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**Official Report
of Debates
(Hansard)**

Monday 16 October 2000

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des débats
(Hansard)**

Lundi 16 octobre 2000

Speaker
Honourable Gary Carr

Clerk
Claude L. DesRosiers

Président
L'honorable Gary Carr

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Monday 16 October 2000

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Lundi 16 octobre 2000

*The House met at 1330.
Prayers.*

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

Mr Steve Peters (Elgin-Middlesex-London): As the Walkerton inquiry begins today, all of Ontario is eager to find the answers to why this tragedy occurred and what steps are needed to ensure it will never happen again. Finger pointing and laying blame will not solve anything. What is needed is leadership to ensure that our legacy is a cleaner environment.

For decades, Ontario farmers have taken great pride in being responsible stewards of the earth. The Ontario Farm Environmental Coalition, formed in 1991, demonstrated great leadership by introducing the environmental farm plan. Over 18,000 farmers in Ontario have participated in this program. OFEC developed a nutrient management planning strategy to provide guidance to municipalities in preparation of bylaws. The leadership and foresight of our farmers and agricultural communities should be commended.

We need assurance from this government that they are committed to resolving the issues surrounding safe drinking water. The renewal of such programs as Clean Up Rural Beaches and funding for infrastructure are desperately needed. Ontario farm organizations have long been calling for province-wide guidelines to replace the current patchwork that exists.

All of us collectively have a responsibility to protect our environment. No one has the right to pollute: not farmers, not businesses, not government, not municipalities and not individual citizens. All of us here and in the upper galleries share the same goal: to have a clean, safe environment.

CANADIAN CURLING ASSOCIATION

Mr Brian Coburn (Ottawa-Orléans): I rise today to welcome the Canadian Curling Association, or CCA, to the Taylor Creek Business Park in my riding of Ottawa-Orléans. This association recently turned sod at their new \$750,000, 5,000-square-foot headquarters on Taylor Creek Drive and Vimont Court.

As all members of this House are well aware, the sport of curling is thriving in Canada. We have one of the most

successful organizations in the world, with numerous world championships at the junior, men's, women's, mixed and senior levels. Indeed, the curling club in Canada is a very tight-knit community, and that's why I believe the CCA's move into Orléans is a perfect fit.

Earlier this year the curling world and indeed Canada as a whole were saddened by the loss of one of this country's athletic heroes. Sandra Schmirler was a legend in the curling community, winning countless championships, including gold at the last Winter Olympics. She brought a new excitement to this sport and played a large role in making it as popular as it is today. The passion and commitment of Mrs Schmirler will live on as Canada continues to bring home world championships to display at the CCA's new headquarters in Orléans.

The sport of curling in this country is indeed thriving, and I welcome the Canadian Curling Association to its new home in my riding.

HEALTH CARE FUNDING

Ms Caroline Di Cocco (Sarnia-Lambton): The community-based health and social services organizations in Sarnia-Lambton, such as Senior VIP, the Canadian Mental Health Association and the VON, are being forced to absorb statutory pay equity costs for 1999-2000 without additional revenue to meet these costs.

The Harris government capped pay equity funding at December 31, 1998, levels. The Pay Equity Act, effective January 1 of each year, translates into increased costs to the community health services. These health services cannot continue to absorb these costs. For example, the Canadian Mental Health Association will be forced to reduce services effective January 1, 2001. The specific impact will mean that eight people per week will not receive services. In one year that means that 416 hours of services to people with serious and persistent mental illness will be lost to Sarnia-Lambton. This is occurring at a time when people with serious mental illness require these services and have to wait an unacceptable length of time, frequently up to one year, because the organizations do not have adequate resources to meet the current demand. Moreover, this is added cost. It is occurring at a time when responsibility for care and treatment is increasingly being shifted away from hospitals and in favour of community health services.

MIDDLE EAST PEACE

Mr Peter Kormos (Niagara Centre): For 50 years Palestinians have been denied statehood. That's five decades of struggle for sovereign recognition, for basic human rights and dignity and for such necessities as food and shelter in a very hostile environment. Recently and once again this conflict has taken a violent turn, costing over 100 lives, including children. We share the sorrow of Ontario's Palestinian community at the recent turn of events in their homeland. We also share in the sorrow and we regret and mourn all loss of life.

The federal NDP is demanding that Canada use whatever means available to it, including its seat on the Security Council, to fight for UN involvement to put an end to the violence and the bloodshed. We also support Amnesty International's call for an independent inquiry into the excessive use of force by the Israeli military. Canada can and must play a role in furthering the cause of justice and in finding a peaceful solution to the problems plaguing the Middle East.

No more Palestinians, no more Israelis must die, and the bloodshed must come to an end. The aggression against unarmed civilians must stop. There must be a just peace that restores dignity, equality and human rights in Palestine, and without justice there can be no peace. There can be no peace without a withdrawal of the Israeli military occupation of Palestine and without a withdrawal of Israeli settlements which encircle and strangle historic Palestinian communities.

We speak up for the rights of Palestinians to create their own independent state and for the right of refugees to return to their own homes and lands in peace.

PUBLIC LIBRARY WEEK

Mr John O'Toole (Durham): It gives me great pleasure to rise in the House and to join with Minister Johns to celebrate the first day of Public Library Week in Ontario and to express my support for our libraries and their contribution to communities across Ontario.

In my riding of Durham we are fortunate to have the Clarington Public Library system, under the directorship of Cynthia Mearns and board chair Craig Brown and other members such as Don Peable, and the Scugog Memorial Public Library, under the directorship of Tom Bonanno, Chair Pat Melligan and Ken Carruthers, just to name a couple.

For years now these libraries have provided an invaluable service to residents of Bowmanville, Orono, Courtice, Newcastle, Port Perry and all communities in between. In fact, their service has been increasing in popularity in recent years, with circulation at the Clarington library growing by 60% since 1995 and by 50% at the Scugog library over the same period.

To celebrate library week this year, Clarington has expanded and enhanced its service, now opening its doors to readers on Sundays and making its catalogue available on the Internet for the first time. Scugog

marked library week with the launch of a book by author and retired teacher Dwayne Darlington. His children's book *Toejam and other Poems* was an immediate success, selling more than 30 copies at the event.

As governments across the country work to promote literacy and early childhood education, we can look to our libraries as an historic and excellent resource.

I want to commend the volunteer boards, members and staff of the Clarington and Scugog libraries, as well as all libraries in Ontario, for their leadership, and thank them for providing the residents of my constituency wide access to the world of information in the resources of books.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mr Rick Bartolucci (Sudbury): Today I urge the Minister of Health to pay her bills, honour her commitments and act upon the requests of our hospital administrators, who are desperately urging the minister to rectify the financial plight of the Sudbury Regional Hospital.

Our hospital has requested the minister to do two things: provide emergency financial relief and undertake a review of hospital operations so she can learn at first hand that the current funding picture she painted is not accurate.

Currently our hospital, like 77% of other Ontario hospitals, is bleeding a deficit because of the Harris government's mismanagement of health care reform. After only three years, the Sudbury Regional Hospital is facing a running deficit of \$40 million.

To add insult to injury, the health minister has repeatedly turned her back on our hospitals, even when she was informed that we were facing a desperate physician shortage and needed immediate funding relief. Her answer was a flat no, which forced the hospital to spend \$6 million it just didn't have.

To date, the minister has yet to repay our hospital the \$10.6 million for restructuring costs. These are bills paid by the hospital and forwarded to the ministry to be reimbursed. How deadbeat can you get?

The dynamics of our community have changed. Our hospital's acting chief administrative officer and the community now speak with one voice, and we demand that the minister act and act now. We are asking for immediate financial relief and an operational review now.

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INTERNET SECURITY

Mr Joseph Spina (Brampton Centre): On October 2, I had the honour of attending the launch of an Internet safety campaign held by the Internet safety committee in Peel. This committee's primary efforts have been concentrating on protecting children from being victimized by sexual predators who use the Internet.

The 19-member committee was initiated by Peel Regional Police Chief Noel Catney, and has representatives from the police, the regional council, the Peel Board of Education, the Dufferin-Peel separate board and volunteer organizations along with the corporate private sector. At this time, Peel is the only municipal police service in the province to have taken such a proactive step.

Although the Internet can be used as a great learning resource, it can also be very dangerous as more and more sexual predators surf the Internet looking for young victims. The main objective of this committee is to educate students and their parents through the introduction of Internet safety guidelines, called cyberproofing. It's anticipated that in the first year of operation, 107,000 students within the region of Peel will be educated through about 300 schools on Internet safety guidelines. Children aged 8 to 15 are the ideal ones we all want to protect.

We want to congratulate Peel Regional Police and the various partners for another forward-thinking initiative.

MUNICIPAL REPORT CARDS

Mr Ted McMeekin (Ancaster-Dundas-Flamborough-Aldershot): Recently, the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing made comment relating to the introduction of municipal report cards. That caught many municipal leaders by surprise, and I can tell you that after speaking to many of those same municipal leaders, I can report to this Legislature that the minister's announcement is being greeted with a combination of amusement, bewilderment and outright confusion.

There is profound lament among municipal leaders that this initiative was taken without proper consultation. There was no attempt to define what information is currently being gathered, what new information needs to be gathered, how that is different from what is currently in place and, frankly, how that would be used.

The idea of benchmarking is nothing new to municipal leaders. We've been doing that for years. In fact, the fear of this report card is that it will be used as a tool, as a club to penalize efficient municipalities—and I speak from some experience, having had the privilege of serving as mayor of the only municipality in all Ontario that actually lowered taxes six years in a row—that it will actually be used to forcibly merge inefficient municipalities with those that are more efficient.

In the opinion of municipal leaders, the only way to proceed is to consult, to partner and to build and enhance the links with municipalities. We need municipal report cards, but we need to link them with provincial support cards as well.

PROSPERITY 2000

Mr R. Gary Stewart (Peterborough): Recently, Peterborough and area suppliers and buyers of goods and services were given an opportunity to see what is offered

by local providers of quality goods and services. The Greater Peterborough Chamber of Commerce organized a trade show in Peterborough on September 26 and 27 entitled Prosperity 2000. This was truly a unique idea to promote the use of goods and services from within the business community locally rather than constantly looking internationally.

Prosperity 2000 was a tremendous success. Over 80 businesses contracted with the chamber of commerce to rent space, and almost 1,200 people attended the show as visitors, buyers and sellers.

Companies in Peterborough and surrounding areas, like many companies in communities across this wonderful province, are creating and producing interesting products, much of which are currently being exported from the area. The Greater Peterborough Chamber of Commerce recognized that the time had come to market those goods and services and to showcase industry and business within our community.

I would like to commend the work of Peter McLean, president, and Doug Armstrong, general manager, of the Greater Peterborough Chamber of Commerce for a truly successful event, the birth of Prosperity 2000.

VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon Gary Carr): We have in the Speaker's gallery His Excellency the Honourable Hugh Desmond Hoyte, MP, Leader of the Opposition in the Parliament of Guyana. Please join me in welcoming our special guest.

Hon Tim Hudak (Minister of Northern Development and Mines): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: I just wanted to let the members know on behalf of the Minister of Natural Resources, John Snobelen, that we are very pleased to be joined today by members of the Young family, in the members' gallery. The Young family today donated Calder Island to become part of the Manitou Islands Provincial Nature Reserve, on the east side of Lake Nipissing. It is indeed, as everybody knows, a very generous donation. On behalf of the people of Ontario, I am very pleased to recognize and thank them for their kindness and their generosity.

MEMBERS' PRIVILEGES

Mr Dave Levac (Brant): On a point of privilege, Mr Speaker: Pursuant to standing order 23(i), I intend to raise a point of privilege today, Monday, October 16, 2000. The issue concerns section 103 of the Child and Family Services Act. It states, under "Rights of communication etc" that:

"(1) A child in care has a right,

"(a) to speak in private with, visit and receive visits from members of his or her family regularly, subject to subsection (2);

"(b) to speak in private with and receive visits from,

"(i) the child's solicitor,

“(ii) another person representing the child, including an advocate appointed for the child by the Office of Child and Family Service Advocacy referred to in section 102,

“(iii) the Ombudsman appointed under the Ombudsman Act and members of the Ombudsman’s staff, and

“(iv) a member of the Legislative Assembly of Ontario or the Parliament of Canada; and

“(c) to send and receive mail that is not read, examined or censored by another person, subject to subsection (3).”

By extension, Mr Speaker, under the Correctional Services Act, section 59, I attended the Genest Youth Detention Centre in London, Ontario, on Friday, October 5, 2000. Upon my arrival at approximately 9:05, the supervisor was immediately notified in order to escort me through the facility, as I requested.

The detention centre was not in a state of insecurity or an emergency situation, as I requested, because I know that is not allowed under any of the sections. I was denied entry and informed that I would have to make arrangements through the Ministry of Community and Social Services.

I feel my rights as a member of the Legislative Assembly were infringed upon, since such a delay would have defeated my purpose under subsections in the act. That purpose was to provide a safe, quick and private manner for a child to speak to an elected member of the Legislature.

I would ask that you rule on this, Mr Speaker. I indicate to you clearly that I did all I could to indicate very clearly to the supervisors that I was there and understood the legislation and asked if there was an emergency or if there was a situation that required me not to be there. I was informed by the manager that she had not been to the floor and wasn’t aware of any emergency. The supervisor, when contacted, indicated that he wasn’t even present on the ground and indicated there was no such emergency taking place.

Again, Speaker, my rights were denied as a member of this Legislature.

The Speaker (Hon Gary Carr): I thank the member for that point of privilege, and I will reserve my ruling.

Mr Peter Kormos (Niagara Centre): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: Further to the matter raised with you, Mr Levac told me what had occurred at Genest. He told me this matter was going to be raised today. I want to encourage the Speaker to consider this very, very seriously.

I appreciate, because of our bifurcated system of young offender facilities, that the senior level of young offenders are in centres administered by the Minister of Correctional Services and therefore under the Correctional Services Act, where section 59, which Mr Levac has referred to, would specifically apply. That bifurcated system, of course, places the lower level, the junior level of young offenders, under the Minister of Community and Social Services. We should note that we’re the only

jurisdiction, as I recall it, in the country that still maintains that bifurcation.

I submit to you, Speaker, that the denial of entry to any member of the Legislature for purposes of examination or discussion with personnel or persons in custody or persons being cared for in that facility, regardless of the statute, is a very serious matter, especially when it isn’t based on, as Mr Levac spoke to, the matter of there being an emergency or a state of crisis going on in there. I don’t care whether it’s a government member or a member of either of the two opposition parties, when there isn’t that state going on, I think the denial of access to any member of the Legislative Assembly is an affront to the Legislature, to this Parliament.

All of us have responsibilities within this chamber but also outside this chamber. If we’re going to be called upon to perform those responsibilities effectively and meaningfully, it means that members of the Legislature have to have reasonable access to provincial institutions or institutions that are supervised under provincial statute, whether they be transfer-of-payment agencies or otherwise.

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Secondly, I ask the Speaker, in considering this point of privilege, to look at section 59 and identify the rationale for section 59. I submit that the Speaker should make reference to section 59 and, by analogy, apply that very express right to those quasi-correctional institutions—I’ll be generous in referring to them as that—those young offender facilities at the junior level. Surely if I have a right, and I do, as does any member of this assembly, to enter any correctional facility, be they adult facilities or young offender facilities, surely by analogy that right extends to young offender facilities, albeit they are administered by the Ministry of Community and Social Services, because the motive is the same, the rationale is the same, the interest being served is the same.

When this sort of occurrence happens, it causes suspicion about the reason for barring a member of the assembly. It puts a cloud over the institution and/or the administration, be it at the institutional level or the ministerial level, a cloud that is undeserved without any further investigation.

That sort of scenario is unacceptable to the people of Ontario, and I submit that this point is very relevant. It’s very timely. I encourage the Speaker to give it serious consideration. I also encourage the Speaker to apply section 59 by analogy and look at the broader interest being served and the fact that there has to be some stature possessed by members of the assembly that permits them to investigate and inquire so that they can do their jobs in a meaningful way. Otherwise backbenchers of all three caucuses become nobodies, not when they’re 50 feet or 50 yards away from Queen’s Park but even when they’re sitting in their very seats.

Hon John R. Baird (Minister of Community and Social Services, minister responsible for francophone affairs): On the same point, Mr Speaker: I certainly

agree with many of the comments by the member for Niagara Centre. Indeed, all members of the Legislative Assembly have the right to visit any of the young offender facilities managed by the Ministry of Community and Social Services. There's no disagreement whatsoever on that. Every member of the Legislature is entitled to visit any of our young offender facilities.

I understand that the member opposite presented himself, and there were a number of others in attendance. The individual had to make the confirmation and check that this was the case. He was invited to come back in, I guess, a little more than an hour and he would have been free to make a tour, accompanied by members of his legislative staff. He's certainly more than able to visit the Genest facility, as I have, or as any other member can, at any opportunity. If he would just provide an hour or two hours' notice or make an appointment the day before, they'd be very pleased to provide him with a tour. I think that was the clear indication that was presented to the member when he presented himself for the tour.

Should you require any further information, Mr Speaker, I'd be pleased to provide it, or officials within the ministry would be.

The Speaker: I thank the member for Niagara Centre and the minister for their comments. I will reserve my ruling.

VISITORS

Hon Frank Klees (Minister without Portfolio): I would ask members of the House to help me welcome people from my riding, the Stouffville Seniors Association, who are here to observe the proceedings.

Mr Bert Johnson (Perth-Middlesex): They look younger than you, Frank.

Hon Mr Klees: Wonderful-looking people.

MOTIONS

HOUSE SITTINGS

Hon Frank Klees (Minister without Portfolio): Speaker, I move that pursuant to standing order 9(c)(i) the House shall meet from 6:45 pm to 9:30 pm on Monday, October 16, Tuesday, October 17 and Wednesday, October 18, 2000, for the purpose of considering government business.

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

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

All those opposed will please say "nay."

In my opinion the ayes have it. Carried.

TOM WELLS

Hon Janet Ecker (Minister of Education): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: I believe we have unanimous consent of the House today to pay tribute to Mr Tom Wells.

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

Hon Mrs Ecker: It's certainly a privilege for me today, on behalf of my caucus, to rise to make some comments about a very fine former member of this Legislature. We have seen in the past that a number of distinguished members of the Conservative dynasty have succumbed to the passage of time.

Not only was Mr Wells a senior cabinet minister in the administration of both Premiers John Robarts and William Davis; he also was an education minister for six years. One of the things I have discovered as the current holder of that portfolio is that past ministers do continue to take a proprietary interest in education matters, and Mr Wells was no different. I had a number of wonderful conversations and received some good advice from him about handling of the portfolio, although times were quite different in those days. He talked to me about when they had the first province-wide teacher strike and some 6,000 teachers, I understand, were gathered on the lawn at Queen's Park. He said that resolving that strike basically involved him and one or two members from the Premier's office and one or two members from the union. They sat in a hotel room one night, and a small group, over dinner and libations, on the back of an envelope, did the agreement that solved that particular strike.

I don't think that these days, with the battery of consultants and lawyers who are involved in all of the different levels, we could quite take that approach, but he said it had worked quite effectively. He wasn't suggesting that I should try that with some of our groups but he did make that comment which was rather interesting.

