't do addition? That happened quite a bit over the years in Ontario, where people moved on to grades and their academic performance wasn't anywhere near what it should have been.

One of the ways we wanted to address that, if some boards or some schools across the province were doing exceptionally well, was to have an objective measure for that. We wanted to be able to say to the boards that were doing really well: "What's your secret? We need to know your secret so we can pass it on to other boards where they're not doing as well." Or if some schools were doing better than others, we wanted to ask: "What's your secret? Let's learn from each other and improve."

Province-wide testing was met with a great gnashing of teeth and frustration and blockage at the time we brought it in. It's now becoming more and more accepted. People are beginning to see it more and more as a tool that we can use to improve education.

Standardized report cards: That's another area where parents have been frustrated for years about changing report cards, changing formats all the time. They didn't know how to read them. They didn't know how well their kids were doing. Another improvement.

1930

And now, tonight, we have a code of conduct. This is yet another change to the education system intended to improve that system, intended to support teachers in that system more.

I remember in 1995 having a focus group that talked about a lot of issues within education, and at the time a lot of teachers expressed to me the concern that they felt abandoned at times when they were trying to bring discipline to their classrooms. They didn't think their principal or their school board would stand behind them when they wanted to enact discipline on that one unruly student who really ruined the lesson for everybody else.

During Bill 160, I had a teacher talk to me about prep time reductions. That teacher said, "You know, we would not mind at all if you could give us some authority so that instead of spending a lot of time in our class dealing with one or maybe two unruly students who ruin the lesson for everybody else, who take up too much of the teacher's time—give us the ability to deal with that student, and we don't mind." We're trying to answer that call today. I remember talking to teachers at the secondary and elementary levels.

I know that in most schools on the first day of school they give out a little handbook, and somewhere in that handbook there's usually some kind of a code of conduct or maybe some rules on dress code and so on and so forth. Nobody ever really reads it. The kids don't read it. Parents really don't pay any attention to it. It's handed out and forgotten.

I remember talking to some teachers back in 1995-96, and we all came to the conclusion that it would be nice if perhaps at the start of each school year a teacher and a parent could sit down with a student, all three or four in a room, and look at the responsibilities of each. What is it that the teacher is going to provide for that student and the school system? What are the parents' roles and responsibilities in this relationship and what are the role and responsibilities of the student? And if any of those aren't fulfilled, are there consequences to that? Each year, let's bring them in, sit them down, talk about it and have everybody in the room sign that document, so when someone does not live up to their responsibilities, someone breaks one of the rules that they've signed on to, consequences can occur and there will be no surprises.

I'm very happy to note in this bill that one of the very first things—after the purpose clause, which I want to talk to in a minute—it says is, "Every board shall take such steps as the minister directs to bring the code of conduct to the attention of pupils, parents and guardians of pupils who may be present in schools under the jurisdiction of the board." I think that's right on the mark. It's not enough just to say, "Here's the rules." You've got to make sure that everyone understands there are rules and responsibilities in a school. I'm delighted that after those discussions I had many years ago that's happening.

I want to congratulate Dan Newman, who's now the environment minister, who in the last Parliament spent many hours developing a Safe Schools Act. He worked with a lot of teachers' associations, a lot of front-line teachers, with school boards. He travelled the province on his own time, meeting with people who wanted to talk to him about his Safe Schools Act. A lot of what Dan did then is reflected in this bill, so I want to congratulate Dan for that.

There's a lot of consultation that happens in the education sector already. The Education Improvement Commission continues to do a lot of work in the sector, which we're grateful for. I note there's quite a bit of flexibility in this bill for guidelines and regulations and the minister will—and I already know this; she has even said so tonight—consult with the sector. We're going to look around and find out where things work best and we're going to try to adopt that province-wide. There's a lot of room for that in this bill, and I'm happy to see that.

I could go on at length, but I need to leave some time for the good member from Brampton. I'm going to do that tonight, Speaker, but I just wanted to go back and talk about those many things that don't get spoken about very often, that have improved the lot of people in the school system. This code of conduct is something they've

been after for a while. They needed some support within their classrooms, within the schools, and that's done here.

I'm going to vote for this bill and I look forward to the upcoming consultations that are going to be done to fill in some of the guidelines and some of the regulatory additions that must be made.

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

Mr Joseph Spina (Brampton Centre): It's my pleasure to spend a few moments in the remaining few minutes as part of our share of the debate on Bill 81.

As we went through this and as I listened to the various speakers, and even members of the opposition, over the time that we've had discussing this bill, I thought back to a number of situations in my life as a student, both growing up in Sault Ste Marie and going perhaps, Speaker, to the same school you did, St Mary's College. I'm not sure if you did, but I'm presuming you may have, Speaker. I remembered Father Brown, the principal at the time. Father Brown was a fairly strict disciplinarian and set a very definite tone within the school. He had a sawed-off golf club, a wooden shaft with no head, and Father Brown walked the hallways and tapped his stick along the hallways. If you heard the tap, tap, tap of the stick and the "harrumph," you knew you'd better straighten up because Father Brown was coming down the hall.

We know today that corporal discipline, the things perhaps that Father Brown was able to use—the whack across the backside if you went to the washroom when you weren't supposed to or you stepped out of line as you went from class to class—was an element that kind of went the way of the dodo bird. That's not to say that discipline disappeared. There are schools today that have very good discipline systems, but it all becomes a matter of policy of the principal and vice-principal in charge.

I can think of comparisons within my own neighbourhood, where the principal and vice-principal of Mayfield high school, for example, set an excellent example of discipline in that school. There was a low tolerance for violence, disrespect and many of the other elements where students crossed the line. As a result, Mayfield high school in north Brampton is a very much sought-after school by parents to try to get their kids into that school, not just because it's an extremely talented high school—it has an entertainment and dramatic arts program which is unequalled in Peel region—but also because of the fact that the subsequent principal and vice-principals have carried out this tradition of good, strong discipline in the school. The pity of it is that it was not consistent across the board or indeed across the boards across the province.

I was at a parent-teacher council meeting at one of the schools in my area, my neighbourhood, and we talked—this was before Bill 81 was introduced—about some of the elements of what we were coming forward with and what we talked about certainly in the election campaign with the Blueprint, and I mentioned of course the code of conduct. The parents at this council as well as the

principal and teachers were very interested in what would comprise this code of conduct. The interesting point that was brought forward by one of the parents was, "Look, I know that we've gone through this idea of suspensions in our school system and a vice-principal or principal has the right to suspend." They can appeal it. They can go to the board and appeal the suspension. It usually goes to a board committee. I know that there are members, both in our party and in the opposition, who sat for many years on boards as trustees or as chairs and went through this process of listening to an appeal for a suspension.

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I think the point this parent made to me was very important. He said, "Look, if my kid steps out of line and it's justified by a suspension, I don't want my son or my daughter running around on a free day." In many cases this is exactly what was happening. He said: "You know, when I was a kid I deliberately tried to get in trouble so I could get suspended. Why? Because I'd go shoot pool for a day or three days." He said, "If you're going to introduce something like a code of conduct, we would ask that you have a remedial program that is clearly associated with it." That is exactly what will be accompanying this code of conduct under the regulations that will follow the bill, that there will be policies associated with the suspension. In fact, if you look at a part, it says: "Proposed Authority to Suspend;

"Minister's authority to set policies and guidelines on:

"Supports for students;

"(a) the teacher is responsible for providing school work for their class(es) for the one-day suspension;

"(b) the principal is responsible for directing the student to ask for school work from other teachers for one-day suspension;

"(c) the principal informs the student, parent/guardian of what structures/supports are available," fully intending that there would be some structures and supports available for that student.

I think we all agree that the last thing we need is to have a problem student just turned loose willy-nilly on the streets. I don't think any of us wants that. We know there is an opportunity here for remediation or rehabilitation, or at least an opportunity to serve the discipline in a constructive, learning way. Father Brown's methods may have been rudimentary, but I can tell you that any student who was technically suspended never really got suspended. They got suspended from class, but never from the school. There was a lot of work done around school property with these students who were suspended from class and, frankly, that was the lesson. These people knew that they weren't going to be sent off for a day so they could shoot pool with students who perhaps were no longer in school at all, but rather were going to spend the day or two days around the school property cleaning up, doing work on the property, and in some cases doing some fairly hard labour.

I just want to share with the House in the couple of minutes that I have left some quotes. The president of the Canadian Safe School Network said: "But the absolute

direction they're headed in," speaking of our government, "is a good one. The fact that they're engaging parents, they're providing parents with the opportunity to have uniforms in the school for their kids, the fact that they're setting a standard, and we talked a bit about this earlier on, the fact that they're setting a standard for all schools to reach to, providing resources for alternative programs, all are something that's a good idea."

Mr James J. Bradley (St Catharines): Who said that, Frank Klees?

Mr Spina: That was SA, president of the Canadian Safe School Network, and that was published in the Toronto Star.

The Durham board report on violence indicated shocking statistics: 41 assaults on teachers, 230 incidents of violence, 22 incidents of weapons in schools, 44 threats of serious injuries to students and 67 cases of students causing bodily harm. That was published in the Toronto Star April 27.