He served over 22 years and had a number of different portfolios, not only education. I'm told by people I've met that one of the things they remember about his time as education minister was the fact that they were allowed to watch Canada in the world hockey tournament in 1972. That was actually a ministerial decision to allow the schoolchildren to watch that on television. I've met people who have remembered him because of that. But he contributed much more as Minister of Education, and as Minister of Health when there was the introduction of medicare as we know it. He was a government House leader in a minority House and helped facilitate a number of contentious issues through that time. He was Minister of Social and Family Services and Minister of Municipal Affairs. He covered the whole gamut of the government in his day.

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He also had the privilege of serving as agent general on behalf of Ontario in England for about seven years, and many who travelled to London had the privilege of

meeting him and to learn of the good work he was doing on behalf of Ontario, and Canadians, at that time.

I think he also will be remembered very fondly by people who dealt with him as a man of integrity, a man of great class and dignity; a man who won the Order of Ontario for his contributions. Also, as an aside, and I think many people in politics probably don't realize this, he led to the formation of constituency offices on behalf of all of the members here, something that I think has served all of us, and certainly the voters, very well over many years.

On a personal note, I know that in this House people are fond of teasing the whip or the Deputy Premier for their sartorial splendour and their well-coiffed hair, but Mr Wells did set quite a standard in that regard for what he wore and how he was dressed. As many have remarked, the press gallery was fond of referring to him as "the man from Glad" because of his immaculate presentation at all times, no matter what the stresses and the strains were.

So certainly the sympathies and the condolences of this caucus, as of all our colleagues in the House, go out to his wonderful wife, Audrey, his son, Andrew, and his daughters, Brenda and Beverley, and their two grandchildren. As one of the writers in the media said, "He was a classic politician of the old school," and that is in the most positive sense.

Mr Gerry Phillips (Scarborough-Agincourt): I am pleased on behalf of my leader, Dalton McGuinty, and the Liberal caucus to say a few words about Tom Wells. I knew Tom for, I guess, 35 years; he became quite a good friend.

The Minister of Education outlined his extraordinary career here as an MPP for 22 years. He was the Minister of Health, I think, when medicare came in. He was the Minister of Education during some challenging times and did a terrific job there. He was the Minister of Municipal Affairs—I think they called it Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs then—right at the end of some substantial change there, and he was also the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs when the Constitution was repatriated; so he was at the centre of some of the major changes in the province of Ontario.

I actually have never heard a bad word about Tom Wells, which is quite extraordinary.

But I want to talk a little bit about Agincourt, because that's where I knew Tom very well, obviously. He never forgot the constituency. I think someone who plays a big role here in the province can, at their own peril, ignore the constituency. Tom never did. The minister mentioned he opened a constituency office. Even in the toughest times, Tom would be strolling like he had not a care in the world through the Agincourt Mall in the middle of a major teacher dispute. There was Tom, always available, ever available to constituents. I've thought back on the 35 years; I don't think there's been a more respected politician in Scarborough that I can remember. He had universal respect; as I say, the most respected politician in Scarborough.

He was unbeatable. I was one of the six who took a run at him; I didn't make it and neither did the other five. We actually had a contested nomination to pick the Liberal candidate to run against Tom Wells—believe it or not, a contested nomination. There were eight people there—the guest speaker and seven others—that's how much we felt we could beat Tom Wells. That wasn't the year I ran, that was 1967; I ran against Tom in 1975 and I remember the advice was, "You've got to attack Tom." I said, "Well, attack him on what?" He was unassailable, he was a decent person, and I said furthermore that if I did attack him nobody would believe me, because he had that kind of reputation.

The two big things I remember that Tom, among others, did for the riding: Scarborough Grace Hospital exists because of Tom Wells, there's no question about that, as does the Tam O'Shanter Golf Course. Right at the last minute it was ready to be filled in with apartment buildings and what not, and the community got involved in it and Tom got involved in it and saved it. I think well over a million rounds of golf have been played there since Tom and the community saved the Tam O'Shanter Golf Club. I have accounted for three or four of those, but another million people have played it.

Seniors benefited enormously from Tom's work.

On a personal note, I remember one time we had a babysitter, a young lady, probably 25 years old, whose child was killed on a Friday night, a five-year-old child. She came from Newfoundland and she wanted to somehow or other get the child home. I phoned Tom, probably late on a Friday night, and he had it solved. He found a way over the weekend to make sure that young person was allowed to go home.

I was in the hospital myself, a year and a half ago, to have a little hip operation—nothing, just a hip replacement. But who appeared at my door? Tom and Audrey. They were a team, by the way. In Scarborough it was always Tom and Audrey, his lovely wife. You never had to say "Wells"; it was always "Tom and Audrey."

So, on behalf of my caucus, and I know my colleague Alvin will want to say a couple of words, I just want to say how much we respected Tom, Audrey and the family—Brenda and Beverley and Andrew. He will be well missed. He did a terrific job for the province.

Mr Alvin Curling (Scarborough-Rouge River): I too would like to pay tribute to a remarkable gentleman. I think Abigail Tator stated it well when she wrote in the Scarborough Mirror, "Tom Wells is a true gentleman."

Tom was a man of great character and distinction, a statesman and a visionary. The fact is that I was the one who, not knowing the history at all, felt that we had to put a Liberal candidate against this gentleman. I just knew him as a wonderful man. Not knowing what it takes to run an election campaign, I got in there and I started knocking at doors and things like that, and the fact was that at the time Tom came up to congratulate me for entering the race. He didn't say anything to the effect that "You're going to lose"; it was the fact that I was entering. To my great surprise, he came and told me he

was going to step down. So he stood down at that time in 1985 and I ran.

I had understood in the process that the area was the largest electoral area in Canada. It had 414 polls, and the last time a contestant had gone against Tom Wells they got one and Tom won 413 of those polls. I was in the middle of all of that, and when he quit I felt I would be massacred.

In my own statements in the campaign I said some rather stupid things. I remember I said that when I was finished with Tom Wells, he would be carrying my bags. Then after winning that election, the first call I got was from Tom Wells in England who called me to congratulate me that I won.

Sometimes when you ask for things you do get them. I was asked to go to England just after as a cabinet minister, and, as the agent general, Tom Wells came to meet me. The first thing he said was, "Welcome, Mr Minister, to London, England. May I take your bags, please," and I said to Tom, "I really can't do this." He said, "It's all right, Mr Minister." I said, "No, I can't. I'll explain to you later in the car." Then when I explained to him in the car, he thought it was rather funny; I felt rather ridiculous at that.

I felt so comfortable with Tom, the man, as an individual. He was always there for advice and he was always there to support me in whatever he could. Some people have stated here that he held many prominent posts, but I did not see him as the man in these rather prominent posts. He was a gentleman, a really respectable individual.

I of course had these huge shoes to fit my feet into, and as I've gone along I've kept in mind Tom Wells, a man of such stature, such a gentleman. All along he was a friend. It was of course a shock to me when I heard that Tom had passed away. Just a couple of hours before that I was asking Gerry about him, and Gerry said, "Tom is not well," and a few hours afterward I heard that he had died.

We want to say that Tom had such a position in Scarborough-Rouge River, as it is called today. The place is so huge that, as you know, Gerry Phillips, myself and other people now share that large area. We see him as a respectable man, a man of vision and a man we all will remember for years to come. You know that he was a part of the Toronto bid to host Expo '98, and he was named to the Order of Ontario.

He leaves his wife, Audrey, whom we all know; his son, Andrew; his daughters, Brenda and Beverley; and two grandchildren.

We want to wish him well. Scarborough will always remember this great statesman, this friend, this wonderful man.

1410

Mr David Christopherson (Hamilton West): It's my honour to rise today and pay tribute to Mr Tom Wells on behalf of the NDP caucus. It has already been mentioned that he was known as "the man from Glad" to many people in Ontario, certainly to reporters, but those who

worked with and knew Mr Tom Wells remember him as a young upstart, freshly elected into the provincial Legislature during the 1963 landslide, when the Conservatives not only won this place but for the first time ever there was a gaggle of Conservatives on this side of the House because of the overflow. They referred to themselves as "a gaggle." Of course, the last time that happened in this place, we referred to them fondly as "the rump," and I'm sure Mr Wells would have no problem with that title.

As part of the gaggle of government members sitting on this side of the House, he was quickly branded as a member of the "Chicago gang," a group of young Tories who had a reputation for coming into the House gunning at the opposition, but sometimes they fired at their own government too, again not unlike the recent rump that we had on this side of the House a few years back.

Mr Wells was a member of the Conservatives at a time when "Progressive" had a little more resonance than some of us feel it has today. As Mr Wells himself remembered, "We used to make a bit of noise." None of that seemed to do him any harm. Three years after Tom Wells was first elected to the Legislature, he joined the cabinet and went on to take over the health ministry in 1969, just as medicare was coming on stream. During his political career, Tom Wells would go on to hold ministerial portfolios in social and family services, education, intergovernmental affairs and serve as government House leader.

As the Toronto Star wrote in its tribute to Tom Wells, "He was at the hub of Progressive Conservative rule in Ontario for 22 years, almost from the time he was first elected MPP for Scarborough North in 1963 until he stepped down undefeated in 1985," 22 years of political leadership and not a single defeat.

But a political resumé does little justice to Tom Wells, who was known on both sides of the House as a man of integrity, as someone who tried to find commonalities rather than thrive on differences. He was inclusive, not exclusive, in his political approach.

During Tom Wells's reign as education minister, his focus was on educating all students, not simply on province-wide tests to root out the bad students and crack the whip on the education system. His philosophy was far more inclusive. He said, "It's not whether you pass examinations that is important. It is whether you can learn and adapt that knowledge."

As intergovernmental affairs minister, Tom Wells was very involved in the run-up to the 1981 constitutional agreement, which he viewed as one of Canada's success stories. He said, "I don't think anybody today believes you could write a constitution for any country in the world which wouldn't include a charter of rights and freedoms."

It was that fair and inclusive approach to politics which won Tom Wells praise from both sides of the Legislature. Even as the then Liberal leader, David Peterson, was busy criticizing Mr Wells's 1985 promotion to agent general as a patronage appointment, he was

quick to offer praise about Mr Wells the person. He said, "Tom is a nice man. There is no question about that. He's basically a peacemaker."

In an interview in the mid-1990s, Tom Wells talked about his ability to bridge the political gap and get along with members on both sides of the Legislature:

"In those days we had a great bunch in the Legislature. We may have differed philosophically and had great battles, but we seemed to be friends with people in all parties. I remember getting along well with a number of Liberals and NDPers, sometimes to my disadvantage with members of my own caucus who used to say, 'You can't be that friendly with all these people.' My philosophy of how the system works is that you do your business and defend your particular policies and beliefs in the House but, outside that place, we are all friends and are all elected to do the same job."

George Hutchison, one of Mr Wells's communications advisers, has said that Tom Wells "was an incredible politician in the best sense of the word, because he was able to bridge differences and find common ground. He had tremendous negotiations skills," as we've already heard the current education minister refer to. Tom Wells attributed those negotiating skills to his early days as an advertising director for the Canadian Medical Association Journal: "I was in selling before politics, and selling is selling, whether the product is advertising, a political image or Ontario."

For more than two decades, the electorate of Scarborough North bought Mr Wells's image of what Ontario should be. Today, as we mourn his passing, we pay tribute to the political statesman he was, and to the man of integrity we remember him to be.

On behalf of my leader, Howard Hampton, and the NDP caucus, I extend our condolences to the family and friends of a fine parliamentarian, Mr Tom Wells.

The Speaker (Hon Gary Carr): I thank all of the members for their comments. I will make sure copies of Hansard go to the family.

ORAL QUESTIONS

TRUCKING INDUSTRY

Mrs Sandra Pupatello (Windsor West): My question is for the Minister of Economic Development and Trade. For months now, truckers have been losing hundreds of dollars a day, independent truckers who have kept our economy moving, because you promised action to help them cope with a 75% increase in their fuel costs. In spite of all the promises, nothing has happened; all you've done is talk. As they say, talk is cheap, Minister, and filling their gas tanks isn't. The truckers are tired of hearing the promises.

Minister, you promised action and the Ontario truckers are calling your bluff. We'd like to know today specifically what you intend to do to alleviate the situation with

our truckers so we ensure the economy doesn't end up in the dumpster as a result of your failing to act before this crisis started.

Hon Al Palladini (Minister of Economic Development and Trade): Certainly, to quote the honourable member, what comes out of her mouth is cheap as well.

This government has been facilitating and trying to do things that are going to address the concerns truckers have as a whole within the Ontario industry. I believe we are making progress, and the fact is that it has taken us about 20 years to get to this particular point. I have every confidence the industry will come up with resolutions that will make it prosper and make it better in the long term.

Mrs Pupatello: Today the truckers are going broke. Talk is cheap, and all we've heard so far is that you were going to bring everybody to the table to talk. The truth is, the truckers were looking to you for part of the solution and you haven't offered any solution at all. You left a carrot dangling last week and said you hope you don't have to use it, but you have legislation just in case you have a crisis.

My question for the Minister of Economic Development and Trade is, what does the minister consider to be a crisis? Does he consider truckers parking and stopping the movement of product a crisis? In a just-in-time economy that Ontario has, is that considered a crisis? Were you serious about bringing forward legislation? Were you serious about coming to the table with a solution, as opposed to just inviting everybody to come and sit down at the table?

Hon Mr Palladini: We have been facilitating various meetings within the industry. We appointed an independent chairperson to oversee these meetings. I believe that certain headway has been made, progress has been made. As I said earlier, it is an unfortunate situation, but it's going to make more time to make sure that things are going to get addressed.

Our government has led by example. The fact that the Minister of Transportation made an announcement on Friday making retroactive a base price of January 1, that will instantly put money into the hands of these independent owner-operators. I have encouraged the industry. They are at the table, and they are facilitating and looking at how they can put more money in truckers' pockets.

These things will happen, but we need to sit and do it in an amicable fashion so we can resolve not just the fuel surcharge issue but other issues that confront the trucking industry as a whole.

1420

Mrs Pupatello: To the Minister of Economic Development and Trade: the truckers are not at the table. They're parked at the side of the road. What you have is a crisis. Every economy in Ontario is being affected by the truckers who are not working today. What they are looking to you for is a solution.

Last week we asked the minister in this House a question. He could not come forward with a solution. The next day, the Premier had to walk in and draw up

legislation within three hours for a solution. I'm asking the minister: isn't it time to call the Premier to the table? Is it not time to get the Premier of Ontario involved in finally finding a solution to a crisis that will grip Ontario and will bring all of our economy to a grinding halt? Minister, will you get the Premier involved in this solution?

Hon Mr Palladini: The honourable member would like to say to people or to the members of the Legislature that the Premier is not involved. The Premier is involved on a day-to-day basis on every issue within this government.

I have a tendency to speak too loudly. I'm going to try and keep my voice down so the members can hear me a little bit more.

I would like to tell the honourable members across the hall here that this government has acted very positively on this issue and we have made inroads to coming up with a solution that will be in the best interests long term.

I have encouraged working together because working together we are going to come to a resolution. I've also said that if industry does not respond, if industry does not come to the table, then this government will regulate the portion of the fuel surcharge access. We have said that and we are willing to do that, but I have a lot of faith within the industry that it will not be the solution that we are all looking for.

WALKERTON TRAGEDY

Mrs Sandra Pupatello (Windsor West): My question is for the Acting Premier. I'd like to read a letter from Jamie McDonald who writes,

"My wife and I and our three young children reside in Walkerton.

"Not only have we had to cope with the ongoing water woes but we also had to cope with having two of our three children hospitalized in London due to serious complications of an E coli outbreak."

Today, "All cooking, washing of food and cleanup is done with bottled water.

"In order to give the children a cleansing bath, we drive 150 kilometres round trip to our relatives' house.

"These are just a couple of the high points of living in Walkerton. Everything is far from fine from my vantage point!!"

Acting Premier, could you explain why this government has failed the McDonald family in Walkerton?

Hon Chris Hodgson (Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet): Through you to the member opposite and to those who may be watching, everyone is aware that the situation in Walkerton has been truly tragic. This government has a great deal of empathy with the family the member mentions. We are living up to our commitment to do everything we can to make sure that the situation improves in Walkerton.

To date, the 4.6 kilometres of water mains have been replaced. We've issued orders to stop using well 5 and ordered hydrogeological study in areas surrounding the

other wells. The Ontario Clean Water Agency is at Walkerton and has been there for a number of months, trying to make sure that when the water is hooked up it is absolutely safe, and I think the member opposite and everyone would agree that should be the priority. They're doing that as quickly as they possibly can, but you want to make sure that when it does start to work again for the family you mentioned it's absolutely safe.

Mrs Pupatello: Acting Premier, five months ago the water in Walkerton began to make people sick. Five months ago Dalton McGuinty dragged this government into a public inquiry which begins today.

My question for the Acting Premier is, what do you think is reasonable? Is it reasonable that the people should have no assistance by this government so that people like the McDonalds are still suffering the fate today that they suffered five months ago and that they still are without safe drinking water?

The people of Walkerton deserve something more than just the truth that will come out in a public inquiry; they do deserve to have safe water and they deserve that now. After five months, the water coming out of their taps is still poisoned. Your government failed to provide that water assistance. What exactly is an acceptable level of wait for the McDonalds and all the other people who today, after five months, still do not have safe drinking water in Walkerton?

Hon Mr Hodgson: As I've mentioned, everyone is concerned about this situation. It's truly tragic what happened in Walkerton to the people who died and the families that have had to live through this ordeal. We are taking steps, and you know that. The Ontario Clean Water Agency has been working with town officials. If you talk to people at the municipal level, the town's mayor has been widely quoted as stating that the Ministry of the Environment has been very helpful and is doing everything in its power to make sure that water is restored in a quick fashion, but also it has to be ensured that it's safe. The experts are working on that to make sure that when it does get restored it's absolutely safe for the McDonald family and all the residents of Walkerton, and I think that's what reasonable people would expect.

Mrs Pupatello: This is what the Premier of Ontario said last May: "We can't wait five months for a public inquiry." He made it sound as though five months was an absolute lifetime, and for the people who've been coping with cleaning, with babies, with trying to give baths, five months has been an absolute lifetime.

Do the people of Ontario know that you, the government of Ontario, have not helped the people find water to drink, to transport water? You've done nothing to assist the people to go day to day until you decide that you're going to have safe drinking water in Walkerton.

I'm asking the Acting Premier today, do you think it's acceptable that after five months in the 21st century the government of Ontario cannot provide safe drinking water for the people of Walkerton?

Hon Mr Hodgson: The member opposite is a reasonable person; she knows that there's no such thing

as a magic wand to just say that everything will be hooked up tomorrow. This is a complicated situation. The Ontario Clean Water Agency has worked with the town and the municipal officials and experts in the industry. I think she would agree that it should be done properly and that it's turned into an issue where it's taking a lot of resources to replace all of the piping. But do you think we shouldn't do that? I think we should. We should act responsibly and make sure that we do the best thing for the people of Walkerton and that when the water's hooked up it has to be absolutely safe for the residents of Walkerton. I think you would agree with that and that experts should be working on that and doing it in that manner.

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

Ms Frances Lankin (Beaches-East York): My question is to the Acting Premier. Last week you introduced Bill 124, calling it the toughest environmental penalties legislation in North America. What I want to know is why this bill also repeals some of the toughest provisions in the existing law. The law on the books now allows administrative penalties against a director or an officer of a corporation who has failed to take all reasonable care to prevent the corporation from polluting the environment. Your new law repeals that provision. Funny how, among all the smoke and mirrors and hoopla, your minister neglected to tell us about that little change. It was nowhere in his statement. It was nowhere in the bill's explanatory notes. It was nowhere in the ministry backgrounder document. Acting Premier, would you tell us, why are you scrapping that section, weakening our environmental laws while pretending to make them tougher?

Hon Chris Hodgson (Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet): As the member opposite is aware, we are keeping our promise to get tough on polluters. I will pass on to the Minister of the Environment your specific concerns, but I think you would agree that this is a step in the right direction, that we want to have the toughest laws and make sure they are enforced, to make our air and water cleaner and our environment better for the next generation. I think you would even agree with that.

Ms Lankin: Acting Premier, it's your government, your cabinet that made the decision to repeal this section of the act, and I want to know why. It's pretty clear that Bill 124 is little more than a public relations exercise to respond to the beginning of the Walkerton inquiry. You are trying to make a big deal about raising penalties when in fact you're not enforcing the law and you're not prosecuting under the law.

1430

Your bill amends the environmental penalties that were enacted in 1998, under the then minister Norm Sterling. You told the House at second reading—this is really great, Minister—when discussing this very section of the act, that this would make our laws—you guessed

it—the toughest in North America. It's a great spin line. The government spin doctors obviously like it, so they're trying again. But it's hard to make it fit when they're actually weakening the law and the legislation that's there.

What was enacted in 1998 says that administrative penalties can be imposed on corporate officers and directors who don't do everything reasonably possible to make sure that environmental offences are not committed. Why is your government repealing that section now?

Hon Mr Hodgson: I can assure the member opposite that our draft legislation will go through consultations. I know that you would agree with making sure that we have the toughest laws to make sure that our environment is the cleanest and the best it can possibly be. You've read the introduction of the draft. I think you would agree that these fines will make us better as a province and that good industry will welcome this. It levels the playing field and it means that Ontario is a leader in environmental protection.

Ms Lankin: Minister, in 1995 environmental fines in the province of Ontario were at \$2 million. Under your government it has dropped to \$850,000. You're not enforcing the law; you're not prosecuting under the law. Raising the limits is not going to make it the toughest.

This bill falls way short of what your ministry officials told you needed to happen in the cabinet submission that led to Bill 124. They said you needed 500 new staff to enforce the existing law; you decided to go for 65 temporary staff. The submission proposes an environmental snitch line so members of the public could help you enforce the law; your bill doesn't do that. It proposes amending the legislation to make environmental regulations an "absolute liability," to eliminate lame excuses for polluters; your bill doesn't do that either. Instead, you're repealing a section that your former Minister of the Environment said made his act the toughest in North America, the same language that you're using today.

You were part of the cabinet then; you're part of the cabinet now. You are here as Acting Premier. Tell us: why is your government repealing this section of the law, weakening Ontario's environmental protection?

Hon Mr Hodgson: You've got some concerns with the bill, but I think you would agree overall that this is a step in the right direction. There are some huge, significant steps forward. For individuals, a first-time offence: right now, the present situation in Ontario is zero to \$100,000 plus a possible two-years-less-a-day jail term. Under this proposal it would be a maximum of \$4 million plus a five-years-less-a-day jail term. For an individual's subsequent offences it's a huge increase, up to a maximum of \$6 million plus a five-years-less-a-day jail sentence. For corporations, a first offence: right now it could be anywhere from zero up to \$1 million. Under this proposal it will be a maximum of \$6 million. For a corporation's subsequent offences it goes to a maximum

of \$10 million from the present limit of zero to \$2 million.

I know that the Minister of the Environment will be interested in the opposition's comments, and we look forward to working with you to make sure we move forward to protect the environment in Ontario.

TRUCKING INDUSTRY

Ms Shelley Martel (Nickel Belt): I have a question for the Minister of Economic Development and Trade regarding his complete mismanagement of the fuel price crisis in the province of Ontario. Truckers have blocked the Whitby food terminal today because your government has done absolutely nothing to deal with the serious problems that are facing independent truckers. They have tried for six months now to get your government to understand that the fuel crisis is costing them their trucks and their livelihood, and all they've gotten is rhetoric from your government. Minister, you promised that your government would regulate the trucking industry if the industry wasn't prepared to regulate itself. It's clear it isn't. It's clear you've caused a crisis. When are you going to bring in legislation to fix the mess?

Hon Al Palladini (Minister of Economic Development and Trade): The honourable member would like everyone here to think that the fuel crisis we're facing is an Ontario-made problem. There is a fuel crisis throughout the world; unfortunately, we're all affected by it.

I want to say that yes, I did say that if the industry is not able to regulate itself, this government would regulate, making sure that access to the fuel surcharge is made available to the owner-operators. We have been negotiating in good faith and the working committee is working. We have made advances. I just would like to allow the process to make sure that we look at not only the fuel surcharge issue but other issues that are affecting the trucking industry.

Naturally, I'm disappointed at some of the things that have been happening. That's not the way it's supposed to be. I encourage all truckers to give an opportunity to the people who are part of the working group to come up with all their solutions.

Ms Martel: Minister, the truckers don't need your encouragement. They need some leadership from you, and they're wondering when they're going to get it.

The question was, when are you going to bring in legislation to regulate the trucking industry? Independent truckers need to know they're going to get some compensation for high fuel prices. They need to know they're not going to carry the cost of increased fuel prices all by themselves.

Your working group has fallen apart. There are no effective discussions going on right now, and it's clear your government has no plan to deal with this crisis. I ask again, Minister, when are you going to show some leadership? When are you going to bring in legislation to regulate the trucking industry?

Hon Mr Palladini: It's very clear the honourable member would like to add more fuel to the fire—no pun intended. This government has acted very responsibly by facilitating the meetings the industry needs and by helping the truckers at least have access to the people they work for. The working group is working, contrary to what the honourable member is saying. The best thing for the trucking industry is to allow these meetings to continue, so we can get to the bottom of this thing and make sure Ontario's trucking industry is viable for a long time.

The Speaker (Hon Gary Carr): New question.

Mr Monte Kwinter (York Centre): I have a question to the Minister of Economic Development and Trade. Two weeks ago today, I stood up and suggested to you that the talks between your ministry and the trucking associations had collapsed, and that we were in danger of having a slowdown: rigs parked by the side of the road, disruption to just-in-time deliveries, disruption to fuel deliveries and disruption to produce deliveries. You stood up and said you had a working group that was working and doing these things, and that you were going to come up with a resolution.

In your response to me—and you've already made it twice today—you said exactly the same thing. I just want to quote it to you, because I think it's a smokescreen for doing nothing. You said, "We can address not only the fuel surcharge but also some of the other issues within the trucking industry." You said that to me, and you've said it twice today. Later on in the same response, you said, "But we have to look at the overall industry." Then you said, again, "not just the fuel surcharge but other issues within the industry."

The problem is, when you called your meeting, this exalted working group, and you brought the National Truckers Association there, they came expecting to see something on the table. They came to see you addressing their number one issue, the fuel surcharge pass-through. You didn't even mention it. It wasn't mentioned at that meeting. They walked out, and the acrimony was reported in the media. They said you may be talking but you're not listening. What do you have to respond to that?

Hon Mr Palladini: I want to say to the honourable member that I'm not negotiating. I've been a facilitator all along. I've been facilitating access within the trucking industry, so that talks could actually take place so we can come up with solutions.

Fuel surcharges have been a problem for quite a while, and this government had the courage to lead by example. Last Friday, the Minister of Transportation made the announcement that owner-operators at least will have immediate access to the monies they have been putting out.

I want to say to the honourable member that we have every intention of making sure the carriers and shippers are going to make sure that access to fuel surcharges will be possible to the industry. If that does not happen, this

government has already said we will regulate that portion of the industry to make sure it does happen.

1440

Mr Kwinter: You're talking a good game, but the facts do not bear out what you're saying. Yesterday the trucking associations met, had a vote and were unanimous that they were getting nowhere with this government. According to Bill Wellman, the president of the National Truckers Association, "We're through talking." You keep talking about things that might happen, and they're talking about things that are going to happen. They are going to stop delivery of products to our key industries, and you are doing nothing about it. You've made all sorts of promises that you will bring in legislation and do various things. You're doing nothing.

I ask you now, are you prepared to bring in legislation? If you are, why are you telling some of the truckers that you're not bringing it in? You're not really being upfront with them, and you're creating problems. Those problems are going to affect our industry, they're going to affect our consumers and they're going to affect people who are the most vulnerable. I suggest that if you're going to deal with the problem, deal with it. Stop talking and start doing some action.

Hon Mr Palladini: We have made every serious effort to deal with the problem, contrary to what the honourable member is saying. Never at any time have I said to anyone within the trucking industry that I would not consider regulation of the fuel surcharge access. On the contrary, I must have said that a hundred times, and we still have every intention of doing it.

I'm glad the honourable member has asked the question, because one of the things the honourable member should know is that even if the province regulated the fuel surcharge access within Ontario, that will only affect a minor number of owner-operators in the province. I wonder if I can get the honourable member's support to help me lobby the federal Minister of Transportation, so Ontario operators will not be put at risk. I'm looking for your support.

FARM TAX REBATE PROGRAM

Mr Bert Johnson (Perth-Middlesex): My question is for the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs. You recently made an announcement concerning provincial sales tax on farm building materials. I know the exemptions on these building materials has driven a lot of new construction on the farms in my riding of Perth-Middlesex, and farmers want information on your plans to make this plan more accessible. Minister, can you outline the changes that have been made to the program and tell the House why these changes were made?

Hon Ernie Hardeman (Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs): As the member will know, our government committed in this year's budget to make the sales tax exemption on farm building materials into a point-of-sale exemption, meaning that farmers could keep their hard-earned money rather than paying the

provincial sales tax for these materials and applying for a rebate.

Exempting farm building materials has stimulated construction on farms across the province, leading to more modern facilities and more jobs. Under the rebate program, over 15,000 claims, representing over \$425 million worth of renovation and new farm buildings, were processed. Now farmers can make this competitive contribution to our economy more easily. This is just one example of our commitment to the province's farmers.

Mr Johnson: Minister, people in my riding want to know more specifics on this change. They want to know how the program has changed, now that they don't have to apply for the rebate, and they want to know how this change affects building projects that are done by contractors. Minister, can you give us some detail on how the program is meant to work when a farmer actually goes to the store to buy materials, and what happens if a contractor is doing the buying?

Hon Mr Hardeman: When a farmer goes to buy materials for a farm building, he or she must sign what is known as a purchase exemption certificate stating that the goods are for farm use only, as well as stating the name and address of the farmer. This process is already in place for many products bought for farms such as fertilizer, pesticides and hand tools.

I want to make it clear that a contractor can also sign the exemption certificate when the building materials are bought, provided the details of the project and the name and address of the farmer are given. This will make the program work better, as contractors do a large part of the work in our farm construction. We have worked with the Ministry of Finance to get the word out on this regulation to our stakeholders and to stores that are selling building materials. Anyone who wants more information can call the local retail sales office and the Ministry of Finance for information. Their number is in the blue pages. Thank you again to the member for the question.

CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY LABOUR RELATIONS

Mr Dominic Agostino (Hamilton East): My question is to the Minister of Labour. Late Friday afternoon you announced that you were going to kill Bill 69. Clearly, on this side of the House we believed all along that Bill 69 was an unnecessary, aggressive, bad piece of legislation that was simply intended to split the labour unions, that was simply another attack by your government on the construction trades in Ontario. You had somewhat of an agreement, you had unions agree to it, and the reason you did that, Minister, was because you put a gun to their heads and you said, "You either go along with this or we're going to blow your brains out through an even worse piece of legislation."

Let me quote what you said in the Toronto Star on June 29: "They're playing with fire. If they don't support the bill, they will leave me with no alternative. I'll have to bring in a bill that abolishes section 1.4 of the Ontario

Labour Relations Act.” Minister, that is a declaration of war on the construction trades of Ontario. Will you stand up today and make it clear to the House that you have no intention whatsoever of bringing in any legislation to abolish 1.4 of the Ontario Labour Relations Act as it affects the construction trades?

Hon Chris Stockwell (Minister of Labour): I’d like to thank the member opposite for the question. I can’t give him that kind of undertaking because right now the Ministry of Labour and cabinet and caucus itself are reviewing the options that are made available. I personally think it’s a shame that there wasn’t compromise and agreement found by all the parties who in fact endorsed the piece of legislation, Bill 69. I thought it was a good piece of legislation. I thought the legislation dealt with the issues that the employers and subcontractors, general contractors and unions had with respect to competitiveness in the construction industry in Ontario.

Having said that, it didn’t work out. Obviously we believe that there is a competitiveness problem in the construction sector and that it still needs to be addressed. There are still a few avenues and options made available to us. We’ll have to examine those options and determine what would be best for the people of Ontario.

I understand your opposition to that. I think you and the other opposition party have outlined your concerns. I appreciate your concerns. If you have any bits of advice or inquiries, I’ll be happy to respond.

Mr Agostino: From a minister who’s usually pretty clear and forthcoming in the House with his answers, frankly, that was disappointing. Very clearly, here’s a bit of advice: there is no need at this point to bring in any tougher legislation that would cause disruption to the construction trade simply to please your friends in the general contractors who have donated a ton of money to your party and who have lobbied you to make these changes. There is no need to make any changes at this point to the legislation. That is our position, Minister.

Bill 69 was not necessary and the removal of section 1.4 is not necessary either. It is disappointing because, clearly, by your answer today you have not ruled out the possible removal of that section of the legislation. That is a declaration of war on the labour movement. If you move to remove that section of the legislation, I can guarantee you one thing: you will bring every single construction site in the province of Ontario to a standstill. It will bring the economy of this province to its knees, and you will be responsible for that.

You have a choice today, Minister. Once again, you can make it very clear to the province of Ontario that you have no plans of removing 1.4 from the Ontario Labour Relations Act. Will you do it today or are you going to declare war on the labour movement by not doing that?

Hon Mr Stockwell: Well, Mr Speaker, in the beginning of that question he suggested I didn’t answer the question, and at the end of the question he suggested that I did answer the question, so I’ll try my best to respond. What is it? I hardly should be asked not only to answer

the question but also to figure out what the question was, but I’ll do my best.

Interjection.

Hon Mr Stockwell: I hear the member for Windsor cackling away there. Listen, you might even agree with this when you hear the answer.

We haven’t decided which way we’re going to go. We tried to get Bill 69 as a compromise. We tried our best to find out whether there was a compromise in this industry and we worked toward it for over a year. There wasn’t a compromise. The parties couldn’t come together. The union side, in my opinion, gave us an undertaking—I see some of the members who actually sat in the room and gave me that undertaking, who went out and then said, “No, we can’t give you this undertaking. We can’t do what we said we would do.”

So all I can tell you is that we’re examining our options. Our options are open to us. When we make a decision, we’ll bring legislation to the House and we’ll debate it fully. There’s not any point in my telling you what we’re going to do until we’ve had a frank and open discussion within caucus and gotten input from caucus, something I’m sure you don’t know much about.

1450

DRINKING AND DRIVING

Mr John O’Toole (Durham): My question is for the Solicitor General. Minister, at the local meetings I’ve had over the summer and fall, my constituents have repeatedly expressed concerns with the issue of road safety, more specifically driving while under the influence. I know that road safety is one of our government’s top priorities and that in 1995 we launched a comprehensive road safety plan which gave police the tools they needed to make our roads safer. We’ve also implemented strong legislation like the Sergeant Rick McDonald Memorial Act and created initiatives like community safety zones. But of particular concern to my Durham constituents is the issue of drinking and driving.

Could you please tell the House and my constituents today about other initiatives the province and your ministry have taken to combat drinking and driving in Ontario?

Hon David H. Tsubouchi (Solicitor General): First I’d like to thank the member for Durham for his question. Drinking and driving will not be tolerated in this province. I think it’s very clear that everyone in this House believes the same thing.

We’re pleased to tell the House and the people of Ontario that in 1995 our government carried through on a commitment we made and fulfilled a \$1.2-million annual funding promise to the people of Ontario. This doubled the commitment of this province in the fight against drinking and driving. While I have the opportunity, I want to recognize as well the efforts of the police services across this province, both municipal and provincial, in terms of their commitment to the fight against drinking and driving.

The other thing that I think is very significant is that this government has increased the suspensions with respect to drinking and driving to be the toughest in the country. Now a repeat drinking and driving offender can face a lifetime suspension of their driving licence. "Three strikes and you're out" I think is a very important message and a tough message to send to the people in Ontario. Don't drink and drive or else you'll face the fullness of penalty in this province.

Mr O'Toole: Thank you for that very genuine response, Minister. I like your strategy, that drinking and driving should not be tolerated. I think it's a zero tolerance issue, personally.

As I must repeat, this issue is, not just for my riding but for all the people of Ontario, a very important one. In particular, there were several fatal accidents you might be aware of in my riding of Durham over the summer. Most of them involved the use of alcohol.

While most people are getting the message about the dangers of drinking and driving, sadly, the message simply is not getting out to some. Could you tell my constituents and the people of this province what other initiatives and investments our government has developed to combat drinking and driving and put a stop to this abusive situation on our roads?

Hon Mr Tsubouchi: Once again I thank the member for Durham for the question. It gives me an opportunity to talk about the local investments this government has made in its fight against drinking and driving, particularly in the region of Durham.

Since 1995, our government has provided almost \$130,000 to RIDE, the Reduce Impaired Driving Everywhere program.

There's an interesting program that we helped to fund in Durham through our Partners Against Crime community crime prevention program. We provided a \$30,000 grant this last fiscal year to the Durham District School Board for a program called Impact 2000. This a road safety program which is addressed toward teen drivers and specifically addresses drinking and driving.

I've had a lot of opportunities, in my previous portfolio and also this one, to act with a number of groups. One of the really significant groups in this province is Ontario Students Against Impaired Driving, OSAID. They have taken the lead.

If we can somehow work with the young people of this province to get across the very important message of not drinking and driving, I think that is the key for the future of safety on our roads in Ontario.

MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

Mr David Christopherson (Hamilton West): I have a question for the Acting Premier involving a very serious matter. I would like you to tell the people of Hamilton, to tell me and to tell the family of Zachary Antidormi why you have rejected a coroner's inquest recommendation to expand a program that will save lives.

You will know that as a result of the 1999 inquest, there was a recommendation to expand the services of the crisis outreach and support team, known as COAST. In May, your government received a proposal to expand that program. The Hamilton-Wentworth police services board have already approved their share of the funding, and you have rejected your share of it.

Your government talks a lot about children. You talk a lot about justice; you talk a lot about public safety; you talk about fairness. You talk a lot. This was an opportunity for your government to put your money where your mouth is and expand a program that will save lives.

Minister, tell all of us today why your government thinks they can afford to ignore the recommendations of that coroner's inquest and ignore the needs of families like Zachary Antidormi's.