I want to leave us all with a statement that was published in the Lindsay Daily Post. It said, "It's about time teachers received the support they've so sorely lacked in the past few years," and that's on a consistent basis. I can tell you, as a husband of a 26-year veteran of a high school teaching system, it makes me feel better that we are able to give my wife the support she needs in doing a better job and feeling safer within the school environment in which she teaches.

The Acting Speaker: Comments or questions?

Mr Bradley: Is "phony" a word you can use in the House? I think you can. I'm asking, but I think you can. That's a phony concern. I won't say it specifically to anybody, so I can get away with this, but that's a phony concern for teachers that I hear on the part of this government. Here's a government who puts the boots to teachers almost daily, who uses them as victims, who uses them as scapegoats constantly. Now this government gets up with this bill and says, "Oh, we're really here to help teachers out."

There isn't anybody, but anybody, who believes that's your motivation. We know what your motivation is. You took some polls. You asked people if they want discipline in the schools. Everybody wants discipline in the schools, quite obviously. This is the easy stuff you're doing. Most schools in this province now have a code of conduct, most schools are enforcing this, and this is just a big showpiece.

Are some of the things involved in this bill all right? Yes, because they're already in existence. But to say this is somehow to help teachers in this province out, I don't think there's a teacher, outside of perhaps the one he mentioned, who would actually believe that is the case, and I expect she would do that.

We have a dearth of psychologists and psychiatrists who help out students who have obvious problems. I'm not talking about ones who are simply disruptive, but people who have some obvious problems—a real cutback in that field.

You started out saying you're going to suspend students for 20 days. Everybody knew that to have teachers suspend people for 20 days wouldn't work. That's down to one day now. The real test is going to be where you are going to send these students. What if it's an eight-year-old student? Where are you going to send that student? How is that going to be funded? None of that is in place at this time, because this is just a big show you're putting on to divert attention from crises such as the water crisis in Walkerton and the rest of Ontario.

Mr Rosario Marchese (Trinity-Spadina): I just want to say to the good people of Ontario that if they want an alternative point of view, I'll be speaking at approximately 9 o'clock.

Mr Garfield Dunlop (Simcoe North): It's a pleasure to rise this evening to make a few comments on Bill 81, the Safe Schools Act. I'd like to congratulate the minister, the parliamentary assistant and the other two members who have made a few comments on it as well.

We promised in our election platform last year that we would take action and that we would take responsibility to ensure that respect, responsibility and safety are a fundamental part of our education system. With Bill 81, we are delivering on that promise. People have told us—and they've told me as well many times—that they want classrooms that are conducive to a respectful learning environment and schools that promote responsibility on the part of our students. I'm sure we've all heard these stories many times over about some of the problems that teachers have run into in the schools. We recognize that teachers can't teach and students can't learn if they fear for their own safety.

In too many classrooms across this province this is the case. There are problems. We want our students to excel. We'll do nothing less than make our best effort to ensure that their schools are safe and respectful places.

I particularly like the requirement of the singing of O Canada. A lot of schools do it now, but I think it's nice that it's required. I like the option of using school uniforms and using the pledge of allegiance in our schools.

Mr Speaker, we've heard over and over again about safety in our schools and the code of conduct, and I thank you this evening for the opportunity to speak to this and make a few comments. I will be supporting Bill 81.

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The Acting Speaker: Further comments. The member for Lennox, Addington, Frontenac, Hastings. Did I get that backwards?

Mrs Leona Dombrowsky (Hastings-Frontenac-Lennox and Addington): You got all the riding but just not in the right order. But thank you, Speaker, very much. I'm happy to make some comments on what the members of the government have shared. Since the member from Niagara Falls chose not to focus very much on Bill 81 but gave us a bit of a history lesson, it was really a nice reminder for me, and I think the record needs to be clarified on some of the points the member from Niagara made. I think I have some right to clarify that, because I was a school board trustee and a school

board chair and I have some pretty vivid memories of what the government did for education.

The member from Niagara Falls talked about the great favour they did for teachers when the social contract was lifted, when the Conservatives came to power and teachers were able to be compensated for those years they did not receive an increment. But I would remind the government that it was the school boards that did that, without any additional compensation from the government. There were no additional grants provided by the government to address that equity, that justice issue. It was the boards that did the right thing, not the government.

Also, the member talked about the government providing \$100 million in 1997 for new textbooks because the boards were so totally irresponsible and hadn't looked after that. I remind the members of the government that it was about that time that the new curriculum had been introduced into the system. I would sincerely hope there was an understanding that if you're going to bring in new curriculum, you should be spending more money on textbooks for the students. It's important that the people of Ontario understand that those expenditures were made for that reason.

The Acting Speaker: Response?

Mr Tascona: I appreciate the comments that have been made by the members of the opposition parties and the government. The member for St Catharines makes a valid point: When you set mandatory requirements for students who have been expelled or suspended, you are going to have to have an alternative. We've set that out in Bill 81 in terms of strict discipline or equivalent programs in order to re-enter the regular school system. That is going to be a priority in terms of the re-entry and the funding that obviously is going to be needed to deal with that particular issue.

The member from Trinity-Spadina is not here at the moment, but I certainly await his remarks at 9 pm. I always appreciate what he has to say and I would urge the viewers to stay tuned for some of it.

The member from Simcoe North was always on point, always relevant, always speaking to the bill. The purpose of the bill, as everyone knows, is to deal with safety in our schoolyards and in our classrooms, because you have to have an environment where teachers can teach and students can learn. That's the primary focus of Bill 81, among other things.

The member from Hastings-Frontenac-Lennox and Addington—unfortunately she's not here at the moment, but I did appreciate her experience as a school board chair. The history lesson was quite informative. I would just remind the member that she's now an MPP and I think she should address the issues of the day. The issue of the day is Bill 81, and we didn't hear anything on that.

But Bill 81 is something the public believes is necessary, and this government has lived up to its promises.

The Acting Speaker: Further debate?

Mr Gerard Kennedy (Parkdale-High Park): It is a pleasure to join this debate tonight and to be able to

respond to the previous hour's worth of discussion in this House. I think the public really needs to know what this so-called Safe Schools Act is about. We certainly don't take anything away from the motivation of the members opposite, but if they were as contemplative and as full-some in their concern for the safety of schoolchildren, we would have heard quite a different noise from the other side of the House. It's this group of people, this government, this Premier and this Minister of Education who need the code of conduct we're talking about tonight.

When it comes to the safety of schoolchildren in this province, this government has nothing to be holding its head high about. In fact, this government has palpably, markedly and measurably made schools less safe. I will refer in specific detail, which we heard none of tonight from the members opposite, to how specifically the measures they're dealing with would actually have an impact on the concerns that parents and children and teachers have about the viability of the safety of schools.

In effect, we now know this is a government of shortcuts, a government that will take the easy way. What we've heard tonight is the creaming off of the easy stuff, the things any government could write down on the back of a napkin—and frankly, I think it was on the back of a napkin, the earlier version of this bill that this government put forward in full confidence some time ago, because the new bill has some changes to it. To give you an idea of the level of precision this government puts into its forethought, its preparation and its understanding of how to deal with a problem, it first said to us, some number of weeks ago, that teachers should be able to suspend for 20 days; the new bill says one day. What happened to the other 19 days? What kind of backing up, what kind of perception did this government actually have to make that kind of gross change in what it was doing?

This government also tried—it's probably a time-tested standard of when the public should be suspicious, when you get a government, any government, hiding behind the Queen and the flag, which is what this government purported to do when they first brought out this bill. They spoke to an oath of allegiance they wanted to subject schoolchildren in this province to, as if that would somehow magically make children safe.

This bill betrays an outlook not only lazy in its character, not reaching in its preparation and actual diligence in addressing the problem, but also somewhat problematic in its overall view of what is supposed to be happening in schools. What we didn't see in any of the bills here today is how to actually reduce violence where it takes place. Instead, we have seen a slavish connection to what is now recognizable about this government's education approach: a centralized, Soviet-style outlook that says they can sit in their nicely upholstered seats here at Queen's Park, push a button and make something happen in a school, or, more to the point, pretend that something is going to happen in a school, to make sure that the public they'd like to serve—and that certainly is

not a majority of the public—believes something is happening.

This government would have us, in their central, big-government mindset, say that just because they set a code of conduct somehow that's going to make a difference in the daily lives of children and of teachers. Well, I will demonstrate in the next number of minutes that not only is that a false hope being held out to schools, teachers and parents, but it is palpably dangerous in terms of what we in this House should be discharging as our responsibility for the safety and well-being of this province.

This government has put forward a plan that has no real substantive basis. We heard the minister earlier tonight say on several occasions, in an almost imperial kind of outlook, that there will be, there shall be, diversion programs. Well, there is no funding, no provision, no detail about where a grade 8 student who gets kicked out of class is going to end up being; there is no contemplation on this government's part. In fact, the government is proposing and recommending to us a law that will contradict another law it's already passed. There is no space in Mike Harris's school, in the few square feet he's apportioning per student, to acknowledge any place for a diversion program. This government has not thought this through, as their earlier version demonstrated in spades. In fact, this minister has not provided any ability for the public to be confident that those kids are not going to end up in the malls and on the streets.