Hon Chris Hodgson (Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet): As the member opposite knows, this is quite a complicated issue. We are looking at the implications of this. I know the Minister of Health is aware of the situation and will report back on it. I appreciate the question. I will inform her that you've asked.

Mr Christopherson: Minister, that is certainly far, far from acceptable. The fact of the matter is that lives can be saved. The police believe it; our community believes it; the Antidormi family believes it; the coroner's inquest believes it. It's only your government that doesn't think this matters.

Here's what the Antidormis had to say: "The jury worked very hard at the inquest, investigating the needs of the community. This was considered a need.... Some other family is going to have to suffer what we suffered."

Minister, it doesn't have to be that way. You have an opportunity to do the right thing today. As the second most influential financial minister in the government, you would be very much aware of this proposal. If you can't give me an adequate explanation of why you rejected this expansion, then I want you to stand in your place now and say that it's a mistake and that your government will approve the funding expansion so we can save lives in Hamilton and every other community across Ontario.

Hon Mr Hodgson: After researching this issue, the member of the third party would be aware that the program has not been cancelled, that the Ministry of Health is committed to the recommendations and making sure they are workable. The Ministry of Health and the minister will work with the program to make sure the concerns that he mentions are addressed. As I've already mentioned to him, I will mention to the Minister of Health that he has raised this issue. But I want to stress, for the people who might be watching this on television, that the member already knows the program has not been cancelled.

POVERTY AMONG SENIORS

Mr Michael A. Brown (Algoma-Manitoulin): I have a question for the minister responsible for seniors in this

province. Homeowners who heat with natural gas or home heating oil will see a huge increase in the cost of heating their homes this winter. Close to 800,000 seniors in this province do not pay provincial income tax. These people don't pay income tax because these people don't make a lot of money. They are on fixed incomes. These people are going to have to pay, by most estimates, over \$500 more this winter than last to heat their homes. They don't have an extra \$500. Minister, what are you and your government going to do to assist those seniors in the province who need to heat their homes this winter?

Hon Helen Johns (Minister of Citizenship, Culture and Recreation, minister responsible for seniors and women): Let me say that everyone is cognizant of fuel prices and the increasing prices. We all are watching carefully to see what happens in the federal mini-budget this week. There's lots of talk about what may be there and they are certainly talking about what they might do.

But let's talk about what we're doing in the province of Ontario. Let me say that this week, or in the next few weeks, everyone in the province who has paid tax of up to \$200 will be receiving a \$200 rebate, thanks to this government. That's an important side, if you will, a dividend from the province of Ontario.

Let me also say that this province has worked to reduce the taxes that seniors and all people across the province pay. We've reduced the tax substantially. We haven't seen any reduction from the federal government yet. All of those things enable seniors to have more disposable income, to be able to pay costs that sometimes are unavoidable, unfortunately, as a result of the well gate prices.

1500

Mr Brown: Minister, you didn't listen. There are 783,490 seniors in this province who will not receive a tax rebate cheque from the province because they did not pay it. These are the people we're concerned with today. We want to know how seniors in this province, those 783,000 who did not pay provincial income tax and are going to have to pay \$500 more to heat their homes—are you going to do something about it or are you going to leave them in the cold?

Hon Mrs Johns: Let me be very clear. There's no way this government should be apologizing because we took hundreds of thousands of people off the taxes so they don't have to pay tax any more. There's no way we should be apologizing for that.

The people of Ontario see tax reductions which have been substantial as a result of this government, and never will we apologize for that. In fact, we're proud of our record. Fewer people are paying tax in the lower brackets, and that's good for seniors, that's good for people with low incomes, and we're proud of that record.

ACADEMIC TESTING

Mr R. Gary Stewart (Peterborough): My question is to the Minister of Education. I hear a great many concerns from people in my riding that today's students

need to be extremely well-educated to compete in the global marketplace. Our Ontario students will be competing with students across the country, and indeed around the world, for many jobs that don't even exist yet. My constituents tell me that a good basis of literacy is vital for our students.

I'm aware that this past week all grade 10 students across Ontario took a literacy test. Can you explain why this government has chosen to implement such a test, and can you also tell us how the tests went overall last week.

Hon Janet Ecker (Minister of Education): As we said before both the 1995 and 1999 elections, one of our goals was to have better quality and more accountability in the education system to make sure that we were giving our students what they need when they leave high school. One of the ways we test whether the new curriculum is doing its job is to have standardized testing. For example, one of the tests that is just being phased in this year is the grade 10 literacy test. It was something we said we would do. We are indeed doing it. It was phased in this year to make sure that it is indeed a valid test, that it is giving information not only to measure how well we're doing as a system but also how well students are doing individually, because of course it will be, starting next year, a requirement for students to graduate from high school. We also have accommodations for special education students to make sure they can do it.

I'd also like to thank the many individuals, the teachers and the staff at EQAO, for the work they have done—

The Speaker (Hon Gary Carr): Order. I'm sorry, the minister's time is up.

Mr Stewart: Thank you, Minister, for your answer. After meeting with about 150 students last week, their concerns are certainly your concerns and vice versa.

I know that parents and employers in my riding are glad to see that this government is recognizing that we need to know how well our education system is serving our students. Is it true that testing is one of the most accurate ways we can determine how students are doing? Once the results of the tests are known, are there remedial supports available for students who need extra help?

Hon Mrs Ecker: Students, of course, get evaluated a number of ways by their teachers, as they should be. But if we're going to be able to ensure that the system is doing its job, we need to have standardized tests across the system, so we do in grade 3, grade 6, phasing in in grade 9, and of course the grade 10 literacy test.

The other reason is that it clearly will be measuring whether our students have appropriate literacy skills before they leave high school. If they don't have those skills, remediation has to be done, and we've already started funding that. There is \$25 million in additional monies being invested this year to help with remediation activities, things like summer school, study groups, steps that will assist students in being able to pass the literacy test.

We are also interested in preventing literacy problems. That's why we've increased funding this year for literacy programs in kindergarten to grade 3, so that in those early grades not only are young children getting what they need in literacy skills but also, if they are having problems, they're getting identified at that early age.

NATIVE CHILDREN'S SERVICES

Mrs Leona Dombrowsky (Hastings-Frontenac-Lennox and Addington): My question is for the Minister of Community and Social Services. In 1989, eleven years ago, commitments were made to the aboriginal people of Toronto that, in time, Native Child and Family Services would receive full CAS funding. Dalton McGuinty made this commitment in the First Steps document. Aboriginal children of Ontario deserve services that will respect their unique culture and identity.

In 1997, your assistant deputy minister told Native Child and Family Services of Toronto that you would make a decision. In 1998, they expected an answer. In 1999, you still did not respond. Your ministry's own review reported that your lack of action has placed this agency, and I'm quoting from the report, in an "uncomfortable and unsustainable position." Minister, when will you make Native Child and Family Services of Toronto a full-fledged children's aid society?

Hon John R. Baird (Minister of Community and Social Services, minister responsible for francophone affairs): We encourage the agencies in question, with their programs, to reflect the traditional aboriginal values. However, our priority is to ensure the safety and security of every child in this province.

I'm aware of the concerns the member opposite has expressed. I'm aware of the concerns expressed by aboriginal leaders in the province about the implementation and the pace of child welfare reform.

We've undertaken, at considerable effort, to reform our child welfare system, with more than 100% increase in funding and some tough new legislation. We have designated a number of aboriginal child welfare agencies in the province, and we're waiting to see the full results of that. So if the member opposite wants a clear answer, it is no, not at this time.

Mrs Dombrowsky: Minister, this 80-page report by the Ontario Federation of Indian Friendship Centres catalogues the plight of urban aboriginal children.

Last year, Bill 6 amended the Family and Children's Services Act "to recognize that Indian and native people should be entitled to ... their own child and family services." Yet you wrote to Native Child and Family Services of Toronto in June, indicating you would not designate them as a CAS. On September 25 of this year, this agency wrote to all of its stakeholders to inform them of your—and I quote from their document—"promises made and promises broken."

You've ignored your own legislation, Bill 6, at the expense of children. When are you going to designate

Native Child and Family Services of Toronto as a full-fledged children's aid society?

Hon Mr Baird: In the member's first question, she says we won't give them a straight answer, and in the second, supplementary question she reads a letter from me, saying the answer is clearly given.

At this time, we have no plans to expand the number of native children's aid societies across the province. As I indicated to the member opposite, we're undertaking a comprehensive reform of our children's aid societies, which has been led by my predecessor, the Honourable Janet Ecker. We've more than doubled funding. We have designated a number of agencies. We'll watch closely how they move forward before we make a decision to proceed.

1510

STUDENT ASSISTANCE

Mr Wayne Wettlaufer (Kitchener Centre): I have a question for the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities. It concerns the Aiming for the Top scholarships, the creation of which program you announced earlier this year. Very recently the first winners have been announced and I'd like to know, for the benefit of many of the students in my riding, what you can tell us about the program, about this year's winners, and certainly for the many students who are going to be graduating this year, how they can apply for the program.

Hon Dianne Cunningham (Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities): The Aiming for the Top scholarships are something that everyone in this House should be very proud of. It's an opportunity for us to recognize our top students in our secondary schools, those students who are not only good at what they do but those students who really need to be in those universities and colleges. Qualified students are eligible to receive up to \$3,500. If they keep their marks up, they can do that for as many as four years, so we know we're looking at some \$14,000 in support. They just do this by applying next year by filling out the OSAP form and filling in the tick marks.

I will say that more than 4,000 young people received this award in some format this year, and close to 1,400 received the maximum award. I want all members of this Legislative Assembly, however they can, to somehow acknowledge the young people in their own secondary schools.

Mr Wettlaufer: I think this indicates that we are recognizing some academic excellence. But, Madam Minister, I think students need to be reassured, because certain students in my riding have expressed some concern that if they accept this money they will place themselves at a disadvantage when applying for Ontario student loans or any other financial aid. I wonder what assurance you can give to them that, if they win an Aiming for the Top scholarship, they will not be put at any financial disadvantage.

Hon Mrs Cunningham: To ensure that the scholarship winners receive the full benefit of their awards, the Ontario government has in fact put in an exemption for any merit-based scholarship. That's very important. It's a new requirement for OSAP in the sense that this will not be counted against them for the special awards that we give our students with regard to student loan programs.

Interjection.

Hon Mrs Cunningham: I will say that this in fact is a scholarship. The opposition are asking a question, which they could do during regular question period, but I'll answer it anyway. The Millennium is not a scholarship. The federal government unilaterally made up a program that we already had in Ontario. Since the member asks, that is the wrong way to do business. The federal government should work with the provinces.

I will say that that is not a scholarship. That, in fact, is not a scholarship. It was not clawed back—

The Speaker (Hon Gary Carr): I'm afraid the minister's time is up. New question.

Interjections.

The Speaker: Stop the clock, if we could, please. Order. On to the next question.

COLLECTIVE BARGAINING

Mr David Christopherson (Hamilton West): My question is to the Minister of Labour. Minister, you will know that there's a piece of legislation coming before the House this afternoon, Bill 128, the Social Housing Reform Act, that contains yet another attack on working people and their right to belong to a union. In fact, this bill goes so far as to strip the democratic right to belong to a union and the democratic right to have a collective agreement from workers who are actively working in the public housing field.

You are the Minister of Labour. We are asking whether or not you are in the cabinet now arguing on behalf of those workers and for their rights by telling your cabinet colleagues that they must delete section 51 of Bill 128. Minister, will you stand in your place now and tell us that that is what you are doing on behalf of these workers?

Hon Chris Stockwell (Minister of Labour): I appreciate the question from the member from Hamilton. This is the period of transition that takes place between transferring the lock, stock and barrel from this level of government to another level of government.

From the meetings that I was involved in in drafting the legislation it was very clear, and we made it very clear as a government, that we were not in the habit of stripping collective agreements or stripping members and unions of their rights. During the period of transfer there needs to be a transition period, a natural time when you can move certain employees from one level of government to another. Those employees who are being moved need protection as well as the employees who are in place presently today.

When they come together, there is some excess in certain circumstances. We need to protect both levels of employees and understand that their rights and provisions are protected under the act so when they come together, both sides are represented by their local unions, both sides have proper representation, and when they amalgamate at that time, everyone has a fair and active right to pursue the kinds of employment they want to pursue, and those who don't get taken up receive the proper payouts and so on that they receive from whichever level of government they have.

The fact remains—

The Speaker (Hon Gary Carr): I'm afraid the minister's time is up.

Mr Christopherson: Minister, that's not what's happening here. The fact of the matter is that under this bill you've taken away their grievance rights. The grievance procedure has been denied them. So how can you stand in your place and talk about being fair and you try to come across as this new kind of Tory Minister of Labour, but at the end of the day the legislation and the anti-democratic attack on union workers are exactly the same? It doesn't matter whose face they put into that ministry; the attack is the same.

What you're doing is downloading about \$1 billion worth of costs on to municipalities by giving them responsibility for all social housing, and you're trying to offset those costs by undercutting the rights, the wages, the benefits that union members enjoy in a collective agreement. Contrary to what you say, Minister, just the fact you're taking away grievance rights proves that this is all about taking away rights from workers yet again and denying them their democratic rights.

Minister, I need you to stand in your place and tell me that you're going to go back into that cabinet and fight for workers rather than fighting workers.

Hon Mr Stockwell: I've got to say to the member for Hamilton West, I go to the cabinet table and represent the people of the province of Ontario.

When it comes to fighting for workers, let me say this: I have never been part of an administration as Minister of Labour that went and raped and ripped off collective agreements like the social contract. I was not part of that kind of application of what you consider fair labour laws. I've not been part of an administration that went in and ripped up collective agreements, rolled back wages, forced people to take Rae days. I've not done that. What I've done is protected—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon Gary Carr): Sorry to interrupt the minister. We can't continue with the shouting.

We still have a little bit of time, 10 seconds, for the minister.

Hon Mr Stockwell: What we've done is we've amalgamated the housing authorities between provincial and municipal levels. Yes, there will be some jobs cost, but what we're doing is protecting both levels—the local level, the provincial level—protecting each worker's right to get the job they deserve based on their seniority.

Remember seniority? It's part of a collective agreement that you pillaged under the social contract.

NOTICE OF DISSATISFACTION

Mrs Leona Dombrowsky (Hastings-Frontenac-Lennox and Addington): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: I am dissatisfied with the response from the Minister of Community and Social Services and I request a late show.

The Speaker (Hon Gary Carr): I thank the member, and she can file the appropriate papers with the table.

PETITIONS

NORTHERN HEALTH TRAVEL GRANT

Mr Rick Bartolucci (Sudbury): I have a petition to the Ontario Legislature. It's with regard to northerners demanding that the Harris government eliminate health care apartheid.

"Whereas the northern health travel grant offers a reimbursement of partial travel costs at a rate of 30.4 cents per kilometre one way for northerners forced to travel for cancer care while travel policy for southerners who travel for cancer care features full reimbursement costs for travel, meals and accommodation;

"Whereas a cancer tumour knows no health travel policy or geographic location;

"Whereas a recently released Oracle research poll confirms that 92% of Ontarians support equal health travel funding;

"Whereas northern Ontario residents pay the same amount of taxes and are entitled to the same access to health care and all government services and inherent civil rights as residents living elsewhere in the province;

"Whereas we support the efforts of the newly formed OSECC (Ontarians Seeking Equal Cancer Care), founded by Gerry Lougheed Jr, former chair of Cancer Care Ontario, Northeast Region, to correct this injustice against northerners travelling for cancer treatment;

"Therefore, be it resolved that we, the undersigned, petition the Ontario Legislature to demand the Mike Harris government move immediately to fund full travel expenses for northern Ontario cancer patients and eliminate the health care apartheid which exists presently in the province of Ontario."

I affix my signature to this petition, as I'm in full agreement.

1520

Ms Shelley Martel (Nickel Belt): I have a petition regarding this government's ongoing discrimination against northern cancer patients. It reads as follows:

"Whereas the northern health travel grant offers a reimbursement of partial travel costs at a rate of 30.4 cents per kilometre one way for northerners forced to travel for cancer care while travel policy for southerners

who travel for cancer care features full reimbursement costs for travel, meals and accommodation;

"Whereas a cancer tumour knows no health travel policy or geographic location;

"Whereas northern Ontario residents pay the same amount of taxes and are entitled to the same access to health care and all government services and inherent civil rights as residents living elsewhere in the province;

"Whereas we support the efforts of the newly formed OSECC (Ontarians Seeking Equal Cancer Care), founded by Gerry Lougheed Jr, former chair of Cancer Care Ontario, Northeast Region, to correct this injustice against northerners travelling for cancer treatment;

"Therefore, be it resolved that we, the undersigned, petition the Ontario Legislature to demand the Mike Harris government move immediately to fund full travel expenses for northern Ontario cancer patients and eliminate the health care apartheid which exists presently in the province of Ontario."

This is signed by many residents from my riding. I agree with them and I'd like to thank Gerry Lougheed Jr for all of his efforts.

HIGHWAY SAFETY

Mr John O'Toole (Durham): This petition is with respect to Bill 102, An Act to amend the Highway Traffic Act to prohibit the use of phones and other equipment while driving on a highway. Actually, this is my bill; it's a good bill.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas motor vehicle accidents are the leading cause of death in North America; and

"Whereas studies conducted in the city of Toronto, the United States and Great Britain have reported that drivers using cellular phones while operating a vehicle significantly increase the risk of collision; and

"Whereas people talking on cellular phones while driving may cause a 34% higher risk of having an accident;

"We, the undersigned, respectfully petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to ban the use of"—Mr Speaker, this is very important—"hand-held cell-phones,"—that's what the nature of the bill is—"portable computers and fax machines while operating a motor vehicle." Remember the hand-held part there; we don't ban cellphones with this bill.

"We further respectfully request that Bill 102, An Act to amend the Highway Traffic Act to prohibit the use of phones and other equipment while driving on a highway, be passed unanimously by all members of the provincial Parliament of Ontario."

I'm pleased to endorse this.

McMICHAEL CANADIAN
ART COLLECTION

Mr John Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands): I have a petition here from the Agnes Etherington Art

Centre at Queen's University, one of the leading art centres in Ontario. It reads as follows:

"Whereas the government of Ontario has introduced Bill 112, An Act to amend the McMichael Canadian Art Collection Act; and

"Whereas the McMichael Canadian Art Collection has grown and evolved into one of Canada's best-loved and most important art gallery collections of Canadian art; and

"Whereas the passage of Bill 112 would constitute a breach made with the hundreds of other donors to the McMichael Canadian Art Collection and vest too much power in the hands of the founders, who have been more than compensated for their generosity, diminish the authority and responsibility of the board of trustees, limit the focus of the art collection and hamper the gallery's ability to raise private funds, thereby increasing its dependency on taxpayers, and significantly reduce its capacity and strength as an educational resource;

"Therefore we, the undersigned citizens of Ontario, petition the Ontario Legislature to withdraw Bill 112."

It's signed by approximately 60 individuals, and I've affixed my signature to it as well, as I am in complete agreement with the petition.

OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH AND SAFETY

Mr David Christopherson (Hamilton West): I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario that reads as follows:

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

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

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

I add my name to those of these petitioners.