It will interest the public viewing to know that when this minister announced these proposals she did so at the Eagle Project in Peel region. Now, the Eagle Project is a fine project, dealing with about six kids who have been suspended or expelled in that area. The thing, though, that I think would interest the people of the province to know is that not one dime of government money funds the Eagle Project. In effect, what the government was doing by making its announcement there was telling us that this is the future of education, this is what they have in mind: kick certain kids out of school and then either let them twist out in the malls or end up in some kind of magically privately funded place—no guarantee, no assurance and certainly nothing that could be relied upon in terms of people wanting to believe that this government has their interests at heart.

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What has this government done in specifics? In the generality this is where this debate certainly needs to go. This government has spent some of its time tonight trying to tout what it sees to be its achievements. That is a challenge that cannot go unresponded to. Let's look very specifically at what is really happening in the schools: What does this bill try to avoid, what does it try to distract and draw away from? Well, we learned some of it today. Members of each of the ridings represented on the opposite side of the House will want to get a copy of the 2000 Tracking Report. There are 900 schools in here, honourable members, and your schools, your ridings, are in this. What this does is track the changes of nobody else but your government over the last three years. What

have you taken away from your elementary schools? And apropos of the debate tonight, what have you done? You've reduced the access to psychologists by 38%. Will you stand up, proud in your place tonight, and explain to people who've got young children in elementary schools who need intervention that it's 38% less likely because of the proud decisions of your government? Will you take that responsibility?

When this minister made her initial announcement, she had a big, expensive background, emblazoned with "Respect and Responsibility." Well, you've got to give some to get some. If you're going to put the people of this province under the illusion that you're going to deal with safe schools, if you're not even just going to hide behind that smaller fig leaf of some code of conduct that everybody has already, then you're going to have to stand accountable for what you've done.

Also in the report today we find out there are fewer guidance counsellors. There are substantially fewer people available to provide exactly the kind of intervention that this bill purports to have a concern about. In fact, at the core of the education and learning experience, which this government tries everything in its power to distract our attention from, we now have 10% fewer full-time principals. The leader of the educational community, the person we depend on to spot and deal with discipline problems, is 10% less likely, in the last two years, to be there because of these particular people: this government and the people who support it. What does that mean? That means that 15% of the schools in the province, up from 6% a few years ago, have to rely on part-time principals.

Let's talk about safe schools. Let's talk about what it's like to have very young children and nobody patrolling the hallways, nobody there to hive off intruders, nobody there to deal with situations when there are people from the outside because there are part-time principals, because this government couldn't be bothered to put full-time ones in when it brought in its omnipotent funding formula: push-button, central-style control of all the communities represented in this House. This government has stolen the control of local education and doesn't even have the respect or the sense of responsibility to take the responsibility for what it's done, or there would be principals in those schools today.

We have in front of us a bill, a bill that purports to be a Safe Schools Act, that was promised many, many months and years ago, that has been promised at least three times, mainly, I'm sure it will not shock our viewing audience to know, during the election. That's the time it was talked about the most, when this government said, "We'll bring in a code of conduct and that code of conduct will make everybody behave." This is the thinnest of thin veils for a government that actually has to bear responsibility for the safety of our children, when they haven't provided—for example, ESL programs have dropped by some 25%.

I want to challenge the members opposite. And let's keep in mind that we're not dealing with the penal

system here; we're dealing with schoolchildren. In essence, what I think the majority of the Ontario public wants to hear from the members of the government is, do you believe that children of school age are still deserving of being prevented from aberrant behaviour, that when they exhibit that behaviour we should work to reduce it, to find ways to compel or to otherwise persuade children to adopt better, safer behaviours for them and for others? Do you actually hold any of that kind of view of society, or are you saying with this bill, in an absence of any measures that hold that more reasonable and hopeful view of society in it, that you just want to give up on those kids? Are you saying, effectively, to the rest of society, "We're not going to do our job, and the people we're going to dump into the streets or dump on to the malls are going to be somebody else's problem"?

While words like "code of conduct" bear resonance, this government is going to find itself, as it does now on other things, held accountable for whether the Safe Schools Act is actually going to make schools safer.

The compounded frustration they're creating for students out there with the new curriculum, with less attention available from each teacher—for example, for the 58% of kids who need understanding in terms of their limits, in terms of their ability to contend with the program, what used to be called the basic program, they have no curriculum to deal with them at all. If members in this House, both on this side and opposite, would take the trouble, they would find that in classroom after classroom, those people are lost in the current system, that there's no room for them in this tough new curriculum of this government, which is really a chaotic new curriculum from this government. That can only lead, predictably, to more frustration and more potential difficulties. But that is not addressed in this bill. There is nothing that this government says it's going to do about creating a climate where all kids will be worked with in that system, will be provided for, will be given some kind of assistance to see that they reach their potential.

I again challenge the members opposite. Reconcile this narrow, limited, centralist view of what a safe school is with what I think is the majority, widely held Ontario view that schools are there to help kids reach their potential as citizens, not some throwaway that says they'll sing "O Canada." We're all for there being an improvement in citizenship, but you can't demand it. This government demeans our national anthem by throwing it in with its so-called discipline package, and it did almost do that to the oath of allegiance as well.

What we don't have from this government is any acknowledgement that they will be the responsible parties for making sure that the school day is conducted safely.

We have a very specific challenge for this minister and for this government that will find form in terms of amendments to this bill. We will learn through this test whether this government is serious in its intent, or is this just another feeble effort to milk something for its propaganda value, with no concern for how it actually

plays out in the lives of the students and the teachers it purports to have an interest in? If you care for the safety of schoolchildren, for the teachers who are committed to educating them, you will agree that every school needs to have safe school teams, that every board also needs to have safe school teams, people who can be involved and dedicated to the identification, the prevention, the reduction of violence and of unsafe behaviour before it even happens, dealing with it when it does happen, and making sure that our schools are as safe as they possibly can be; and only after that effort has happened, then doling out the punishment that this bill purports to offer.

If the people opposite in this House, the government of the day, cannot see the value in having in each of the schools the assignments, the time allowed, the permissions, to provide for that, then I think they stand exposed. They stand exposed as people not interested fundamentally in the safety of schools. Similarly, if we cannot have school psychologists, if we cannot have guidance counsellors, if we cannot have attendance and counselling people who are actually going to deal with that percentage of the student body that encounters problems, then we do not have sincerity on the part of the people opposite in this House; it cannot be. Because it can be measured.

As we've heard about elementary schools, we know fundamentally that this has not worked, that they have deducted from the safety of what's out there. This government, through its excessive spending of public dollars on advertising about education before the last election, a bad habit that apparently they're now prepared to go back to—it's like somebody who's quit some kind of addiction. This government is now spending the same scarce education dollars that mean we can't have people to intervene when there are problem kids in the school on radio and potentially television ads to tell us all how to think about education. In fact, they would, if they were more sincere, put that money into the safe school teams that we're talking about.

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On the specific measure about whether or not there should be punishment, by all means. But what the viewing public needs to realize is that since 1994 every school has been required to report each of the offences, which this government has used to create some kind of scare list about what could go on in schools, to the police. That's the right authority to be dealing with serious criminal offences, and no one else. What we suggest and challenge this government to adopt is that every school should become a safe school zone, that offences like trafficking and possession of drugs and of weapons should carry an extra penalty, so that schools become a no-go zone for that kind of activity and for that kind of behaviour. Again we will find from the members opposite whether or not the real safety of schools enjoys a home in the Harris government or whether this is something they take lightly, something they just want to use for the benefit that could be had, for flags to be flown and nothing serious to be done.

It's important that the government face some of the people who have to work with their policies on a day-in, day-out basis. One of the fundamental problems of this Soviet-style approach is that not only is it the minister in all her glory, sitting in a big chair pushing a button and pretending that this is going to do something, but it really obscures the fundamental problems that are real about violence and about safety in schools. Where violence occurs, where there are safety issues, where there are acting-out problems, they're often locus in certain schools, at certain times, in certain ways. That's why it's fundamentally important that any government that would like to be credible on this subject have some capacity. Instead, this is the government that has taken away the capacity.

For example, Carol Roslin is the principal at Thistle-town Collegiate Institute in Etobicoke. In a recent week, they had 11 suspensions—in one week. This is what Carol Roslin, who deals every day with one of the more challenging school supervision assignments we have in this province, has to say about this bill: "Today's code of conduct announcement is nothing but window dressing and does nothing to fix the problems we see in our school every day. Announcing a new dress code and singing 'O Canada' will not make my school more safe when we are having to beg and borrow from outside community agencies to make up for funding cuts."

That's what's happening in her school. It may not concern the Minister of Education to know that in her school they could be losing hall monitors. They no longer can call on the board for security guards, as of next year. Those are the people who respond quicker than the police when a system is breaking down, when something is beginning to happen. But this government has created those cuts. This government is the one forcing those people out of the system. It's the principal who sees where the intervention should happen, who is there on the ground, who isn't flying at 10,000 feet or in some panelled office in Queen's Park, who sees those kids and believes that something can be done to intervene for their well-being and for the safety of the rest of the school, and she can't access the resources because you've taken them out of her reach.

That's what this bill is about today. This bill is about a pretend Safe Schools Act. This bill is about a government that won't come to terms with what it does and the impact it has in the real world.

The Carol Roslins of the world will tell you. If you would take the time, if you would visit some of the schools that have experienced challenges, good schools like Thistle-town, that have incredibly dedicated people who make sure it's a good school for the vast, vast majority of students who are there, you would learn that and you would not dishonour the efforts in those schools by bringing forward this kind of paltry bill which would take up some of the public goodwill that obviously exists by way of concern for violent incidents, for the things that are happening in our schools and could potentially be happening in our schools.

But of course this government does this in a context. They do it in a context that they don't wish to speak about very much. One part of that context is that they threw their credibility overboard when they decided to reduce their funding of education by some \$1.6 billion; 29% of their share of funding is what they've cut over the last number of years. That's why they've got nothing left to offer. They've got nothing to bring to us tonight. The minister, the government, the Premier can't put anything into the system to make our schools safer because they have sacrificed it already. They've given it away.

We heard from the minister before talking about record-high levels of funding. What does that really mean? It means they're counting money they downloaded to the municipalities. When you take that out—it's available in public accounts, and we have a report. We've challenged the minister to debate the numbers, to show her own numbers as to whether this is wrong. That challenge is now four weeks old. We have to assume that the minister of the day, that the government of the day has nothing to say about this because they've published no report of their own numbers. So \$1.6 billion—

Interjection.

Mr Kennedy: It is—29% less that this government has taken out of the system since it assumed office. Where, then, can these members hide when it comes to trying to avoid responsibility? Where is the respect for the people who are trying to provide an education, both the parents at home and the teacher in the school? How does that reconcile with any effort to see schools as safer places to be when you have everybody scrambling because of your misguided efforts to take money out of the system?

There were 5% to 10% cuts at Thistle-town Collegiate. Guidance counsellors have been reduced at the school and asked to do more classroom assistance. The caretakers they count on to keep a watch out have been reduced from 10 to six. That didn't happen by accident. It wasn't the decision of the principal. The Toronto school board didn't wish for this to be the case. It was your decision. You need the code of conduct. You're the ones who should be showing some responsibility here tonight. If there is an enlarged danger out there in any situations, if that exists, it's partly because of your ignoring the conditions in which those kinds of things thrive. You have not provided the system. More importantly, you have not provided the people with the kind of encouragement and the direct resources that would have them do the job that the Carol Roslins of this world want so desperately to do.

This government has taken it upon itself to release several initiatives in terms of education. One we've mentioned tonight—and it's funny, because at some point it seemed like this was going to be the centrepiece of pride and glory for this government, but I think some of the money they spent on polls, that probably also should have been in the classroom, made them back off—is Bill 74. What this government would like to call something to do with accountability is actually once

more the education control act, 2000. It's exactly as ominous as that sounds. This is a government recklessly out of control itself, recklessly unable to come to terms with its impact on the day-to-day lives of schoolchildren.

What is it prescribing to us in this companion bill? By the way, why aren't we debating that tonight? If this government is so proud of this bill, then why is it rushed through in such record time? Why did we get the minimum time under the new, centralized Soviet-Tory rules where we're afraid to hear from people? Why is it going to committee for two hours tomorrow in Barrie, one day in Ottawa and nowhere else in the province, even though we could have been meeting last Friday, yesterday, today and Thursday, another 15 hours?

Even if this government was in such an all-fired hurry, it's not in a hurry to do anything but hide this bill. The reason they want to hide the bill is because of what it's about. It has everything to do with safe schools. It has to do with taking away, seizing, in fact, control from local school boards of just about everything that might be important in terms of making the flexible arrangements at the school level, at the level of resources like safe-school teams, at the level of maybe looking at and working with municipalities and the provincial government to get safe school zones in place. It interferes with that by putting everything subject to the fiat of a minister sitting in a soft plush chair at Queen's Park, a minister who, according to that bill, will be able to tell principals and teachers and school boards what to do on a whole variety of things, the only test for which is that she need have concerns. Incredibly, this bill is headed under the dictatorial—and I'm sorry to use that word, but there is nothing in a democracy that dignifies the kind of idea that a bill like that gets 10 days of debate and then gets passed automatically, that denies any semblance of accountability on behalf of this government.

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But the root of that bill lies elsewhere. It lies, again, in the cutting of funds. This government wants to reduce the amount of money it pays for instructional time. That's how low its regard is for the educational and learning experience in this province. While all kinds of other jurisdictions all over the world—struggling Third World nations, developing Tigers in Asia, people in various continents—are spending higher and higher proportions of their GDP on education, this government is heading fast in the other direction.

What they want to do is have fewer teachers in the system. It's what the bill does; it's what it's fundamentally for. It takes what was essentially a staffing formula that did not work in one region of the province and inflicts that unsuccessful staffing formula on the entire province. It happens to be the region of Durham, it happens to be the region the minister is from, and also another member in this House who chairs the education policy committee of cabinet. We don't know this government's motivation, but we know its effect. We know what's called the Durham Disease, this idea that somehow you get a fight going between trustees and teachers

and students and you lose things, perhaps like extra-curricular, you certainly lose goodwill, you lose good teachers, that that somehow is now a paradigm to bring to the rest of the province. That's what the government wants to do.

The government wants to increase by 11% the workload of teachers and reduce the attention that each individual student will get by the same amount. Would that it was even that mild in its effect, that 11% piled upon the 29% or the other cuts that have been there. But instead, what it means in the real world—again, where this government shows faint attention with its bill tonight—is that teachers are teaching sometimes 33% more; you can have a variety of load between 50 and 100 kids. What if your kid is with the teacher who has to teach classes that add up to 100 kids who need specialized attention, 100 kids who need testing?

One of the members opposite, from Brampton, is shrugging his shoulders and saying, "I don't care about that" or "It doesn't bother me." But it does matter, because that's the real-world impact. You talk about safe schools tonight, you pretend that a code of conduct is going to do it, you pretend that having a list of offences to suspend things shows respect to teachers. In the real world, teachers aren't asking for that power, or if they are, they sure as heck don't want you giving them a list of prescribed offences. If somebody swears, they're out, just like that. Where do they go—you won't even provide the space in the school—in the real world? You won't provide the funding to deal with that kid. You won't provide the staff to look into why the kid is behaving that way. You won't look into how we keep our whole community safe, because despite what this government tries to tell us, there's more than a classroom involved in educating kids. That classroom is situated in a school, a school that has now been stripped of some of its essential resources, and that school exists in a community.

The good thing about tonight's debate and some of the other initiatives this government is taking is that that community is starting to wake up to the fact that this is not about safe schools; this is about safe politics by this government. Sadly for it, happily for the province, it's stuck in the mindset where it thought nobody was paying attention, but a variety of things have come to create a sense of reckoning in the people of this province. They know there's no free lunch, they know there's a cost to everything, and if you're cutting money out, somebody is going to pay, the safety of schools included.

The Acting Speaker (Mr Michael A. Brown): Is the time being split?

Mr Kennedy: Speaker, if I may, my time is being split with the member for Hastings-Frontenac-Lennox and Addington, also with the member for Renfrew and the member for Hamilton Mountain.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you.

Mrs Dombrowsky: I'm very pleased to join the debate tonight to talk about safe schools. I think it's important that the people of the province understand—at least in my riding, the schools in my riding have codes of

conduct in place at this time. These are codes of conduct that have been implemented that have come from the school community. They haven't come from a minister or a director or a school board but have come from the school community. The parents, the teachers and members of the school community have had an opportunity to come together and review what they as a community believe is appropriate and acceptable behaviour and consider ways that the school community can encourage this kind of behaviour and ensure that the students who arrive at the school indeed come to a safe learning environment.

School codes of conduct were implemented well over three years ago, and they were implemented in such a way that they were a celebration within the school community—this was something they worked on together—and the students celebrated as well. They were taught to understand that it was for the good of all that these codes of conduct were being implemented. Most importantly, they understood the rules when they arrived at the schools: “These are the expectations within our school community, this is why we have the expectations, and these are the consequences if you would choose not to participate.”

I really applaud the school communities who worked so very hard, and I think how unfortunate it is, number one, that the government doesn't recognize the kind of community involvement that has created the codes of conduct in the school communities and has chosen to impose its own, a code of conduct which, I would suggest, in what has been communicated to me by a number of schools in my riding, doesn't come anywhere near meeting their level of expectation in terms of respect and how to foster that, and safety within that particular school setting.

I'm especially struck when I read the legislation and the wording of the legislation, and I'm rather appalled when I look at section 301. If I begin at subsection 301(1), it opens with the statement, “The minister may establish a code of conduct”—the minister. We go to the next section: “Every board shall take such steps as the minister directs to bring the code of conduct to the attention of pupils....” The next section, (4), “The code of conduct is a policy of the minister.” I thought that was the role of school boards, to make policies, but now we have the Minister of Education making policies for boards to abide by. “The minister may establish additional policies and guidelines with respect to the conduct of persons in schools”—the minister may establish policies. “The minister may establish policies and guidelines to promote the safety of pupils”—again, the minister may establish. “The minister may require boards to comply with policies....” “Policies and guidelines established under this section are not regulations within the meaning of the Regulations Act.”

The minister is micromanaging education. The minister is setting board policy. Would that the Minister of the Environment would so involve himself in some

environmental issues to ensure the safety of the people of Ontario. It is a trend perhaps worth considering.

I have a document from the Institute for Catholic Education. This is a body of a variety of people who have an interest in education. There are clergy, there are teachers, there are trustees, there are parents. This is a document that relates specifically to the changes that are underway in education at this time, if I might read from the document with regard to the impact of the Education Accountability Act.