NORTHERN HEALTH TRAVEL GRANT

Mrs Lyn McLeod (Thunder Bay-Atikokan): I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

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

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

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

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

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

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

This petition is presented with the signatures of another 90 concerned constituents in my riding, and I affix my signature in full agreement with their concerns.

CHILD POVERTY

Mr David Christopherson (Hamilton West): I have further petitions from the West Hamilton Interfaith Committee on Child Poverty.

"Whereas the federal government signed the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and passed a resolution to eradicate child poverty by the year 2000; and

"Whereas at the first ministers' meeting in June 1996 the Prime Minister and Premiers made tackling child poverty a collective priority; and

"Whereas Campaign 2000 records the province of Ontario as having the highest increase—116%—in child poverty since Canada's House of Commons vowed unanimously in November 1989 to eliminate child poverty;

"Therefore, we, the undersigned, petition the Parliament of Ontario:

"(1) to take immediate steps to eradicate the hunger of poor children by working vigorously with the federal government to reduce the poverty rate among Ontario's children; and

"(2) to follow and implement the recommendations of the Early Years Study, commissioned by the Ontario government in the spring of 1998."

I proudly add my name to this petition.

HUNTING IN WILDERNESS PARKS

Mr Michael Gravelle (Thunder Bay-Superior North): A petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the Minister of Natural Resources has confirmed that the province is considering allowing

hunting in Ontario's wilderness parks, including Quetico, Killarney, Wabakimi and Woodland Caribou;

"Whereas the provincial government made no mention of opening up wilderness parks to hunting when it came up with the Ontario Living Legacy policy last year for a vast area of publicly owned land across northern Ontario;

"Whereas the province's wilderness parks were originally established to be sanctuaries where the forces of nature would be permitted to function freely and where visitors could travel by non-mechanized means and experience solitude, challenge and personal enjoyment of that protected area; and

"Whereas opening wilderness parks to hunters undermines the principles that parks were established to fulfill, threatens animals and exposes the public to risk;

"Therefore we, the undersigned citizens of Ontario, petition the Ontario Legislature to demand that the Ministry of Natural Resources renew and reconfirm its ban on hunting in all of Ontario's wilderness parks."

These petitions keep coming in. I'm very proud to add my name to the signature and I support it fully.

FARMFARE

Mr David Christopherson (Hamilton West): Further petitions forwarded to me by Stan Raper of the United Farm Workers.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the government of Ontario introduced farmfare on September 21, 1999, to supplement their workfare program, forcing social assistance recipients to work on farms for their benefits;

"Whereas the Harris government of Ontario has not provided for any consultation or hearings regarding this initiative;

"Whereas the Harris government has excluded agricultural workers from protections under the provincial labour code by passing Bill 7;

"Whereas this exclusion is currently being appealed under the Canadian Charter of Rights for infringing on the right of association and equal benefit of law;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to retract the farmfare program until hearings have been held and to reinstate the right of agricultural workers to allow them basic human rights protection under the labour code of Ontario."

I proudly add my name.

1530

HEALTH CARE FUNDING

Mr Ernie Parsons (Prince Edward-Hastings): I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas Canada's health care system is one of our greatest achievements as a country;

"Whereas health care in Ontario has deteriorated, with medical services being reduced and hospital budgets cut to the bone, resulting in lengthy delays in treatment, with sometimes fatal results;

"Whereas major changes to health care legislation by the Harris government have been made with no prior public consultation;

"Whereas residents of Prince Edward-Hastings are demanding that their voices be heard and their concerns addressed to ensure that future health care legislation meets their needs;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to call on the Harris government to protect our valued health care system and to hold public hearings on Bills 23 and 173."

I am pleased to add my signature to this petition.

NORTHERN HEALTH TRAVEL GRANT

Ms Shelley Martel (Nickel Belt): I have a further petition regarding this government's ongoing discrimination against northern cancer patients. It reads as follows:

"Whereas the northern health travel grant offers a reimbursement of partial travel costs at a rate of 30.4 cents per kilometre one way for northerners forced to travel for cancer care while travel policy for southerners who travel for cancer care features full reimbursement costs for travel, meals and accommodation;

"Whereas a cancer tumour knows no health travel policy or geographic location;

"Whereas northern Ontario residents pay the same amount of taxes and are entitled to the same access to health care and all government services and inherent civil rights as residents residing elsewhere in the province;

"Whereas we support the efforts of the newly formed OSECC (Ontarians Seeking Equal Cancer Care), founded by Gerry Lougheed Jr, former chair of Cancer Care Ontario, Northeast Region, to correct this injustice against northerners travelling for cancer treatment;

"Therefore, be it resolved that we, the undersigned, petition the Ontario Legislature to demand the Mike Harris government move immediately to fund full travel expenses for northern cancer patients and eliminate the health care apartheid which presently exists in the province of Ontario."

This has been signed by a number of residents from my riding. I agree with them, and I'd like to thank Gerry Lougheed Jr for gathering these signatures.

HIGHWAY SIGNS

Mr Michael Gravelle (Thunder Bay-Superior North): A petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the Mike Harris government has been spending hundreds of thousands of taxpayers' dollars on a provincial sign campaign accompanying highway construction sites which reads, "Your Ontario tax dollars at work," signed by the Premier;

"Whereas these signs serve no particular purpose except to promote the image of the Premier at taxpayers' expense;

“Whereas this kind of public relations exercise is a completely inappropriate waste of taxpayers’ dollars and certainly is not a wise use of our tax dollars at work;

“Therefore, we, the undersigned citizens of Ontario, petition the Ontario Legislature to demand that the Ministry of Transportation immediately remove all of these partisan highway signs from provincial highway construction sites across the province of Ontario;

“Furthermore, we petition the Ontario Legislature to pass Bill 44, An Act to amend the Public Transportation and Highway Improvement Act to prohibit partisan highway signs which, if passed, would prevent the Ministry of Transportation from issuing to the crown any permit to display a sign which contains the name or image of a member of the provincial cabinet or a member of the Legislative Assembly or a partisan message.”

I’m very pleased to sign my name. These are also coming in in great numbers.

OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH AND SAFETY

Mr David Christopherson (Hamilton West): I continue to receive petitions from the Canadian Auto Workers regarding cancer in the workplace. The petition reads as follows:

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas this year 130,000 Canadians will contract cancer and there are at minimum 17 funerals every day for Canadian workers who died from cancer caused by workplace exposure to cancer-causing substances known as carcinogens; and

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

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

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

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

“That it become a legal requirement that occupational history be recorded on a standard form when a patient presents at a physician for diagnosis or treatment of cancer; and

“That the diagnosis and occupational history be forwarded to a central cancer registry for analysis as to the link between cancer and occupation.”

Again, on behalf of my NDP colleagues, I add my name to these petitions.

ROYAL ASSENT

SANCTION ROYALE

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Bert Johnson): I beg to inform the House that in the name of Her Majesty the Queen, His Honour the Administrator has been pleased to assent to certain bills.

Clerk at the Table (Mr Todd Decker): The following are the titles of the bills to which His Honour did assent:

Bill 42, An Act to enhance public safety and to improve competitiveness by ensuring compliance with modernized technical standards in various industries / *Projet de loi 42, Loi visant à accroître la sécurité publique et à améliorer la compétitivité en assurant l’observation de normes techniques modernisées dans plusieurs industries;*

Bill 88, An Act to promote the use of information technology in commercial and other transactions by resolving legal uncertainties and removing statutory barriers that affect electronic communication / *Projet de loi 88, Loi visant à promouvoir l’utilisation des technologies de l’information dans les opérations commerciales et autres en éliminant les incertitudes juridiques et les obstacles législatifs qui ont une incidence sur les communications électroniques;*

Bill 110, An Act respecting the regulation of the practice of Professional Forestry / *Projet de loi 110, Loi concernant la réglementation de l’exercice de la profession de forestier;*

Bill 129, An Act to authorize payments to the estates of the victims of the OC Transpo Tragedy / *Projet de loi 129, Loi autorisant des paiements à la succession des victimes de la tragédie survenue chez OC Transpo.*

ORDERS OF THE DAY

SOCIAL HOUSING REFORM ACT, 2000

LOI DE 2000 SUR LA RÉFORME DU LOGEMENT SOCIAL

Mr Coburn, on behalf of Mr Clement, moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 128, An Act respecting social housing / *Projet de loi 128, Loi concernant le logement social.*

Mr Brian Coburn (Ottawa-Orléans): Before I begin, I’ll be sharing my time with the members for London-Fanshawe, Peterborough and Durham.

Bill 128, the Social Housing Reform Act, if passed, will keep the government’s commitment to transfer social housing administration to municipalities.

When we came to power in 1995, the Mike Harris government said we would end the boondoggle in social housing. Since then we have worked hard to streamline programs, improve administration and bring in efficiencies.

After extensive consultation, we recently introduced legislation that fulfils our commitment to put this service in the hands of municipalities, where it belongs. We strongly believe that local governments are in the best position to respond to the housing needs of their respective communities.

The transfer of the social housing programs to municipalities was announced in January 1997 as part of a local services realignment. The province agreed to take 50% of the education costs off the residential property tax base as part of this realignment. These new financial arrangements began one year later. The province has continued to administer social housing programs while developing proposals to meet our commitment to streamline and improve the social housing system before handing it over to the municipalities.

If passed, the Social Housing Reform Act would give municipalities the say for pay that they have been asking for for many years. What's more, the Social Housing Reform Act would allow municipalities to integrate the administration of social housing with Ontario Works, child care and other social services they deliver. By integrating these services, municipalities would serve their clients more efficiently and more effectively.

1540

Let me stress that the province has taken every precaution to make sure tenants are protected throughout this entire transfer, and beyond. May I repeat: tenants will not be disrupted. Protecting tenants is this government's number one priority in this piece of legislation. No tenant needs to feel threatened by program streamlining or devolution of social housing programs to the municipal level. Provincial standards will ensure that service levels, eligibility, access and benefits will continue much the same as today.

I specifically want to emphasize that rents geared to income will not be affected and will continue to be set at 30% of income. All households in need would continue to be eligible to apply for social housing, regardless of where they live in the province.

Let me tell you what the housing world would look like if this legislation is passed:

Social housing tenants would be secure in their tenure; tenants would not be adversely affected, and there would be minimal disruption in their lives.

There would be no decline in the number of households assisted or in the number of units for people with disabilities.

Municipalities would manage and operate their own social housing portfolios; they would have say for pay and be able to provide better service to those in need more efficiently.

In addition, the province would continue to play a key role in setting and monitoring province-wide standards.

In other words, good news for the tenants, for the municipalities and for the taxpayers who foot the bill.

Let me take a few minutes to highlight some of the details in the bill now before the members.

The government proposes that the transfer would occur in two stages: the province would devolve the 84,000 units of public housing stock and approximately 13,000 units of rent supplement as a complete business on January 1, 2001; and the responsibility for administering the 156,000 non-profit and co-operative housing units would follow over a period of 18 months.

The public housing transfer would take place first, at the start of the new year, if this legislation passes. Municipalities would immediately have the say for pay that they have been seeking. It would also give local governments some direct experience in administering social housing. This experience will help them as they plan to take over the remaining non-profit portfolio.

To implement the public housing transfer, we propose to create 47 local housing corporations. Each would have the designated local service manager as its sole shareholder. These service managers are the existing CMSMs, or the consolidated ministry service managers, who currently administer Ontario Works and child care.

The current public housing business, including the administration of rent supplement contracts, would be transferred to the local housing corporation. The service managers—in fact the municipalities that pay the bills—would have direct control of both the property management business and the properties.

The employees working for the existing local housing authority would be transferred to this new corporation. This would give the local housing corporations the necessary expertise to operate housing units and minimize disruption to tenants throughout the transfer. The local housing corporations would then manage the properties in much the same way as the local housing authorities do today. Again, there would be minimal disruption to the tenants.

I should add that the proposed structure would give municipalities the flexibility to change the system to meet their local needs any time after the transfer. That means that service managers could keep the existing business system, develop a new structure to fit in their administrative and accountability structures, or indeed change the way properties are managed and maintained. There are some restrictions on municipal flexibility to ensure that tenants' interests are protected.

This flexibility would allow service managers to continue to operate public housing through the new local housing corporations. They could also add responsibilities to the local housing corporation. The municipal service manager could choose to integrate the local housing corporation into new or existing non-profit corporations or some other organization.

The non-profit transfer would be completed within 18 months of proclamation. The non-profit and co-op transfer would include both provincially and federally led non-profit and co-op housing projects. Not included in the transfer will be dedicated supportive housing, because it will continue to be administered by the province, as well as the federal co-ops and the rural and native housing programs. The federal government will continue

the administration and funding of co-ops, and before making a final decision on the rural and native housing programs, the province will complete its consultation with the stakeholders.

The proposed legislation would simplify the administration of non-profit housing by replacing a number of different operating agreements for provincially led programs with one stable, consistent accountability framework. The new accountability framework would include the most important provisions of the existing operations, including protection of provider mandates, but it would also include much-needed improvements which balance the needs of housing providers and the municipalities.

Under the new funding model, non-profit and co-op housing providers would be given a fixed level of subsidy within which they would be required to operate. Providers would gain more autonomy, funding predictability and streamlined accountability. This level of subsidy would be established after completing a comprehensive benchmarking exercise, which will determine the appropriate level of funding required.

The roles and the responsibilities of non-profit and co-operative housing providers will remain essentially the same.

I would like to make special mention of the important role that volunteer boards play in the operation of these housing projects. Their hard work, dedication and commitment are critical to the smooth operation and high quality of life in the communities.

The roles and responsibilities and agreements of federal providers would not change.

While municipalities would administer social housing programs, the province would be responsible for the following: (1) setting and monitoring standards; (2) ensuring that current levels of service are maintained; and (3) making certain that benefits and eligibility requirements are consistent province-wide.

It's also worth taking a moment to outline what the provincial standards would do. They would ensure that there is compliance with the terms of the federal-provincial social housing agreement; for example, setting income limits for those who are to receive housing assistance. They would ensure that municipalities will continue to provide assistance to the same number of rent-gear-to-income households as those receiving this assistance at the time of devolution. They would ensure that there are province-wide rules on eligibility and benefit levels. Rents geared to income would continue to be set at 30%. They would ensure that municipalities report on a regular basis to ensure that provincial and federal standards are being met. They would also ensure that the current supply of units for physically disabled access is maintained.

The province would also maintain responsibility for mortgage renewals on the social housing portfolio, manage the default risks and transfer federal funds marked for social housing to the local level.

1550

Two advisory bodies with representatives from the municipal and social housing sectors recommended that certain functions relating to social housing should continue to be managed on a province-wide basis. This would provide opportunities for cost savings and efficiencies by taking advantage of economies of scale.

We agree there is a need for a province-wide corporation to handle those activities such as group insurance, pooling of replacement reserves, ongoing benchmarking, best practices and bulk purchasing. The proposed province-wide corporation would be controlled by municipalities. It would also have non-profit and public housing providers and the province represented on the board. Once this corporation is set up, it would be free to run its affairs the way it sees fit. The province would fund the corporation for the first three years.

The proposed social housing reforms would establish roles and responsibilities for social housing that make sense. Those with an expertise in providing social housing continue to do so. Municipalities fund and administer the program and finally have the ability to integrate this important social service with other services provided at the local level. The province sets out the framework, determines the standards and enforces those standards.

Some might question why it has taken so long to bring this legislation to the House when we announced our intention back in 1997. In fact, we needed a signed federal-provincial agreement before we could move to improve and streamline the programs and serve clients more effectively. The negotiations were lengthy and the agreement was finally signed on November 17, 1999.

The provincial government did a lot more than negotiate with the federal government during this period. We did two things. We had extensive and productive discussions with stakeholders, held public meetings across the province and essentially looked at all options around how to bring in a better social housing system. We also worked hard to find efficiencies so we could give assurances to municipalities that they were getting an efficient and effective program.

As I said earlier, the government has consulted extensively with municipalities and housing providers throughout this process. In 1997, we appointed an advisory council to recommend reforms. Individuals with expertise from the social housing providers and municipalities participated. The advisory council reported to us in 1997. The government accepted the principles of the report and we took our consultation to the next level. We appointed the Social Housing Committee, again with representation from housing providers and municipalities, to build on the work of the advisory council. We asked them to look at the implementation issues and to undertake additional consultation. There was also a special tenants' consultation in the spring of 1998, and the Social Housing Committee had further consultations that fall.

The Social Housing Committee's report was comprehensive, and you will see many of their recommendations reflected in this piece of legislation.

For the last two years we've been working with a municipal reference group both on devolution issues and to help us negotiate the federal-provincial housing agreement. We had regular meetings over the last year with a housing provider reference group. We've had a separate consultation with municipalities specifically on implementation, and we've had working groups, held sessions at stakeholder conferences, and worked with AMO's social housing task force and with a regional housing group.

We have used our time well over the last three years. We have consulted; we've discussed ideas; we've hammered out implementation details. We have had all the parties around the table together. We did not always agree but we did negotiate, compromise and collectively look for the best way to achieve our common goal of an efficient and effective system.

The result of this ongoing dialogue is a piece of legislation that we believe brings us to this goal: to provide a better social housing system.

To all those who have participated in those discussions and debates and stakeholder meetings, and in particular to the individuals who worked so hard on those committees and working groups, we thank you for your hard work and your much-appreciated advice.

Over the past few years, the government has also achieved tremendous savings in social housing costs, more than \$100 million, which have been passed on to the municipalities. These savings were found through efficiencies and lower mortgage rates.

I would like to remind the House that the province is giving the new housing corporations title to the public housing stock. That is an asset with a net worth of approximately \$1.7 billion. The government came to this figure with the advice of an outside firm. It took into account many things, such as size of the units, age of the buildings, and the arrangement with the tenants in place. The number is an estimate, but this is clearly a valuable asset that municipalities will now own and operate.

The public housing stock is well maintained and kept in a good state of repair. The average annual budget for capital expenditures in public housing province-wide is \$100 million. In 1998, in anticipation of devolution, \$117 million was spent for capital repairs in public housing. In other words, we have taken care of our buildings. It is not just our opinion that the stock is in good shape. The government commissioned two independent studies. The first concluded that the condition of the public housing stock is as good as similar rental stock, if not better in many cases. The second showed that the current budget has sufficient capital dollars to maintain that stock. The Ontario Housing Corp is currently reviewing the distribution across the province of the \$100-million annual capital expenditure to ensure that it is distributed appropriately across the province.

The funding associated with social housing business is important to understand. As I said earlier, the municipalities have been paying the cost of social housing for the last few years. Since 1998, the cost of social housing has fallen by \$100 million, due largely to lower mortgage costs.

The province has developed mechanisms that would take advantage of economies of scale for province-wide mortgage renewals and group insurance, and has been working with housing stakeholders on a plan for pooling of capital reserves. These and other cost-saving measures should ensure the municipalities have the ability to cover the costs of social housing.

Through this legislation, we would give municipalities the resources and the flexibility to manage future risks through the flowing of federal funding, the transfer of public housing stock, and administrative flexibility.

If this legislation is passed, each of the province's 47 municipal service managers will get a share of the funds slated for that purpose in Ontario's social housing agreement with the federal government. The province would establish a schedule of federal funding allocations to each service manager, and we would adjust this schedule over time if indeed it is needed.