Here we have before the floor of the House an act that is designed supposedly to ensure the safety of students in schools.

Mr Marchese: And to help teachers.

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Mrs Dombrowsky: And to help teachers suspend students. I haven't met a teacher yet who said they wanted to do that. In any case, we will also be reviewing a bill, the Education Accountability Act, that will undo, in my opinion, any measure of safety that this might attempt to ensure.

I'll just explain a little bit what the Institute for Catholic Education has written in its document with regard to the impact of the Education Accountability Act. It indicates that the Education Accountability Act will affect the supervision and safety of students and staff in school. It goes on to say, with regard to supervision and safety:

“(a) With a reduction in staff availability of 24%—and that's what Bill 74 will mean; there will be a reduction in secondary staff of 24%—“the capacity to ensure school safety will be similarly reduced.

“(b) One result of the seven out of eight workload in 1998-99 was a perceived increase in student behavioural problems due to the reduced supervision at lunch hours, before and after school and in hallways between classes. There were reported increases in:

- “(i) cases of student harassment
- “(ii) the number of violent incidents
- “(iii) vandalism.

“The trend toward increased behavioural problems due to reduced supervision at critical times should be studied before changes are made.

“(c) It is essential that principals be able to ensure adequate supervision of students by teachers at key times” This is crucial to ensuring the safety of students in schools.

“Qualified teachers have authority in the school, a rapport with students as well as the respect necessary for effective supervision. It is the relationships between teachers and students that have the greatest impact on the school environment.”

That is from the Institute of Catholic Education, which has taken the time to consider the bigger picture.

We have an act on the floor that in my opinion pays some lip service to confirming what many school communities have better models of already. On the other hand, we have Bill 74, which will come to this House for consideration in the near future, the too-near future, and

it will completely undermine the school's ability to provide a safety environment.

The member for Niagara Falls indicated that the members on this side of the House will take the opportunity to mock Bill 81. That's not my intention here tonight. Please understand that I have a responsibility as a member of the opposition and as a representative of the people of Hastings-Frontenac-Lennox and Addington to stand before you and share the issues they share with me as their local member. I take them very seriously. I am very proud to stand in the House tonight and bring their concerns to this debate. What I've shared with you reflects what I've been hearing in my riding around Bill 81. There is significant speculation about whether it will have any impact on the safety that there is at the present time in my riding within our schools or that may not be in other schools.

As far as respect and responsibility, the people in my riding are saying to me that those are not things that can be legislated, that those are things students learn at home and at school. I have to say it has come to me that they are not really seeing a lot of it on the part of this government until now.

The Acting Speaker: Just before we start with the member for Hamilton Mountain, it is disconcerting to have people having conversations, especially when they are not in a seat or particularly their own seat.

Mrs Marie Bountrogianni (Hamilton Mountain): I actually really appreciated that, Mr Speaker. I wanted the member to sit down. Thank you.

It's an honour and a pleasure to talk about education at any time, and I thank you for the opportunity to speak about Bill 81. There are just a few things that I wonder if the members on the government side have thought of, or maybe they have and haven't included them in this bill; for example, section 306 on mandatory suspension. "It is mandatory that a pupil be suspended for ..." and then two of the possibilities are "uttering a threat to inflict serious bodily harm" and "swearing at a teacher or another person in a position of authority."

Under normal circumstances I would wholeheartedly agree, as someone who had worked in education for 18 years before coming here, that would warrant a suspension. But I am wondering if the mandatory aspect removes the judgment and discretion of the principal for abnormal situations. Maybe a member opposite can answer this even tonight. For example, a seven-year-old with Tourette's syndrome: It's very common for kids with Tourette's syndrome to utter threats. In fact, they can do it 10 times a minute and then not do it for two hours and then do it 10 times a minute. It's very common for them to swear. If there's an EA in place or some other sort of support in place, there's usually a behavioural program that decreases that behaviour or controls it, but it's impossible to predict how often it can happen.

Would that seven-year-old or, for that matter, 17-year-old Tourette's syndrome student be suspended automatically for swearing or threatening? That's an important question that needs to be answered. I would hope not,

because at present, principals and teachers work together with educational assistants and parents to address those issues. For example, they may have a meeting with a class before the entry of this particular type of student and say: "This is the kind of thing that is uncontrollable in this student. Please understand and please don't role model this student. It's an illness. It's not the kind of behaviour we accept." For most kids, that works. They won't model after the student and they don't fear the student. They understand. Actually, it's a great education of exceptionalities to the other students.

It's tremendously unfair for a family of kids like Tourette's syndrome kids, who already have an amazing amount of stress on their shoulders, to have their kids at home every second day, suspended for doing something that they can't control. If the minister or someone opposite wants to respond later to that question, I would really appreciate that response.

"Duties of the teacher" in subsection 306(3): "If a teacher observes a pupil committing an infraction ... the teacher shall suspend the pupil or refer the matter to the principal." This really opens a can of worms. Most teachers don't want to suspend, but sadly, there are a few who I am sure are looking forward to suspending. There are individual differences in every profession. There are individual differences in tolerance levels among teachers. Some teachers can take a lot more than others.

This really opens a can of worms. Will it be applied consistently? What will this do with school and community relations? For example, you may find after a time a pattern of one teacher frequently suspending the same kids and other teachers never suspending those same kids. What recourse is there then for the principal to address this within the school? It seems a little contradictory. First we made the principals managers and now we're giving the people they're supposed to be managing some very administrative and managerial types of duties. So think of the impact also on the teacher-and-principal relationship.

As well, as one teacher was telling me last night, what about the paperwork? There is paperwork attached to suspensions. A letter goes to the parent. There is supposed to be a meeting before the student re-enters the system. That's a lot of administrative and paperwork to add to an already overloaded teaching load for teachers.

Part (4) of that same section: "The principal has a duty to suspend a pupil who commits an infraction ... unless a teacher has already suspended the pupil for the infraction." Think about this. Does this principal become Big Brother, hunting down teachers who don't suspend the pupil? If the principal either observes or hears that a teacher has observed some of these behaviours that require mandatory suspension, is he going to chase that teacher down so she can suspend that student or do it himself or herself? Is this going to be part of their evaluation if he or she doesn't suspend the student? I am really concerned about that Big Brother aspect of the principal's role.

Part (7) of the same section: If a teacher who suspends wants a longer suspension, “the teacher shall recommend to the principal that the suspension be extended.” Are we now into principal-teacher suspension negotiations? So the teacher suspends a student for a day and then tries to talk to the principal about how much longer the student needs? What will that do to the consistency and the fairness not only within the school but across the schools in a city and, obviously, across the province?

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Section 307 deals with discretionary suspensions. In subsection (5) the teacher may suspend or refer to the principal—the same concerns as the ones I previously mentioned. There also seems to be a little bit of a weasel clause here. First you say the teacher “shall”; now you’re saying the teacher “may,” and then refer to the principal. It’s a little bit confusing. I would hope the members opposite would clarify this before publishing this bill.

Section 309, mandatory expulsion: “The principal shall suspend a pupil who the principal believes may have committed an infraction....” I really hope that’s a typo, because in this society we’re not guilty, we’re innocent, until proven guilty. This would be disastrous, particularly where there are some conflicts within the community. These things happen—a conflict between a community or a school council member and a principal. Whether consciously or subconsciously, these tools are the weapons to punish a student inadvertently. I’m not for a moment suggesting that teachers are irresponsible; I’m just suggesting that they’re human and that when under stress may suspend students who most teachers would not.

The principal shall conduct an inquiry: Think about this, about the logistics of this. We’re talking about acts like sexual assault and drug trafficking. Are principals equipped to do this? I had the honour to work with principals for 18 years. They’re terrific educators and professionals, but they’re not policemen, they’re not investigators, they’re not detectives. What kind of an inquiry are we talking about here?

The same goes with discretionary expulsions. Principals don’t want this responsibility. I realize it may be true that the members opposite and the minister feel they are protecting teachers and principals by allowing them to expel. But if a student is that disordered that he or she requires expulsion, that’s a fairly dangerous situation. It is much safer to refer that situation to the system we have now, to the board, to sort of innocuous administrative body to make that decision rather than to an individual within the school within the community. I predict a lot of slashed tires on certain principals’ and teachers’ cars if they are given this responsibility.

Programs for suspended pupils: This has already been talked about. “The minister may require boards to establish and maintain specified programs, courses and services for pupils who are suspended,” and also for expelled pupils.

This is a wonderful idea, but it’s a very expensive initiative. At our board a few years ago we sat down at a

committee of a psychiatrist, social workers, teachers and superintendents to develop exactly this kind of program. Once we put dollars and cents figures to the program, we didn’t even bother taking it to the board because we knew the budget; we knew there wasn’t enough money for it. If the minister is able to give a great deal of money to develop these programs, we would welcome these programs because this is needed, even now, even before Bill 81. For students who are suspended and expelled, this is needed. Believe me, after 20 days of suspension, particularly at the secondary level, when these kids come back, they’re not necessarily very eager to learn.