In addition, the province also proposes to provide one-time funding of \$58 million to be distributed among federal unilateral and public housing projects to supplement or create capital reserve funds to deal with future capital funding pressures.

We also recognize that there are transition costs associated with taking on the administration of social housing. We propose to provide more than \$11 million in transition funding to help municipalities with the transition costs of assuming social housing. One-time transition funding of \$5.6 million would help offset some start-up costs, such as administrative office set-up, costs of computer equipment or the cost of hiring consultants.

We would also provide local governments with some \$8 million in one-time funding specifically to assist with costs of a property management system for public housing.

In addition, municipalities may also be eligible to receive funding to address any remaining matters with respect to the title of public housing buildings.

1600

Of course, a smooth transition relies on much more than just money. That's why we've been working very closely with all stakeholders over the past few years, and continue to develop extensive information, education and training packages to help municipalities take on these important functions. As just one example, senior provincial staff met monthly with senior staff from the service managers to work on transition issues. If this legislation is passed, there will be a smooth transition, and we all will have worked hard to make sure it happens properly.

In closing, the bill before the Legislature today puts a vital service in the hands of those most capable of delivering it. As I stated before, we believe that muni-

cipal governments are best positioned to respond to the housing needs of their communities.

Mr Frank Mazzilli (London-Fanshawe): It's my pleasure to rise and speak to Bill 128 on social housing, and I want to thank the member from Ottawa-Orléans, who has done a great job on this bill in relation to consultation with stakeholders across the province. I know he's worked very hard at it.

This is part of a commitment we made in 1997 in relation to realigning local services, and who does what, if you will. In doing so, the province, in exchange for assuming education taxes, agreed and worked out partnerships with municipalities allowing them to provide some services that in the past had been provided by the province, and what better service to be provided by municipalities than social housing? When someone feels they have a need for social housing and a need for social services, they generally attend their municipality. How could the province effectively deal with the local needs in that community?

This weekend I had an opportunity to go to an event in London. I spoke to people who are involved with the London housing authority and asked them how the transition was going—the transfer of social housing from the province to the municipality. These are employees of the now Ontario housing authority, and they were very excited. One person told me that not only did she feel it was going well, but it was the right thing to do. She was excited about not only the amount of housing available but the quality, the shape the units were in.

If you look at some of those units, which I have certainly had the opportunity to do in London, over the lost decade of NDP and Liberal government, they had deteriorated. In many cases, some of the social housing had graffiti on the walls and fences, and backyards that were deteriorated. Of course, that shouldn't be anything new to us. It's like the health care system—10 lost years of Liberal governance: no financial resources to put into our hospitals, no financial resources to go into our education system or our housing, along with highways. So why would it surprise us that the stock in housing had deteriorated during that time? Since the Mike Harris government was elected in 1995, we cut taxes, as you know, to the point where we've grown the economy in Ontario. Those taxes have allowed, if you've not been following the numbers, 769,000 net new jobs in Ontario. Through those new jobs, 565,000 people have been freed from the trap of welfare, which was deteriorating our province's fiscal ability to deal with very important issues such as health care, education and social housing.

So, through the increased revenues, not only did we invest in health care and education, but we invested in social housing, and those units that had deteriorated to the point where, quite frankly, no one wanted to live in them, or could not live in them; we've invested in the upkeep of those units. Like I said, people in London are very excited that these units are being transferred to the local authority.

The Liberals under Dalton McGuinty believe in big government: big government making decisions here in Toronto. In most of our ridings, people believe they should be able to make decisions locally, and certainly that is what the Mike Harris government has always supported and will continue to support.

Not to draw anything into a federal election, but certainly we hear rumours of federal elections and star candidates being flown in from across the country into certain ridings. It's certainly something that I would submit, if I were a local person, would not be acceptable: people flying in from across the country to represent a certain riding. That's what the Liberals want to do: bring in star candidates representing big business, representing big tobacco, representing anything that's big. But of course people in their ridings will have to decide who they're going to support, and enough said about that. But I do urge whatever party comes to power federally to look at issues that are important to all of us, like cutting taxes, cutting red tape and certainly growing the revenues in the national coffers to pay down the debt and invest in health care, education and social housing.

We speak about social housing and also homelessness. The Liberals want to talk about homelessness, like they have all of the answers. They'll point out that someone is possibly sleeping on the street. You're right, they are. In relation to other acts, a lot of the issues in relation to homelessness often have to deal with mental health issues. We see it every day, when someone does not have the ability to make decisions on their own and therefore, through no insight into their illness, they're left in a homeless condition. Before we start throwing any money at that problem, we certainly have to figure out a mechanism of how we get help for that person who truly needs help before we can address the housing needs. But this is a debate for another day, and I urge Dalton McGuinty not to oppose anything to do with prosperity and allowing people to get help, allowing people to spend more of their own money.

As you know, I've heard from people in my riding recently about the \$200 tax dividend. People are excited. One night on TV I watched the parliamentary assistant to the finance minister doing a program. He spoke about neighbours of his who were going to buy new boots for their children with this \$200 tax dividend. You know what? That is their right to do that, to buy new boots for their children to go to school with. In other cases I've heard of people who are going to buy gifts for families. We encourage that. This is their money, after all, and they deserve to spend it.

Thank you, and I will now pass it over to the member for Peterborough.

Mr R. Gary Stewart (Peterborough): It is indeed my privilege to speak to Bill 128. You're going to hear over the next little while, certainly from the opposition, members saying, "Oh, this is downloading to the municipalities." Let me tell you this is—and I know it is difficult for the opposition members to understand this, but I'm going to say it fairly slowly so they can. The fact

is that this is a shifting of services to the level of government that can best deliver those necessary quality services in a very accountable and efficient manner. As I said, I know this is foreign language for the opposition, but in this day and age, where there's only one taxpayer and there's only a certain number of dollars that we can all pass on for quality services in the province, we have to look at ways to make it as efficient and accountable as we possibly can.

1610

I look at what's happening in health care. The feds are supplying a certain amount of money, the province is supplying a certain amount of money, and indeed the lower-tier government is as well. I cannot believe that we have three levels of government giving the same service, and absolutely all of them have great bureaucracies and great administrations. If I was making a suggestion, I would highly suggest that we have one level of government doing this with one administration or one level of bureaucracy. Then put the dollars into the actual product or the service that you want to provide.

This bill is a continuation, I believe, of the Blueprint and, indeed, the Common Sense Revolution and the Who Does What process. It's one more indication that this government is doing what it said it would do. If I look at the municipalities for the last many years, municipalities wanted some say for pay. Being in municipal politics for about 13 or 14 years, we kept saying to Mr Province or Mrs Province, whichever way you want to do it—or the province—suggesting that you get out of our pocket and let us do it. When there are various levels, it costs dollars and takes dollars away from the product you are trying to create.

Certainly if I look at what's happened in the municipalities over the last couple of years, I have to chuckle to myself, because they are paving or cementing absolutely everything that's flat, which says to me that there's a lot of dollars out there.

You know where a lot of the dollars have come from? It's because of the reduction in social services, which meant a great deal of dollars for the local municipalities that they can now reinvest in other things. If you look at some of the key benefits that this legislation is suggesting, I think it is primarily the benefits to the people who will be using social housing, but I believe it will be a major benefit for the municipalities as well.

In fact, as I said, number one, it puts a local service back into the hands of the local community, and why not? It's a service that can be more effective, and it reflects local needs. There is no doubt in my mind whatsoever that the municipal governments are the ones that are delivering social services, and most of them are doing it at the upper tier, and they know what is required within their particular municipality. Certainly it is different in possibly Toronto than it is in rural Ontario, or it may be different up north than it is in south-central or western Ontario. I believe that the municipal politician has his finger on the pulse of what's going on in his particular community.

It also means that the local community can more effectively integrate this service with other local delivery social services such as Ontario Works and child care. Again, why would we not put this all under one banner and get away from the fragmenting, get away from a number of levels of government costing dollars to do that service?

It can mean that the clients can be better and more effectively and efficiently served. Certainly if we can be accountable and if we can be effective and if we can be efficient, it then means that additional dollars can be put into the service. Third, it means that the responsibilities for bricks and mortar will be in the hands of local government where it more appropriately belongs. I have great respect for the municipal level of government. I believe they are closest to the people and they are the people who know what's going on.

One other thing: I'd like to compliment Henry Clark, a councillor with the city of Peterborough. Mr Clark is looking after social services for the city, and they have come up with a couple of unique ideas that are enhancing social housing. They have both the public and the private sectors involved with the city, and what they've done is open a couple of houses that they now own, which have been renovated, again with the help of both the private and the public sectors, and volunteers. There is absolutely no doubt that Peterborough is the volunteer capital of this province.

Mr John O'Toole (Durham): Next to Durham.

Mr Stewart: Well, just before Durham, as my colleague Mr O'Toole says.

Peterborough is, I believe, the volunteer capital of the world. Certainly some of the initiatives that we have seen there, this being one of them, say to me that the municipal politician and the people involved in delivering social services at a local level are the ones who know what is going on.

It's interesting to note that the whole plan, the whole scenario of the Who Does What program, was set well in advance, being back in 1997 when that whole process was happening, and the municipalities knew that they were going to be receiving this or would have to deliver this service in the year 2000-01. That's exactly what's happening. The municipalities had three years to prepare for this, and many municipalities are indeed preparing for it now. As I say, with the number of people who are now off social services, well in excess of 500,000, the amount that is being saved within the municipalities—I believe it's now suggested to be some \$100 million—those kinds of savings, along with the support that the province is giving the municipalities, along with the CRF fund, are all going to help them take over this area of social housing, and I know they will do an exceptional job.

The one other comment I want to make before I turn it over to my colleague is that there will be transitional dollars. Our government has asked municipalities to do a number of things over the last couple of years on this Who Does What program, the reason being, as I say, accountability and efficiency. It's a proven fact that the

savings are there. When you look at the dollars that municipalities are spending in infrastructure and other programs now, there is no doubt that the province is coming through with various savings by the shifting of some of the services. This is something municipalities have wanted for many years, and this is part of the reason we took 50% of education tax off the property tax. You hear a lot of people making comments about that. There was probably not a municipal council member in the last 15 to 18 years who did not want that to happen. The reason they wanted it to happen was that there now is control or there is some policing of the number of dollars that were spent and put on to the tax base. It was nothing back a few years ago, after the municipalities had their tax rates set, whether it was at the upper-tier level or the lower-tier level, for boards of education to come and say, "Oh no, we want an extra 8% more put on," or 10% or 12%, without any controls whatsoever.

1620

I think the province has been very supportive of municipalities. Again, the key to this is that both the municipalities and the provincial government have to work together on this to make it happen. The big issues are, first of all, to have the dollars available, and second, the assets that the municipalities are going to achieve, but primary is the customer service that we have to provide for the people who need and require social services.

The final point I want to make is that there will be one-stop shopping, so that people who need this service will have one area to go to. They will get assistance to get on a list that will be prioritized, they will know where they are and they will have the opportunity to become part of the social housing program.

I indeed support this legislation. I believe it is one more leg on the plan that our province has and one more thing we are doing that says we do what we say we will do.

I am going to pass my time over now to the member for Durham.

Mr O'Toole: It is indeed my pleasure to pass some remarks on Bill 128. The member for Peterborough has covered many of the salient points; however, I think it's always important for those listening today to look at this legislation as something that has been out there and been discussed since 1995. As the member for Peterborough and others have mentioned here today, first and most importantly, it is no surprise to the stakeholder groups. There have been ongoing consultations, which I will outline in my formal remarks.

The intent of Bill 128, An Act respecting social housing, is to accomplish three things and they're in the purpose clause of the bill. It's important to know the starting point before you jump to the end point:

(1) it establishes a framework for the administration and funding of the housing programs by designated service managers; (2) it governs the provision of rent-g geared-to-income assistance and special needs housing under those programs—it's important to stress that there will be special recognition for that—(3) it authorizes the

transfer of assets. As I said, these assets amount to 84,000 public housing units and 156,000 non-profit and co-op housing units as well, treating them in two separate ways in this legislation.

There is a framework here that I will probably share with the House today in my remarks.

It's a very large bill. I believe there are 10 parts to the bill, and in some respects it's a highly regulated environment. I will say at the outset that it's part of a whole process of removing some expenses off the municipal tax burden, such things as the educational portion, and moving down those things that are more appropriately delivered closer to those in need of the service.

It outlines the scope of the transfers that will be set out before the members. The Social Housing Reform Act, 2000 sets out the province's proposed legislative framework for the transfer of this important community service. Throughout the framework, the province would place responsibility for administration of social housing assets and services in the hands of the level of government requisitioned to deliver the service—

Mr David Caplan (Don Valley East): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: The member for Durham is one of the most compelling orators in this place. I would like you to check if there is a quorum present, please, to hear him.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Bert Johnson): Would you check and see if there is a quorum present.

Clerk Assistant (Ms Deborah Deller): A quorum is not present. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker ordered the bells rung.

Clerk Assistant: A quorum is now present, Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The member for Durham.

Mr O'Toole: I thank the member from Don Valley East, because it is important to have as broad an audience as I can. I see the opposition are capably represented but not appropriately represented.

Interjection: How are they behaving?

Mr O'Toole: They are behaving, though, and that's important.

I just want to start again. As I said initially, I want to make sure that this is really a sharing-of-information portion, the few remaining moments I have.

There are 84,000 units of public housing which are owned by the Ontario Housing Corp today and operated by local housing authorities. So they are owned by the province and the delivery agent is the local housing authorities. The Ontario Housing Corp is an agency of the government of Ontario and is governed by a board of directors appointed by orders in council. This governance model is one of the important elements of change. It's bringing the decision-making closer to the people who are paying for the service. Each local housing authority is an agency of the government and is governed by a board of directors also under orders in council.

There are provisions in the regulations dealing with rent geared to income and also with threshold information for people who qualify for this subsidy. This process is to ensure a smooth and seamless transfer with no

disruption to housing providers, applicants and tenants. It's very important that tenants are not disrupted by this process at all. I see in my correspondence package that the minister has gone to some lengths to send out letters to those authorities. I think the assistant to the minister, Mr Coburn, has certainly outlined in his remarks the importance of those vulnerable people in supportive housing and people who may be under some threat of being victims in a violent situation of course receiving priority on any list. As the member from Peterborough mentioned, there would be a common priority list for people looking for openings in supportive housing and rent-g geared-to-income housing.

It will simplify and harmonize the administration of non-profit housing programs and help to ensure that non-profit housing projects remain viable and can continue to provide high-quality housing services in the community.

Again, I want to stress the importance of those vulnerable elements in society. I can tell you, my reading on housing is that it is a very important social issue. I believe that housing and shelter become the fundamental piece we need to have stability in someone's life. I think there are many reports that substantiate the claim I'm making.

It provides municipalities with the flexibility to streamline administrative arrangements to better serve tenants, to meet community needs and provide best value for taxpayers. That's accountability at the front line that's absolutely critical.

The one-window approach that the member from Peterborough used I think is a very appropriate way to say how many people are on how many waiting lists and what housing supports they can get, and to make sure they have one application, a simplified process of affirming whether or not people are in need of support and how much support they are in need of.

The reform we are proposing would establish roles and responsibilities for social housing that make sense. Municipalities, the province, the federal government and housing providers all have defined, clear and important responsibilities.

I should fill out the equation here. It's important to recognize that back in November 1999, I believe it was, there was an agreement signed with the federal government, because this cascading of responsibilities really started with the federal government and the agreement signed there. They are devolving it down to the province, and the province, you can say clearly, is devolving it down to the municipal level.

But in fairness, the reality is that there are transitional issues, which I believe committees are working on. On those transitional issues, there is also transitional funding for setting up and streamlining administration. So don't think it's just handed down. By the same token, the payments the municipalities are making today are already being paid. In fact, the administrative efficiencies they are realizing may not be claimed as easily by the municipalities under the current structure. Under the new structure, any efficiencies they can glean from the pro-

cess will become, I believe, clawed back into more and more affordable public housing.

1630

Under the proposed reforms, municipalities would administer their own social housing portfolios; be able to streamline administrative arrangements within a provincial framework; own their public housing stock—a very important issue and one close to the taxpayer; continue to fund social housing; ensure that service levels are maintained and tenants are protected. It's absolutely critical that we reinforce the ensuring that service levels are maintained. In fact, there will be standards set by the province to make sure there's no one falling through the cracks. It will be as good as or better than it is today.

Municipalities would have additional powers to develop new housing programs and services. I can tell you that has been an issue in Durham over the years. Now that they get to pay for say, they will have more say. Municipalities would determine how to administer access and financial testing functions. These, of course, will be regulated as well.

Under the proposed legislation, the province would do the following: it would set standards to ensure that levels of service are maintained by requiring that the number of households receiving rent geared to income does not decline. That's important, that it cannot decline. It would ensure that basic rules around eligibility and benefits for individuals are fair and consistent across the province. That's very important. This is about providing for all of the people of Ontario.

It would flow funding received from the federal government to municipalities to assist them with the costs of social housing and report to the federal government on the use of those funds—I think there was probably over \$500 million transferred down with the federal piece—and make sure that money flows. In my remarks later on I will hopefully have enough time to disclose the amounts of money.

The province would continue to play an important role in mortgage renewal and risk management for non-profit housing, and administer dedicated supportive housing. It's very clear that the province's role will be to administer the supportive housing component.

Under the terms of the 1999 federal-provincial social housing agreement, the federal government would flow funds to the province for programs covered by their social housing agreement—so they are still involved—monitor compliance with federal principles for the use of federal funding; continue to provide mortgage insurance, through the National Housing Act, to non-profit housing projects administered by municipalities; and administer federal co-op housing programs. It's important to realize that federally sponsored co-op housing programs are not being devolved.

Of course, the providers would continue to manage their projects much as they do today. Our objective is to smooth the transition and provide for the tenants they serve.

If this legislation is passed, the province would be essentially out of the business of administering social housing within two years. The province would continue to play a more appropriate and very critical role of setting and enforcing standards.

The province would continue to manage the relationship with the federal government and ensure that the terms of the federal-provincial agreement are met. Our proposed legislation sets out federal principles and requirements for municipal reporting. The province would, in turn, compile province-wide reports to meet their own obligations.

Our goal, of course, is to ensure that social housing services continue to be available to all Ontarians at at least as good as current levels. The province's proposed standards would ensure that there is no decline in the total number of rent-geared-to-income households that are assisted. There would be no reduction in the number of units modified to meet the needs of people with disabilities.

For the first time, service level standards would be enshrined in legislation very clearly to make sure that safety is part of the decision, not just devolution of responsibility.

Proposed social housing reforms would not change the basic rules for rent-geared-to-income assistance. Many of those people with fixed incomes or with no incomes of any substance would not be offended by this legislation. Rent geared to income would continue to be set at 30% of income. Eligibility would continue to be open to those in need, regardless of where they live in this province. To ensure that the rules were clear and applied consistently across the province, we proposed for the first time that basic rules and governance governing RGI—rent-geared-to-income assistance—would be set out in legislation and regulations.

It's very fortunate that I have about four minutes left just to go through some of my notes. When I was going over this on the weekend, this struck me. This may not be systematically structured, but the transfer, as I said before, includes 84,000 public housing units that currently are kind of controlled by the province but operated by the local housing authorities, and 156 non-profit, co-operative housing units.