Speaking to the Hamilton-Wentworth district board, our police chief in the Hamilton-Wentworth area has gone on record as saying he doesn’t agree with suspensions and expulsions because you’re basically moving the problem from the school to the street. In the absence of these programs—I still can’t figure out how the minister’s going to have them developed without a great deal of money or space in the schools, which as a previous member mentioned, is non-existent now—these kids will move to the streets and crime on the streets will increase, in which case this bill should really be called the “safe schools, dangerous streets, act.” That’s exactly what’s going to happen.

It’s much more preferable to work with the police to refer these very dangerous students to the police rather than having a mini-police department within any school.

Mr Sean G. Conway (Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke): I want to make a few comments about Bill 81 tonight. This is a policy that of course continues to evolve. I’m always interested to hear the minister, because one week we’re going to have a mandatory pledge of allegiance, and then the next week it’s going to be a voluntary pledge of allegiance. I have a constituent who’s travelling this season in Great Britain. He was telling me the other day, “My, the Ecker plan about some of these matters seems to be much more prescriptive in the province of Ontario than it would be here in the home country of England.”

I guess none of us should lose sight that Bill 81 is more about politics than it is about good policy. I want to say that it’s a product of the separate schools of Ontario in the 1950s and 1960s. I certainly know what it is to be in a place where there are codes of conduct and fairly strict rules, both secular and otherwise.

In some ways I consider myself a bit of a conservative on these matters. I spent a little bit of the winter teaching a university course. I haven’t done that in a while. I’m not quite as democratic on some of these matters as I might like to be. I sometimes fantasize about what I would do if I had the likes of Mike Harris and John Snobelen in my class. I might have hoped for and I would have probably striven for a more positive result when I think about some of the people who opine regularly about schooling and results, and think about what they did with their not inconsiderable intelligence but with apparently quite idiosyncratic attitudes. I’m

trying to be as polite and as diplomatic as possible because I wouldn't want to inflame anybody tonight.

Mrs Lyn McLeod (Thunder Bay-Atikokan): Liberal arts courses? Do you think he'd be seriously interested?

Mr Conway: Oh, listen, I have known the member for Nipissing for almost 20 years. He's a man of some considerable intelligence. I wonder, what was it that explained some of the underperforming? It's certainly not because he lacks the intelligence. It must be about attitude. When I get the lectures that I get continually from the member for Nipissing about codes of conduct and what needs to be, and then I think about what actually was, I guess I should be guided by that old injunction, "Do as I say, not as I did."

I was struck by an extremely good program that aired on the CBC national television news about three or four weeks ago. Some of my colleagues may have seen it. It was about Parkdale Collegiate here in the west end of the city of Toronto. My friend Rosario is here tonight. I don't know whether he saw the program. He may know the program. Anybody, any parent, any educator, any legislator, watching that program would have been struck by the kind of initiative that school and that community and that board had developed with apparently high levels of success to get at a number of the issues that undergird some of the issues in Bill 81.

I was struck by that program in a number of respects. One of the parts of the program that really stuck with me that night was both the students and the teachers and a particularly heroic vice-principal talking about the great danger of zero tolerance. The politicians love zero tolerance. It sounds so very good. In that school, where very considerable success apparently is being achieved, zero tolerance is seen as very much the problem.

My concern about some of these issues that are addressed in Bill 81 is that the politicians—I don't even mean to be partisan here because I hear the Democratic President of the United States and I hear the Conservative Premier of Ontario and I hear some of the same phrases. They are phrases crafted by and for Madison Avenue.

Politics is easy. These last few weeks I've been getting these submissions from people like firefighters in Eganville asking me, "Where on earth did this squeegee bill come from?" We know where it came from. I remember at the time people who know the law better than I saying: "This bill is all about politics and it's going to cause you a lot more grief. You are going to end up—you say you're setting out to catch certain kinds of fish. You're going to have a net full of all other kinds of fish."

That's what we've got, not just in my county, but my friend Ms Dombrowsky is here from Hastings-Frontenac-Lennox and Addington. She's got her stories. My colleagues in Ottawa tell me of their stories.

Make no mistake about it, the squeegee bill was all about politics. It wasn't about administration, because if it had been about administration we would have simply applied the sanctions we had. So now the poor old Attorney General, I am sure, is quietly beaver away trying to find a retreat from whatever that bill number was.

There will be a retreat because no Attorney General, no sane person, wants to have to stand up and look at the Eganville firefighters or anyone else and try to explain the inexplicable or defend the indefensible.

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Again, to give Ms Ecker some credit, she has moved on Bill 81 and the oath of allegiance is now voluntary. The original proposal was something quite different. One can just imagine, and particularly in urban communities like Metropolitan Toronto or Hamilton or Ottawa, the surreal quality of administering the oath of allegiance on a mandatory basis to a roomful of recently arrived new Canadians. I think of a school I visited in Hamilton not that many years ago. I thought to myself, can you imagine trying to do what was originally intended? Of course there is now a sensible retreat from that first position.

The other comment I would make, because I spend a fair bit of time in and around the schools and this past winter had the quite delicious experience of teaching a course myself at the university level, I look and I ask myself, how do some of these things come to pass? I'm one of the members who thinks one of the great treats we have in this place is the library. I love the legislative library and the people who work there. But I'm struck by how few of my colleagues I see in the library. I suppose the answer is, "Well, they're all on-line and they don't have to do it the old-fashioned way that some of we antediluvians do." But I tend to spend a fair bit of time in the old-fashioned way, actually reading books and newspapers in this wonderful resource centre that we have.

I found at the university this winter that the university has very good library facilities, but a lot of these kids are like their parents: They seem to embrace an electronic and not a literary or literal world. I could complain about that, and do from time to time quite vigorously, but the reality is these kids seem to reflect the world from which they come. I suppose the caution I would offer tonight to the House is that we had better understand that the schools to a real extent reflect the community of which they are a part.

My colleague from Windsor West, Ms Papatello, is talking to me these days about these raves. I don't want to sound really unfashionable, but I did a few weeks ago. I find that just quite a remarkable development, the idea that parents are taking 14- and 15-year-old kids to all-night parties, because apparently they are non-alcoholic venues. It is I think really a dramatic commentary on the state of society in Ontario in the year 2000. Maybe I am an old fogey for saying that, but I think that story tells a lot more about the parents than it does about the kids.

So I make the point about Bill 81: It's largely about politics. There are a lot of politicians in this place, many of them on the treasury bench, who profess loudly and vigorously about conditions and standards they would expect to apply to others when in fact they may not have been willing to accept the same standards themselves. I suppose I would sit down with that old injunction, "Let he without sin cast the first stone."

The Acting Speaker: Questions and comments?

Mr Marchese: I agree with 99.9% of what my Liberal colleagues have said, and I will add a few of my comments shortly.

Mr Raminder Gill (Bramalea-Gore-Malton-Springdale): It is a pleasure to join in the debate this evening. One of the things the member for Hamilton Mountain brought up is a very interesting subject in terms of kids with special needs, and she is so right. Member from Hamilton Mountain, perhaps you'll want to listen because it's very important. You had brought that up. She brought up the subject: What about the special needs kids?

Let me assure you, through the consultation processes that we went through when we talked to the people—and let me read it from the ministry document how we're going to be addressing this:

"The legislation that was introduced provides for mitigating circumstances that will be spelled out in an accompanying regulation. This will include very clear directions as to what considerations must be taken into account when determining whether a mandatory suspension or expulsion should proceed. We will consult with the minister's Advisory Council on Special Education in developing the regulation."

We have already considered that and we will certainly be making sure that kids with special needs are addressed. There will not be an automatic expulsion. I'm very glad the member did bring that up.

Let me touch base on what else is included. One of the things that none of the members mentioned is that this bill will certainly allow a majority of the parents at any school to decide on a dress code or a uniform. I came through a school system where a uniform was mandatory. Different schools would have different uniforms and it did actually instill within the students a matter of pride. They would belong to a school and they would have a very healthy competition with other schools. That was very important. I certainly recommend it, and I hope that most parents would go along with that, because in the long run it is a cheaper alternative—I see my time is already up.

Mrs McLeod: My colleagues have done a fine job this evening of exposing this bill for what it really is, which is another piece of public relations campaigning on the part of the Conservative government, obviously wanting some kind of a cover for the very destructive and very damaging bill which is actually in a non-public hearing situation right now.

If the government were serious about this bill they might actually present it with some information as to why the zero tolerance policy that was introduced in 1994 by the previous government is somehow failing, because it hasn't been my experience in any school visits I've been making that that policy is absent or is lacking. I would be very interested, if the government is serious about this bill, in hearing how many schools do not have codes of conduct. Is there something missing from the schools' codes of conduct that the government felt compelled to bring in an entire piece of legislation this evening

permitting them to establish codes of conduct? They can do it now. They've been required to do it for some years and they're doing it. Where does the problem lie?

The problem lies not with the schools but with the government's need for a new public relations scapegoat. If they can create the impression that somehow the schools are still out of control, they're full of bad kids and we need this tough legislation, this government can get on with its agenda, which is really whenever it's in trouble it wants to take some credit for doing something on the issue of safety: "If we can target the schools and scapegoat the kids, just as we previously scapegoated the trustees and the teachers, then we can move on with our new agenda thrust."

Fortunately, when they bring a bill like this forward, it gives those of us on this side of the House an opportunity to talk about some of the significant things they've done to education.

I happened today to come across letters that were written by the members for Simcoe-Grey and Barrie-Simcoe-Bradford on the subject of the government doing more for special education than any previous government, which of course completely fails to recognize that previous school boards were doing a great deal for special education, and as part of this government's cuts, \$300 million in cuts to special education, because they ignore what the schools boards were putting into special ed before.

Mr Dominic Agostino (Hamilton East): I want to thank my colleagues, who have outlined clearly and eloquently the weaknesses in what I consider a Mickey Mouse piece of legislation.

The member for Bramalea-Gore-Malton-Springdale—it took me two minutes to get that out—talked about consulting. The reality is that, as with most education bills this government passes or brings forward into this House, there's very little consultation. The teachers are ignored. They will selectively consult with certain parents or certain groups that they choose. This bill is no exception.

Most teachers I have spoken to and most principals I have spoken to right across this province feel that the way the system is now with regard to zero tolerance and the way the system is in place for expulsions or suspensions works fairly well. School boards have developed codes of conduct over the years, zero tolerance policies, dress codes. I went to a Catholic high school in Hamilton. There was a dress code at that point.

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These are not revolutionary ideas that somehow are going to reform this falling-apart school system that you believe exists out there. The reality is that this is nothing more than public relations. My colleagues have mentioned that this bill is smoke and mirrors. You had some wacky, what I consider stupid, ideas in the first part of the bill. You moved away from those. So what you now are left with is basically—I would like to members to point out, what really is in this bill that school boards are not doing now? Except now you're putting the onus

more on teachers, and they don't want that onus you're putting on them. You're putting the onus more on principals. Principals didn't ask for the power you want to give them.

The reality is that whenever you get off your agenda, whenever something happens across this province that takes you off your agenda, you go back to one good old standby, and that's either beat up on teachers or beat up on welfare recipients. This is a perfect example of that. You can always count on a bash-the-teacher bill, bash-the-education-system bill, when this government starts to slide in the polls, and this is another perfect example of that. It's a useless piece of legislation that you should be ashamed of.

The Acting Speaker: In reply, the member for Parkdale-High Park.

Mr Kennedy: I want to congratulate the speakers who came from our side tonight, particularly the member from Frontenac-Lennox-Addington, the member from Renfrew and the member from Hamilton Mountain.

It's essential that people realize that there is a need for a serious effort by the Legislature to look at how to support successful schools, and safety is part of that. There's nobody who would say that's not part of our objective. In fact, there are some schools in some places that need more help than they have today, and it is sad to offer them this threadbare effort by this government. There is nothing that will help, for example, Parkdale Collegiate, one of the most successful collegiate in the province. Its problems are not in the school. There are tremendous people in that school today, but for some reason, parents of nearby neighbourhoods are reluctant to send their kids to that school. The reason is that they need a safe school zone; they need some of the activity outside of the school to be dealt with.

That's our proposal, that will be our amendment, and if you're serious, have even a scintilla of sincerity and seriousness about this subject, you'll pass that amendment. If you believe that kids can't be thrown away, that they can't be tossed out on the street, tossed into the malls, if you're not willing to give up on them when they're eight, nine, 10 or even 12, 14, and yes, even 16, then you'll also accept our amendment for safe school teams. You will see that every school has the capacity within it to deal with situations before they arise, to prevent them, to make sure they don't happen, and yes, after they've happened, to make sure things are there, because they're not there today. They're far less likely, 38% less likely, in elementary schools to have the services of a psychologist because of the actions of your government.

Will we see you take responsibility? Will we see you show respect? We'll learn that when this bill moves to the voting stage.

The Acting Speaker: Further debate?

Mr Marchese: I'm happy to have this opportunity to speak to Bill 81. I'll say to the public that you often will only see one New Democrat or two speaking on a particular bill. You may wonder why. We are a small caucus

of nine and we can't divide our forces to the extent we would like. But I've got to tell you, and I'll say it in Spanish: No somos muchos, pero somos machos. I'll translate it for your benefit, Speaker. It just rings well in Spanish. The translation is not as effective. It means, "We're not many but we are strong."

Interjection.

Mr Marchese: No, it wasn't that. Please, don't say rude things that we cannot say in this place in another language.

To use another Latin expression, "Quis fit, homo?" That's a Latin expression that has currency today. It means, to be helpful to you, Speaker, and to the general public, "What are you doing, man?" in reference to Harris, or more literally, "What's happening, man?" That's the question a whole lot of people today in this society are asking: "Quis fit, homo?" meaning Mr Harris. I keep on asking that same question. A whole lot of people are asking that question.

I was listening to the speakers before and you could feel the cold-pressed olive oil kind of presentations. Did you not, Speaker? Because I felt it, cold-pressed olive oil kind of presentations. I heard the member from Niagara Falls. He was so calm, cool and collected. He wasn't moved at all by anything anyone might have said. He spoke, as Harris instructed all of you boys and women to do, and he said, "This is about better quality in education." He and others, my good buddy from Barrie-Simcoe-Bradford, make reference to the whole idea of accountability. All of you said that, pretty well. I would not be wrong in saying that. I think you may have made reference to, if not today, on other days: "The union bosses—there's the evil, there's the rot in society. If we could just eradicate that cancer from the school system." It isn't individual teachers who are bad. God forbid, no. It's the union bosses. They're the bad people. That's the rot in the system, and they're dealing with that. There was of course reference to change being necessary, that we've got to change. It doesn't matter what kind of change, but we've got to change, because the status quo is bad. It doesn't matter what we're talking about, the status quo is bad. There was reference to, "We're doing it for the students." I love that one. "We're making these changes because we really care about the students." And the big one—well, I already mentioned quality and accountability. These are the cold-pressed olive oil words that the members use constantly in this place.

My friend Sean Conway says that this bill is a bill in evolution. Well, I say that you guys are cunning in your politics. There's nothing evolutionary about your stuff, your presentation of policy issues or bills. What you guys did that was brilliant is that two months ago, your minister went to—let me just check. Where was it that she went to? The Eagle Project, the Peel District School Board. I was there because I wanted to hear what she had to say. She made a whole number of announcements that day. In reference to what Sean said, that this is an evolving kind of matter, no, it's politics. They said that the pledge of allegiance to the Queen will be mandatory

and now it's not so mandatory. Is that evolving? No, it's you guys who are so brilliant and cunning. You test the waters out, then you come back a month or two later and say: "Ha, the public says this is perhaps not a very smart idea. Perhaps we should make it optional."

Mr Brad Clark (Stoney Creek): It's called responsible.

Mr Marchese: No, it's called cunning. It's called Machiavellian. It's getting to that point, isn't it?

At the time there was so little detail she presented, but detail with this government is almost completely irrelevant, isn't it? It's the message that matters, right? What is the message? For the non-thinking public, for the common folk, the message is: "We are being tough on those students who are just not able to be dealt with in any other way. So we've got to bring in a bill, Bill 81, that deals with them." That's the message. Was there any detail? Please, it's irrelevant. Why would you need detail when you have done a brilliant job of dealing with behaviour, of making it appear like we're still in the Middle Ages because nobody else did anything before? Oh, it's true the New Democrats brought in the code of behaviour in 1994, but you mustn't tell the public that. You must remind the public that we are in the Middle Ages, or a little farther ahead, in the time of Machiavelli, and that what we need is a government that finally has come in the 21st century to fix things. That's what you need. And please, don't encourage the public to think, because I don't think they really need that, because you're doing the good thinking for them. Is that true? Am I wrong?

Mr Clark: You're hurting the public.

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Mr Marchese: Really? The way I see it is that what you have done is to simply let the public have the rest that they so richly deserve because they're so stressed out. To bring them to committee meetings would be such a burden to them, wouldn't it? Some of these people work at two or three jobs, stressed out of their minds as public servants because they are doing double the work after firing 20,000 of them. The private sector is demanding more because they fire people, the sector that says, "We can make more money and more profits by firing workers." They fire people as a way of making more money, and the few people who remain are doing much more of that work. Civil servants stressed out of their minds, people in the private sector stressed out of their minds, unable to have the freedom and the time they need, so you're doing them a favour, aren't you? You're saying to them: "Bill 74 is a good piece of legislation. It takes care of the union bosses. That's all you need to know."

Tomorrow we're going to Barrie for two hours, the riding of Barrie-Simcoe-Bradford, and on Friday, through the magnanimity of this government, we have a whole day. As I say, it's because you people are so kind and so thoughtful of that public that is unable to come to public hearings that you have decided that democracy is best served by keeping them at home and ignorant. If I'm

wrong, you have to let me know, because that's how I see it.

Mr Tascona: You're wrong.

Mr Marchese: I'm wrong. I ask you then, Joe Tascona from Barrie-Simcoe-Bradford, if you are so proud of Bill 74, the one that whacks the union bosses and the teaching profession in ways that we have never seen before, why isn't it possible for you to give a week of hearings, two weeks of hearings, possibly three? If you're proud, and if you really want to get people to come and see and hear what you've done, why don't you have more than just a day and a half of hearings?

How do you define democracy? I define it as public participation, public involvement, civic involvement, a desire to participate as a way of helping shape public policy. But you've already done that. Bart Maves from Niagara said you've already consulted with students, teachers and union bosses. If you've done all of that, you don't need to hear from them any more.