Also, the provincial standards, which I spent some time on: there's compliance with federal standards and there are no exemptions under this proposed bill.

The current supply of units modified for the physically disabled is very important. Included in that, the priority list would recognize that it would be a mandatory priority for applicants who are victims of violence to be recognized under the service manager's mandate to find housing.

As I've said, and I think this just bears repeating, because I know in my riding of Durham I've received over the years a number of people inquiring that they are moving closer to their family for whatever reason and they need access to housing with special needs, there have been initiatives just recently in that area.

Role and responsibilities: I think it is important to recognize, and this is something I struggled with, that the SHSC, which is like the board of directors, would consist of 15 members, including two members appointed by the minister, one of whom may be a representative of a local housing corporation; one person selected by the city of Toronto; one person selected by the council and the regional municipalities of Durham, Halton, Peel and York; one person selected by the council of the city of Toronto and the councils of the regional municipalities of Durham, York, Halton and Peel; one person selected by the district social services administration board; four persons selected by the councils of the service managers; three persons selected by provincial non-profit housing providers; and two persons selected by the provincial co-op housing providers.

What we have is a board overseeing, and that board's primary function would be of course to provide bulk purchasing or bulk decision-making where there are the economies of scale, where acting as a group to provide services and perhaps supplies there would be efficiencies recognized—and shared, I might say, with all of the participants.

I believe that this devolution started with the federal government. I think the province has had ongoing discussions since 1996 with their municipal partners and I recognize that there are transitional needs. Under that—I'm just looking for my notes here—I believe that there are two special transition funds. That's the point I'm looking for here and I will find them, I'm certain.

They're also going to propose to flow a one-time funding of \$58 million to deal with future capital funding pressures. That's one-time funding. There's also transitional funding for service managers to be able to access a total of \$5.6 million in funding that would be given to service managers to offset some of the start-up costs such as administrative, office setup, computers etc.

The province would also provide another fund, and I believe it's in a similar order of about \$5 million or \$6 million for streamlining the process. Also, it's a two-part transfer. The first part that would be transferred, I believe, is the part that was dealing with public housing. Some six to 18 months later the second part would be devolved, giving our partners more time to make the right decisions for the right reasons.

After all, it's about making services work for people in their communities, and having communities with the resources under the Who Does What exercise, to provide those kinds of supports as they see it, as they work with their constituents, whether it's a municipal councillor—and indeed I think it should pass today unanimously.

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

Mr Ted McMeekin (Ancaster-Dundas-Flamborough-Aldershot): I'm pleased. They say, "Everything old is new again." I can remember some 25 years ago working for a member in this illustrious place and at the same time doing my master's thesis on housing policy and chatting on a daily basis with Eli Comay about some

of the issues here. The issues seem almost the same. That was back when we were about to create the Ministry of Housing, when the then government took its housing responsibilities seriously.

I want to talk a little bit to some of the issues raised by the member from Ottawa-Orléans and the honourable member from Peterborough as well and this reference to downloading specifically. As a former mayor of a great municipality, the only municipality in all of Ontario that actually lowered local taxes six years in a row—our reward for that, by the way, was to be amalgamated with some less efficient municipalities. So when we hear words like “downloading” and “Who Does What” and “government that’s closest to the people” from the other side of the House, we get a little worried. Our people have built-in crap detectors when it comes to this kind of discussion. The honourable member from Stoney Creek knows that in the downloading exercise over the last six years—I know he’s interested in hearing this—there have been some \$80 million in cuts in grants; about a \$37-million shortfall on the so-called revenue-neutral downloading; and about \$35 million short on the issue of the business education tax.

1640

Ms Shelley Martel (Nickel Belt): I listened with interest to the comments that were made by the government members and I guess I’d make the following observations. There was much to-do about how this bill would allow us to work toward a more effective, efficient system, and I wonder if we’re all reading the same bill. As I look at Bill 128, this just provides for endless bureaucracy, endless duplication, endless intervention by ministers in terms of what can or can’t be done at the local level and does absolutely nothing to get rid of red tape, get rid of duplication or create some more efficiencies. It’s interesting how this particular bill is juxtaposed against another government bill, the red tape bill, which, frankly, for many things does the same thing.

Let’s just take a look at the scenario we’re setting up. Instead of the province administering social housing, as it has done, we’re now going to have the province watching over municipalities, and the municipalities are then going to watch over the service providers, who aren’t named in the bill. In some cases you’ve got the province which is going to police providers and it’s going to police tenants directly. You have what has been a fairly comprehensive system in terms of provincial control now being mixed in with the province and service providers and other people watching each other and different people having different jurisdictions over a number of different things.

If you look at what the minister provides for in terms of permission, again you see that what this bill really represents is endless red tape, endless duplication. For example, the minister’s permission is required before a municipal service manager can establish a system allowing two or more housing providers to jointly renew mortgage financing. The minister’s permission is required to do just about anything with respect to the assets being transferred to it, especially if the minister imposes

restrictions. The minister’s permission is required to do just about anything around rent-geared-to-income subsidy administration because the province sets most of the rules. The minister is needed for determining eligibility for special-needs housing, and the list goes on and on.

Mr Wayne Wettlaufer (Kitchener Centre): I’m a little amazed when I hear members of the opposition speak, because the one thing we did with this bill was not only streamline, not only devolve, but we also ensured that provincial standards remain in place to ensure that tenants will be protected. The protections will exist much the same as they do today.

I would like to point out that in January 1997 we announced our plans to simplify the programs. We stated then that we felt social housing was a service best administered at the local level. Many of the municipalities agree with us. In fact, this bill has been developed through comprehensive consultations. We had representatives from the social housing sector. They were the social housing advisory committee, the Social Housing Committee and the municipal reference group. They all reviewed the proposals. They all made recommendations on reform and also on the devolution. Since the minister’s announcement at AMO, the stakeholder representatives joined the various work teams established to work on the details of the transfer. This was not done without much consultation, without much input. When the members of the opposition make accusations insofar as what responsibility this is going to put onto various municipalities, they aren’t taking into account all of the input that has been made by these other groups.

There’s something else we have to look at here. We have transferred to the municipality the assets and resources—

The Acting Speaker: Thank you.

Mr Mario Sergio (York West): Evidently the government, prior to the introduction of this bill, as they normally do, did not consult with the people who will ultimately be affected by the impact of this bill. Neither were the municipalities consulted with respect to this bill. It is another intent of the government’s wanting to get out of the social housing business. The same way they did with rent control legislation, they now want to get out of providing affordable housing for the needy people of Ontario.

The last thing the municipalities need and deserve and want is the downloading of thousands upon thousands of social housing units on local taxpayers. We know and the government knows that it takes about a billion dollars to bring up to par and maintain social housing in good condition. Where are the local municipalities going to get the funds? From the rest of the taxpayers, which means the rest of the homeowners in Ontario will have to pay more taxes to compensate for the responsibility of providing affordable social housing, which this government is abdicating. I don’t think that’s being responsible.

Not only have we in the opposition been saying that and continue to say so, but you have a good, right-wing paper, the Globe and Mail, saying, “The Mike Harris

strategy to revive the rental housing market failed. New measures are required. The private sector is not up to the job.

“It’s a bitter lesson”—for the government and Mr Harris—“but there’s no point in ducking it.”

By doing exactly that, they are ducking the issue.

The Acting Speaker: Response?

Mr Coburn: There are a couple of things I want to go over that are really important here and that seem to have been lost on members of the opposition, the three key points in this transition and devolution. The Social Housing Reform Act will put a vital service in the hands of those best positioned to respond to the local needs; it will allow local governments to integrate the administration of social with Ontario Works, child care and other social services to serve clients more effectively and efficiently; and third, it would put responsibility for bricks and mortar where it belongs, with municipalities.

The member for Ancaster-Dundas-Flamborough-Aldershot as the mayor, I’m sure in his consultations at AMO over the years—if he wasn’t weren’t part of the masses who were saying to the provincial government, “Give us more responsibility,” then you were certainly in a minority back then, because they were all saying, “Get out of our face in our local communities. We’ll look after it better than you can, dictating to from Toronto,” and the Mike Harris government listened. At that AMO meeting he stood up and was the only one who said, “That’s what you want? I agree with you. You’re better able to handle it in your own local municipalities.”

But it wasn’t done heavy-handedly. He took 50% off the property tax base for education, and there was a transition between programs and the funding. But the responsibilities in the Who Does What—this was one of things that were better able to be done at the local level. Similarly, if you sat on your own housing board, you would have realized the pride the volunteers and the dedicated people took in sitting on those boards and the condition they kept the buildings in, in conjunction with the ministry.

The Acting Speaker: Further debate?

Mr Caplan: It’s indeed a pleasure to rise and debate Bill 128 in the House today. Prior to my remarks, I want to read a section to the parliamentary assistant, because obviously he has not read the bill. Subsection 164(1) says, “8. For the purposes of subsection 66(2) (amount of geared-to-income rent), prescribing the standards to be used when determining the amount of geared-to-income rent payable by a household.” For the member or any other member of the government to stand up and say it is protected at 30% is simply not true and it’s not what’s in this bill. I want to make that very clear at the outset. I will return and quote specific sections of this bill where no member of the government was willing to.

1650

I want to talk today about why Dalton McGuinty and the Ontario Liberal Party are going to oppose this bill, and in fact why municipalities, businesses, residents, everyone, not only members in this chamber, should be

opposed and concerned about this bill. I’m going to talk about the financial implications to municipalities, but more importantly to municipal ratepayers. Those are the hard-working families, the homeowners, the businesses that create the jobs that are going to have to bear a huge financial burden because Mike Harris, because Tony Clement, because this government is downloading housing on to the backs of municipal ratepayers. That is what this bill is all about. The Social Housing Reform Act? Nonsense. This bill is a Trojan Horse to increase property taxes on the backs of businesses and hard-working Ontario families—plain and simple, bottom line—and the members of the government know it, each and every one of them.

I stood here astounded to hear a former mayor of Gloucester, who would be hopping up and down were he sitting in that chair back in Ottawa, because he knows the implications for taxpayers. The member for Durham, and perhaps even the Minister of Education, when it comes time to pay the piper, when the bills come in, or when they come in in London—I know the members opposite are going to say, “It’s your municipal council. Go talk to the mayor, the reeve or the warden. Go talk to your local councillor.” But really, the only people who are going to be to blame for the property tax increase that businesses and homeowners are going to have to face are right there. They’re going to be looking at themselves in the mirror every day, and it is really a shame how these Harris Tories refuse to take any responsibility for their actions.

I’m going to talk about how this bill is constructed, how it really is only a framework with very little substance. The operative sections of this bill are found at the back, not surprisingly, trying to hide them in the back of a 130-page bill. It’s the section called “Regulations,” governing about every possible aspect of social housing in this province: regarding financing, eligibility, everything. I can tell you that those regulations are not brought before this House. There was no public consultation on regulations. This government has a habit of making regulations, making deals behind closed doors and not letting any light of day on their plans. I can tell you that what is true and what they say today will definitely change tomorrow. This government has proven that time and time again, whether it’s education, municipalities or health care, and certainly now when it comes to housing.

Finally, I’m going to try to illustrate the ominous nature of this bill by showing how the transfer will in no way positively affect the affordable housing situation across Ontario. It’s interesting that we have commentators, advocates, stakeholders and residents themselves who know there is a lack of affordable housing and that there is an affordable housing crisis in the province. It seems everybody knows that except the Harris government. In this bill the seeds of housing are not only lost, but there’s going to be no ability to create new housing.

They’re not going to be able to alleviate these growing, massive waiting lists that are happening in Durham. The Minister of Education knows, because in

her constituency office, as in all our constituency offices, people are coming and lining up—even in Markham, Solicitor General—because they can't get housing because the members of this government are doing absolutely nothing. In fact, they're doing worse than nothing. They're downloading it on to the local level. The specific impacts of this bill are going to have a horrible impact on housing providers themselves and on their ability to provide housing at an affordable level for Ontarians.

As I said in my opening remarks, Dalton McGuinty and the Ontario Liberals are opposed to the province abdicating its responsibility concerning social housing, and there are several reasons which I'm going to outline right here. Ontario will be the only jurisdiction in Canada, and I would say the only jurisdiction I know of in the world, that is transferring housing and housing responsibilities to the local level—the only one in the world that I am aware of—and I challenge the members opposite to say—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker: Order. The member for Don Valley East has the floor. One member may speak at a time. If you wish to speak, there's an opportunity during questions and comments.

Mr Caplan: I hope you'll stop the clock the next time that the members rudely interrupt.

I'm surprised that a caucus full of former municipal politicians would support the downloading, the off-loading, the shirking of provincial responsibility on to the local tax base—municipalities know that their tax base will not be able to handle the stress in the short term and especially in the long term—and that the province, the Mike Harris government, in this announcement has provided zero financial support for municipalities to be able to deal with those concerns.

I'm surprised that this is the first time in memory that an announcement by the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing did not come with a congratulatory note from the Association of Municipalities of Ontario. This alone speaks volumes about the fact that municipalities are concerned about the impact this is going to have on the property tax base.

Were any municipality to be in favour of this, the Harris government would be trumpeting it in a press release. The minister would be in this House talking about why this is such a great thing. They would have chambers of commerce and boards of trade—heck, they would even have Mr Crombie here himself. But I can tell the Minister of Education that Mr Crombie is not here, the boards of trade aren't here, the chambers of commerce aren't here, AMO's not here, the housing providers and especially the housing residents aren't here, because they know about the impact this move is going to have on the property tax base and the ability of municipalities to pay.

The minister, as usual, asserts that this is going to be a revenue-neutral exercise, but we know from previous experience that the dumping of costs on to municipalities

is not a neutral exercise. Of course, the minister is not willing to pay; he's not willing to put his money where his mouth is. It is not unusual for the Harris government to say one thing but not to be there to stand behind their own commitments. Where are the real financial concerns and potential liabilities?

As I've raised before in this House, we should all be concerned about the lack of information on the condition of the Ontario Housing Corp stock. These units are to be transferred January 1, 2001, but we don't have any information at all on what kind of shape they're in. I've heard the minister say that they have two studies. I've heard the parliamentary assistant and some of the other members talk about this, but then I heard the member from London-Fanshawe tell us how they were deteriorating. All members of this House, if they've been there, will know that the condition of the social housing stock is in horrible shape, and a 10% sampling is an attempt at deception to fool people into believing that this government takes its responsibility seriously, which they obviously don't. There has been no proper due diligence of the existing Ontario Housing Corp stock, and the minister is well aware of this.

In the long term there will be significant liabilities for municipal taxpayers. I don't come up with this stuff independently. I've previously distributed a cabinet submission from the ministry staff, who pointed this out to the cabinet, who pointed this out to the minister. They've ignored those warnings. You have to ask yourself why. Why wouldn't they even do the very basic due diligence that would be required?

It is an abdication of any responsibility. If anyone were to try to get involved in a financial deal like this, they would probably land in jail. The minister has cited two studies, one of which municipalities had never heard of, or anybody else for that matter, until this issue was raised right here in the House, and one study that the minister won't even release. What we know about the one never released is that it was done in 1998. It was a survey of 10% of the stock, and the conclusion was that it was in terrific shape.

Does anyone really believe the minister when he says that it's better than or equal to private rental stock? Come on. Any member in this House knows that this is just not the truth. I've been in contact with many local housing authorities and they tell me about the lack of available provincial dollars to bring properties up to standard. There is a real concern that some of the older buildings are 40 or 50 years old, sometimes older, and to date they have not even been retrofitted to meet new fire codes, new regulations—provincially owned buildings which have not even been brought up to fire codes. These aren't private buildings, they're not non-profit housing projects, they're not co-op housing projects; they are buildings owned, managed and operated by the provincial government since their creation.

1700

The lack of real financial attention to these buildings is solely the responsibility of Mike Harris, Tony Clement

and the Tory government. They are washing their hands of this. They are trying to throw this into the lap of, and to pass the buck to, municipal taxpayers, hard-working Ontario families, hard-working Ontario business people. All it would take is some real interest from the minister. I would be happy to take him to any housing project in the city that might not live up to his statement of "above standard." I would be very happy to take the minister over to Regent Park. I would be delighted to do that.

Interjection.

Mr Caplan: I say to the member from Kitchener, if you would like to come too, you are more than welcome, because it is not up to standard. You will see it for yourself. Then perhaps you will do the honourable thing and vote against this legislation.

Maybe the minister thinks that leaking roofs and mould are up to the standard that tenants can expect. Maybe the minister thinks that buildings that are not up to the fire code are up to the standard he expects and tenants can expect. Maybe this minister thinks that appliances that don't work, rotting carpets and peeling paint are up to the standard that tenants can expect. I'm not sure if the minister is just not interested or he has total disrespect for the tenants who live in social housing—or maybe just tenants in general—if he thinks these kinds of living conditions are acceptable.

What is of real concern is the total lack of interest of the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing in getting down to the basic truth. He has buried his head in the sand. It is absolutely shocking.

Why should it be up to municipalities to fund their own due diligence on these properties? If the provincial government owns them, they should rightly check into what the standard is and what the condition is prior to the transfer and undertake to provide financing to bring them up to standard. But the Harris government is nickel-and-diming municipalities. They are going to make them fund their own due diligence.

The transfer has been anticipated for some time. The member from Ottawa-Orléans said this has been going on since 1997, so it's not like the government hasn't known that this was going to happen. Yet for over three years they have just sat around, stuck their heads in the sand and persisted with the mantra, "There is no problem. We'll force it onto municipalities. We'll make them pay for it."

Why didn't the government, why didn't Mike Harris, why didn't Tony Clement or any of the members show any kind of leadership and determine to be honest with municipalities, with municipal taxpayers? I don't think it's possible, obviously, judging from the minister's conduct. The minister feels it is enough to have allocated \$100 million, for this year only, to deal with this problem. Again, the issue is that the minister doesn't even know whether this is sufficient. All he is prepared to do is to say to municipalities, "You should thank me for even being willing to spend this money, so don't come back for any more."

I'm wondering why the double standard. When municipalities faced components of downloading, like the downloading of roads and bridges, like the downloading of water and sewers, why did the provincial government come up with a contingency fund for roads, bridges, water projects and sewer projects that were in extreme disrepair? Why won't they do the same thing for housing? There is sufficient precedent for the provincial government to be able to do this.

The key to making this transfer of the Ontario Housing Corp stock work for municipal taxpayers is for the minister to put his money where his mouth is and to do two things: one, do a complete assessment of the condition of the housing stock at provincial expense. Be honest with municipalities about the state of repair or disrepair, as the case may be. Be honest with municipalities about the long-term financial cost to their taxpayers in their area. When the Minister of Education's taxpayers in Durham see their tax bills going up, at least the provincial government will have set aside a contingency fund to address that. It won't have to be borne by the Durham taxpayers, as I know the Minister of Education was saying she doesn't want to see, because that's what is going to happen. Be willing to commit the dollars past this year to correct any of the major issues that are unveiled as a result of this transfer.

Or the government could do this: ask the municipalities to complete audits and report their findings to you. That is fair; that is reasonable. If they find any problems, be prepared to discuss compensation with them. Be prepared to pay for the large costs that such due diligence requires.