The Tories have relieved the good citizens of the burden of thought and the responsibility of debate. That's the tragedy of what this government is doing. I have to tell you, I am very concerned about where this government is taking us.

On this issue, Bill 81, people need to understand it's a law-and-order kind of initiative. That's the politics of this bill, because how would you explain it otherwise? We had a code of behaviour in existence since 1994 that, dare I say, was a much more intelligent piece, a much more comprehensive piece of legislation, a piece that dealt with behaviour in a way that I think teachers and the general public expects us to deal with it. You would think we were in the Middle Ages before this government came and that they have come and brought civility and have brought, good God, some enlightenment to the Dark Ages, because we had nothing before.

We had a lot, but I want to tell you, the cuts to services that parents need, the cuts they have made, make it very difficult for us to deal with troubled youth and bad behaviour.

Just to cite a few examples for the benefit of the people watching, in Windsor-Essex there are 1,000 children on the waiting list for mental health care. The rate of re-referral is a shocking 37% among these children. In Halton, teenagers wait six to 18 months to see a psychiatrist. In 1998, the Ontario child advocate estimated that 80% of youth in young offender facilities have mental health problems. In 1995, the Harris Conservatives eliminated funding for 64 community youth support programs serving young people between 15 and 20 years of age—all to pay for a tax cut for the wealthy. To help pay for their tax cut for the wealthy, the Harris Conservatives eliminated funding for adult and family counselling in 118 programs. There were almost 30,000 more poor families in Ontario after one year of the Harris Conservative government. Families are the fastest-growing group of homeless in the province. Sometimes an older kid has to leave to give the rest of the family a break from feeding and housing him or her.

Some background on violence in schools in terms of what we did when we were there: We all know the Harris government has cut anywhere from \$1 billion to \$1.5 billion. I know M^{me} Ecker, the minister, says that isn't true, because only what they say is truth and what we say is not. Is that correct? The minister nods her head. So the good public, in the context of everything they're seeing, in the context of Walkerton, has to have a good sense that the money that should be there to protect them and to protect the water they are drinking, that protects their health, isn't there. They've cut in the Ministry of the Environment and in the Ministry of Natural Resources to unthinkable levels, again to subsidize a tax cut.

The question I have for you is, is that tax cut worth it versus the cost to human health, the cost to the environment that is directly linked to our health, the cost to our educational system and the cost to our social services? Is that tax cut worth it? I argue no.

You have bamboozled the public with your billion-dollar boondoggle of giving them, just to buy their votes, 200 bucks. To buy their votes you've given them a mere 200 bucks—bamboozled with the biggest boondoggle this province has ever seen. Mr Ernie Eves says, "It's their money": \$200, a collective \$1 billion, just gone. So when we say they've cut \$1.2 billion, \$1.5 billion from the school system, who do you believe?

Is the tax cut that you may or may not have seen worth the damage to the environment, our health, our social services and our education system? Is it worth it? Is the \$200 they're giving you to buy your vote so you can get a cheque in the mail that you can see worth it in the context of the social disasters that we are only beginning to witness? Walkerton is but a mere symptom of what is yet to come. Good public, citizens of Ontario, you ain't seen nothing yet.

You people are often treated as taxpayers and they refer to you as taxpayers. I say to you that often the problems of society need to be dealt with not as taxpayers but as citizens. We have a social duty and responsibility to respond to many of the problems of citizens, and you must change your attitude that you've been fed by Tories and rich people of this province that all you need to worry about is to think of yourselves as taxpayers whose only thought is how much money this government can give you back.

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The Harris Conservative government removed violence prevention from the new secondary school curriculum. Why on earth would a government remove violence prevention from the new secondary school curriculum? Is it because New Democrats introduced it? Is it because it dealt with prevention?

In 1994, Ontario's first NDP government released a violence-free-schools policy that was developed after consultations with 3,000 people participating in 18 different communities. The overwhelming message from those 3,000 people, in spite of the nods to the contrary that I'm getting from some of the members, was that we need to involve the whole community in violence prevention,

that it isn't something you can do on your own, that a teacher can solve on his or her own. The policy takes a broad view of violence that encompasses not only bullying and weapons possession but racial and other slurs and discrimination. But unfortunately the Harris government has made cuts that have made some of the causes of youth violence more severe.

They have also cut the supports youth need, whether through community agencies or school staff like guidance counsellors, social workers and others, and eliminated the anti-discrimination branch in the Ministry of Education. These were things that were in place before these fine people came to make a mess of it. They took away all the measures we introduced that dealt with prevention, that brought in the entire community to solve the problems of crime, to do prevention that involves everyone, because it isn't something that individuals alone must take responsibility for but that we all as citizens must be actively participating in as part of that solution.

I recall the press conference that the minister had a couple of months ago where she said, "We will reverse bad behaviour." How? "We'll just expel students." No more detail was given; no more detail was necessary. Who will protect the teachers from possible liability should they suspend somebody where the student decides through due process that the teacher will be taken to court and finds that no due process was there? Who protects that teacher from the liability? I'm not certain. The minister and the members don't speak to that. The minister was asked during that press conference, "Is there an appeals process?" She said no. "Will there be an appeals process to deal with suspensions or expulsions?" She said, "No, but maybe in the future." That was a press conference a couple of months ago. "Is there any evidence to show that this approach in terms of expelling students, just that approach of expelling, works?" No, there was no evidence; she could give none, except she said: "We talked to students; we talked to teachers; we talked to school boards. That's enough evidence for this government." "Where will the expelled students go?" The minister had no details.

No detail was necessary because you achieved the political goal you were looking for. What was that political goal, what was the message? The message was to tell the public that only this government, through a law-and-order kind of agenda, will solve the problems of bad behaviour. They will expel students and bad behaviour will simply magically disappear. I think we all know that bad behaviour doesn't just magically disappear, does it? No. John, you were a teacher, weren't you?

Mr John Hastings (Etobicoke North): Yes.

Mr Marchese: John, if you were to expel a student—

Mr Hastings: We did, plenty of them.

Mr Marchese: We did indeed. That's part of the point. We did expel students under the old policies. When it was necessary, we did that, and there was a sound process in place to deal with that. But the other matter—John, as a former teacher, when you expel students, doesn't the problem come back to you and

don't you have to deal with that problem again? What do you see as your role as a teacher? Is your role as a teacher simply to expel them or to find a way to reach them? I ask you, what kind of teacher were you? What kind of teachers would some of you have been in that system? I know some of you were teachers. Wouldn't it be in your interests to find ways to reach students? It would be in my interests, because a whole lot of teachers have turned students around on the basis of what they did and how they worked with the students as opposed to simply saying, "You're gone."

It's so easy for a Tory to give that solution, because the common folk love the simple solutions. We've got a problem? We simply make it disappear. That's good Tory politics. Tom Long loves that kind of politics. He was a good adviser to this Premier and to M. Brian Mulroney. He's going to bring these policies from the provincial level to the national level, God bless him. I'm worried because the religious communities are saying they might be supporting Stockwell Day. Some of the religious communities are sending out the message they should be supporting Stockwell Day, but I suspect they would support M. Long or M. Manning. Rampant child

poverty in this system, in this province and overall throughout all Canada, more and more people working harder, longer, for less than ever before, and you have some church communities wanting to support a M. Stockwell Day? Wacko, I tell you. I think it's wacko.

Speaker, please let me know how much time I've got so that I—

Interjection.

Mr Marchese: I've got two minutes, M. Ramsay. They want to support Stockwell Day. Either my senses are being deranged or their minds are deranged. It's bad. We have poverty unlike ever before. We are seeing a growing gap between the very rich that you support and the very poor at the bottom. It was started by M^{me} Thatcher in Britain and Mr Reagan, about whom I will have more to say tomorrow when I speak to this issue. I just want to remind the good public that I'll be on tomorrow night at 6:45 for my remaining time.

The Acting Speaker: It being 9:30 of the clock, this House stands adjourned until 1:30 of the clock tomorrow afternoon.

The House adjourned at 2130.

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Peterborough	Stewart, R. Gary (PC)	Vaughan-King-Aurora	Palladini, Hon / L'hon Al (PC) Minister of Economic Development and Trade / ministre du Développement économique et du Commerce
Pickering-Ajax-Uxbridge	Ecker, Hon / L'hon Janet (PC) Minister of Education / ministre de l'Éducation	Waterloo-Wellington	Arnott, Ted (PC)
Prince Edward-Hastings	Parsons, Ernie (L)	Wentworth-Burlington	Vacant
Renfrew-Nipissing- Pembroke	Conway, Sean G. (L)	Whitby-Ajax	Flaherty, Hon / L'hon Jim (PC) Attorney General, minister responsible for native affairs / procureur général, ministre délégué aux Affaires autochtones
Sarnia-Lambton	Di Cocco, Caroline (L)	Willowdale	Young, David (PC)
Sault Ste Marie	Martin, Tony (ND)	Windsor West / -Ouest	Pupatello, Sandra (L)
Scarborough Centre / -Centre	Mushinski, Marilyn (PC)	Windsor-St Clair	Duncan, Dwight (L)
		York Centre / -Centre	Kwinter, Monte (L)
		York North / -Nord	Munro, Julia (PC)
		York South-Weston / York-Sud-Weston	Cordiano, Joseph (L)
		York West / -Ouest	Sergio, Mario (L)

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

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

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