I have offered two simple alternatives that this government could go ahead and fund, that this government could commit to. I say to the House, I don't think anybody should hold their breath expecting Mike Harris or Tony Clement or any of the government members to be reasonable in this respect. They are only interested in one thing, which is taking this item off the provincial balance sheet, putting it on to the backs of local taxpayers, and making them pay and pay and pay. And pay they will, with no say. Who do they think they're fooling? It will be interesting to see if the government can commit to doing that.

The financial risk of the provincially owned stock is only one small component of the mess that the Harris government is passing on to municipal taxpayers. The introduction of this bill was not accompanied by a funding announcement for capital reserves of other social housing projects in this province, and they are considerable. Many studies have shown that the reserves are severely underfunded. It was only a few years ago that the Provincial Auditor wrote about the real concerns about the levels of capital reserves held by some of the social housing projects. He was clear. He said that study was needed and that the government should consider bringing fees up to, in his word, a "safer" level.

The government did the study, all right, so part one was completed, but made a contribution to the reserves

that was far less than what was required. Even though back in 1997 the Provincial Auditor flagged this issue for the government, they didn't act. They didn't follow the recommendation. I'm not surprised. I see the minister responsible for the Andersen Consulting contract here, that literally took the people of the province of Ontario to the cleaners, and here is another case of mismanagement by the Harris government.

We should also be aware, and I know all members are—the minister is a member from Peel—of a recent study that exists out there. The region of Peel completed its own study of the housing stock in its catchment area. Their study was a technical audit of 31 buildings; each evaluated 127 building elements. Of the total stock of 47 buildings—it didn't include the Ontario Housing Corp stock in the area—they looked meticulously at every aspect and they ensured that various building types and ages were represented in the sampling process. Just to meet the bare minimum of maintenance issues, the housing in Peel alone will require a top-up to their reserves in the amount of \$27.5 million. To adequately meet the future needs of the housing stock, the analysis estimates the top-up needed to be in the range of \$57.3 million.

Peel is a really good area to look at; it is quite representative of the province. When you extrapolate the Peel numbers across Ontario, the estimate required to top up the reserves is \$1.1 billion. That's \$1.1 billion that the Mike Harris government wants municipal ratepayers, hard-working Ontario families, hard-working Ontario businesses to come up with and cough up. That is absolutely shocking, and that is one small—well, really, one large—reason why we're going to be seeing massive property tax increases.

This study in Peel and other factors leave the Ontario Liberal Party, Dalton McGuinty and myself thoroughly unconvinced that the municipal tax base can handle the cost of social housing. I think this is especially true in Metropolitan Toronto, which contains three quarters of the social housing in the greater Toronto area and 40% of the housing stock in the province. The cost to Metropolitan Toronto—I guess it's no longer Metropolitan Toronto since the forced amalgamation—and the GTA, including Halton, Peel, York region and Durham, all of those areas, is approximately \$356 million borne by the property taxpayer.

1710

We also have some concerns that the government isn't passing on all of the money it should be that it has realized from the federal-provincial housing deal signed November 17 last year. We know the government realized \$143 million more than it would have to spend on the operation of housing from signing the deal.

Mr Rick Bartolucci (Sudbury): Where is it?

Mr Caplan: My colleague asks, where's the money? That's a really good question. Here's what they've committed to, although frankly they haven't spent it.

They committed to a \$50-million rent supplement plan. By the way, they were required to plow some

money back into housing projects. They've committed \$15 million in future capital funding pressures related to the federal projects being transferred. They've committed \$9 million to transitional costs to municipalities that may or may not be eligible to receive it. So it's not even clear that municipalities are going to get their money. That's \$117 million. What happened to the rest, \$26 million? Why isn't it being passed on to municipalities?

Interjection.

Mr Caplan: The member from Etobicoke Centre used to be a municipal councillor. He would be hopping mad, he would lose what's left of his hair, if he had to figure out why the provincial government was not passing along the total amount of money that they received from the federal government to municipalities.

Hon Chris Stockwell (Minister of Labour): They are.

Mr Caplan: No, they're not, sir: \$26 million short. It has fallen into the black hole of the Mike Harris financing scheme. You never know what's going on with these guys. Why isn't it being offered to top up the capital reserves? Why is the Harris government trying to mask its spending of the federal dollars as their making a real financial commitment to relieving the housing crisis? Why would they say on the one hand they are doing something when it's clear from running their own numbers that they have no intention of doing it?

Let me talk about one of the most glaring problems of this bill: how no new housing will be created as a result of this legislation. Waiting lists for social housing are growing at an enormous rate. I know all members would be staggered by that, especially given the fact that we are living in one of the most buoyant and prosperous times in the last half century. At a time when we have such great prosperity, the waiting lists for housing, people who have real housing needs, have grown at an unanticipated, unbelievable and extraordinary rate. The provincial government cancelling all of the social housing projects that were approved in 1995 is one of the factors in why that happened. In Toronto alone, the waiting list for a family to get into social housing is 25 years. Can you imagine? The kids will all be grown up and moved out by the time they would qualify to get into a family social housing unit.

Although the bill claims to protect the levels of housing that now exist, it does not speak to expiring short-term rent-supplement contracts. In fact, the \$50-million announcement that I had referenced earlier for you expires after three years. What happens after that? This legislation doesn't have anything to say about that. It is silent. So they make these small deals, never fully intending to see it go to a logical and long-term conclusion.

Bill 128 fails to provide any new funding mechanism to provide for the construction of new housing. As everyone is aware, the minister hopes that the private sector—the Premier is talking about the private sector—will provide and take on the responsibility of creating this new housing, but it has yet to occur. The government has

not acted on the failure of the private sector to provide housing, and this bill reasserts the abdication of provincial responsibility. It is completely irresponsible for the province to take no role in a fundamentally provincial area of responsibility.

I'd like to quote from an article that appeared one week ago in the *Globe and Mail*. It's entitled "Admit it: Harris's Strategy for Housing a Flop," written by John Ibbitson. You would know Mr Ibbitson is not a Liberal. He's certainly not a New Democrat. He is, by and large, very supportive of the Harris government, but intelligently writing about provincial issues.

"Confronted with the utter failure of the Mike Harris administration's low-income housing strategy, it may be time for even the most idealistic conservative to admit that government has a responsibility to help house the poor.

"Ontario Municipal Affairs Minister Tony Clement obliquely conceded this truth last week when he addressed several hundred members of the Ontario Home Builders' Association." So even the government acknowledges this.

Mr Ibbitson goes on to list a number of facts and figures to back up his claim that Harris's housing strategy is a complete flop. It's amazing:

"While apartments accounted for 15% of new housing in the United States last year, Mr Clement," the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, "acknowledged in Ontario the figure was less than 5%. In Toronto, the vacancy rate is 0.9%. In Ottawa it's 0.7." That's where the parliamentary assistant is from. In Hamilton it's 1.9%. "Rents, in the meantime, are skyrocketing."

Is it any wonder why there is such demand for housing support and assistance, why social housing lists are growing at an enormous rate?

"Even builders shake their heads as they tell stories of landlords in Toronto who have doubled their rents."

Very interesting, and I found the conclusion of the article perhaps the most interesting:

"Whatever the solution, Mr Clement and his government should come clean: The Mike Harris strategy to revive the rental housing market failed." Absolutely and utterly failed. "New measures are required. The private sector is not up to the job.

"It's a bitter lesson, but there's no point in ducking it."

You would expect writing like this to come from somebody who is perhaps liberally oriented or a member of the New Democratic Party. This is from the *Globe and Mail*, from John Ibbitson. This is a pretty damning indictment of the Harris government's housing policy: they're a flop. Yet they're going to become a lot worse with Bill 128. It's absolutely ridiculous how we need some progressive action when all we get is this regressive way.

Let me outline what some tenants are facing throughout Ontario; Mr Ibbitson referred to it. Recently a study was completed in Ottawa by their housing registry. Their data were eye-opening. Some 15,000 active files were on their registry waiting list. Some 7,800 applicants are

responsible for at least one child. Of these 15,000 files, 6,000 applications were new in 1999 and 5,000 were new in 1998. Eighty per cent of the applicants on their waiting list have an annual income less than \$20,000. In 1999 they were only able to house 2,000 applicants. Remember, 6,000 applied and they were able to house 2,000. This shows you this growing list. In fact, in Ottawa they tripled the number of people on the waiting list in two years alone. By the way, of the 2,000 applicants who were housed, 550 were priority files—victims fleeing abuse; 720 were disadvantaged status—newcomers, youth, the homeless; and 734 came from the chronological list that had been developed.

The vacancy rate in Ottawa is 0.7%, from the November 1999 CMHC study, the lowest it has ever been. In fact, in 1996 it was 4.9%. This means there were only 420 vacant units last year in the total private rental universe of over 60,000 units. Ottawa is considered to have the tightest rental market in all Canada. Rent increases were up 3.8%. Inflation was running at roughly 1% or 1.5%. Only 40 new rental units were built in Ottawa in 1999. Average rents across the region—they run the gamut, depending on where you live—are absolutely skyrocketing.

What does this legislation mean for all those people out there on waiting lists, for all those people on a waiting list which is doubling—tripling in the case of Ottawa? Absolutely nothing. Those people are going to wait; they're going to lose their housing; they will end up homeless; they will end up on the streets; they will end up in the jails; they will end up somewhere. I heard one of the government members speaking earlier about how homelessness was because of mental health issues. I'm sorry, my friend: homelessness happens because people can't afford to live in the rental accommodation that's out there. They can't afford it, pure and simple. Through Bill 128 you are ensuring this problem is going to get worse. I say to you now: stop before you make this worse. I know at least some of you care about this.

1720

There has also been a two-part series, a study done on housing affordability across the province. Where's Home, Part I and Where's Home, Part II were clear with the concerns of those who are not in social housing but on waiting lists. The report is crystal clear: every part of the province is affected by the deterioration of the housing and vacancy situation. It's not just in Toronto; it's not just in the larger cities like Ottawa or Hamilton or London, where the affordable housing situation has deteriorated. Data from 21 Ontario municipalities covering the last 10 years demonstrate that hundreds of thousands of Ontario tenants are suffering, and the prospects are likely to worsen unless the provincial and federal governments act, unless the senior governments are willing to come to the table. Municipalities don't have the wherewithal. They don't have the ability to support housing, and they don't have the ability to create new housing.

Rents are increasing faster than the rate of inflation in almost all 21 of the municipalities studied. With the partial decontrol of rents by this government in 1998, rent increases accelerate even faster. In Muskoka, North Bay, Owen Sound, Barrie, Sudbury—my colleague from Sudbury is here—they have some of the highest rates of rent increases in company with Toronto. Many municipalities have serious rental housing shortages. I found it interesting that where the speakers were talking earlier, among those shortages, Barrie, Guelph, Kitchener-Waterloo, Durham, Peel and Toronto have some of the lowest vacancy rates in the province.

The studies, *Where's Home, Part I* and *Where's Home, Part II*, go on to illustrate that the affordability problems for tenants are severe and getting worse everywhere. Almost half of Ontario tenants cannot afford their rent, and the rate of tenants with affordability problems has jumped in every single municipality that was studied, based on the last census taken in 1996. Places such as Peterborough, Kingston, Sudbury, North Bay, Owen Sound, Sarnia and Muskoka have the highest rates of tenants paying 30% or more of their household income on rent. When I had a chance to ask the Minister for Municipal Affairs and Housing last year, in the sub-committee on estimates, he told me and the committee that 30% was the maximum amount a tenant should spend on shelter costs. If that's the case, then one of every two Ontario tenants is paying more.

Those people are in big trouble according to the minister, but he's not prepared to do anything other than pass the buck and pass the blame on to municipalities. But it gets worse: almost one in four tenants in Ontario—300,000 households—are considered to be at risk of being homeless, because they are paying more than 50% of their combined family household income on rent. Those are hard-working Ontario families with children.

Dalton McGuinty and the Ontario Liberal party stand up for hard-working Ontario families. Mike Harris and the Conservatives are for the elite. They don't care about hard-working Ontario families. If they did, Bill 128, the Social Housing Reform Act, would never appear on the horizon.

The trend in Ontario for tenants with affordability problems has increased relentlessly over the last four census periods, and the most dramatic increase was in 1996. I await the outcome of the next census.

It is interesting, though: Peterborough and Kingston exceed Toronto's rate of tenants at risk of being homeless. I'll get to Peterborough in a minute. I see the member for Peterborough is here. He spoke earlier to this bill. It's very interesting that he didn't talk about the study of homelessness and housing insecurity in Peterborough, but I'll mention it to the House because I know the member is too afraid to talk about these kinds of problems. He wants to bury his head in the sand just like Mike Harris, just like Tony Clement. So what does this legislation mean for all of those people on the waiting lists fighting for the housing market? It means absolutely nothing.

As I said, I was going to talk a little bit about Peterborough. Here is a study done by the Peterborough Social Planning Council, *Crisis of Affordability: A Study of Homelessness and Housing Insecurity in Peterborough City and County*. I'm sure he's read this. I'm sure he understands what the implications are. Let me go on to let all of the members of this assembly and all the people who are watching at home know what this study has to say.

The local residents with low incomes clearly can't afford market rent: 60% of low-income households in the sample paid more than 50%. So remember, 60% of families pay more than 50% of their income on shelter; almost 20%, so one in five, pay more than 70%. Can you imagine what kind of choice the people in Peterborough city and county are having to make, whether they pay the rent or whether they feed the kids? Can you imagine having to make that kind of decision about your family? Can any member of this Legislature imagine having to make that decision?

One quarter of low-income households have moved four or five times over the past three years. It's no wonder; 84% of low-income households could not pay their rent for even one month if they had to rely in that brief period on their savings. Only one third of the people who are homeless were on a waiting list for subsidized housing. The other two thirds weren't even on a waiting list. One half of those who are homeless in Peterborough city and county found themselves in that situation for the first time in their lives.

The member for Peterborough might want to take his head out of the sand and do something to help the poor people of Peterborough city and county. He obviously doesn't care. Sixty-seven per cent experienced housing-related discrimination, mostly on the grounds of income or on the amount of income. Lone parents and youth households report the highest amount of discrimination.

So what does Bill 128 mean for all of those people on waiting lists fighting this housing market in Peterborough city and county? It means absolutely nothing. They can go on; they can suffer.

There have been other studies and other reports. Here's the Golden report: more than 100,000 people on waiting lists in the city of Toronto for social housing; more than one third of the applications on waiting lists have incomes of less than \$800 a month; more than 31,000 children are on the waiting lists for social housing. My God, what is happening? The current rate of placement is 17 years for singles. One of the six major barriers to overcoming homelessness is the reduction in the amount of low-cost housing.

How about the city of Guelph? I was surprised the member for Guelph-Wellington isn't here. Approximately 1,000 rent-geared-to-income apartments are needed—singles. This study, done by the city of Guelph and Wellington county office, refers to a need for emergency and medium-term housing stock for couples, families, youth and young mothers. All are identified as most in need.

The Solicitor General is here. He's from Markham. In Markham they just had a report. In fact, the current application activity in Markham: applications with dependants on waiting lists include 45 requesting four bedrooms, 233 requesting three bedrooms, 230 applicants requesting two bedrooms. Applicants with no dependants on waiting lists number 92. Seniors on waiting lists number 304. Note that the senior population is predicted to grow from 12% to 25% in Markham.

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You would think the Solicitor General would care about these things, would want to make sure that the people in Markham were adequately housed, would not have these kinds of problems. Obviously he doesn't care. There are currently almost 900 requests for rental housing listed with the housing authority and the housing corporation. It's further estimated that closer to 1,800 people are waiting for accommodation, taking into account co-op and non-profit housing lists. In fact, Bill 128 is going to make that situation even worse. You would think the Solicitor General, the member from Markham, would want to do something about it instead of supporting it. But I can tell you, Speaker, obviously the member from Markham, the Solicitor General, just doesn't care.

Finally, I would like to talk about the terms in the legislation itself—

Hon David H. Tsubouchi (Solicitor General): I don't care what you say.

The Acting Speaker: Order. It would be helpful if the remarks were addressed through the Speaker. I would remind the Solicitor General that heckling is out of order, but really out of order when you're not in your own chair. The member for Don Valley East.

Mr Caplan: I did address my remarks to you, Speaker.

Finally, I want to talk about some more specific parts of this legislation. I don't know why the Solicitor General is so negative. You'd think he would want to read what's in Bill 128. You would think he would want to understand what's happening in the town of Markham when it comes to housing for seniors, for young families.

First I want to talk about the administrative flexibility that's being given to municipalities and these DSSABs, district social services administration boards. Then I'm going to go on to speak about how the legislation may impact on housing providers. I guess I would say it "may" impact since the main features of this bill, that is, virtually every major issue that will be dealt with by Bill 128, are in regulation. It's not in the legislation. There are no firm provisions in here.

When the parliamentary assistant, the member from Ottawa-Orléans, and the members from London-Fanshawe, Peterborough or Durham got up and told you with certainty that people were protected, that is not factually correct. Those provisions are not contained in Bill 128. They are contained in regulation. This bill comprises essentially enabling provisions for the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. In other words Tony Clement,

the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, is saying, "Trust me." When he and Mike Harris have broken virtually every promise they've ever made when it comes to housing, they're saying, "Trust me." I don't trust him, Speaker. I know my colleagues don't trust him. I know that people across Ontario don't trust him when it comes to housing. I have real concerns about the flexibility that the province is giving 47 new superbureaucracies.

Interjection.

Mr Caplan: I hear the Minister of Labour. He's in favour of the superbureaucracies, obviously. They're creating 47 of them, if you can believe it—more bureaucracy, more red tape. Read the bill, my friends. That's exactly what happens. You are creating 47 superbureaucracies, 47 special bureaucracies that you're creating with this bill.

The government makes mention of provincial standards. I heard a number of the speakers over there say, "There are going to be provincial standards." I'd like to read to you a section of the bill—very, very interesting. It says—

Hon Mr Stockwell: Use your finger.

Mr Caplan: I'm going to use my finger. I want to get this right because, unlike members over there—they obviously haven't read this before. It says—

Interjection.

Mr Bartolucci: Ernie, you haven't read it.

Mr Caplan: He has not read it. There is no way he's read it.

Subsection 72(7) says, "When local occupancy standards are established or are deemed to be established for a transferred housing program, the provincial occupancy standards cease to apply to it." The provincial standards cease to apply if local standards come in. It doesn't matter what those local standards are. It just means there will be no more provincial standards that apply, so they could be anything. In fact, they could make it more difficult for people—

Hon Mr Stockwell: You want us to dictate?

Mr Caplan: I say to the Minister of Labour that yes, I believe the provincial government has a role to make sure there are powerful standards regarding the housing of people in this province. That had been the case for over 100 years in this province until Mike Harris and the Tories come along. I would also say it directly contradicts what the parliamentary assistant says when he says there will be powerful provincial standards which will apply. They will cease to exist.

Interjection.

Mr Caplan: There have never been standards regarding housing? It's amazing that you wouldn't know that, with your background. There have not been standards for housing? Yes, there have. These standards will usurp provincial and affect very critical matters in social housing, such as asset value, the definition of who qualifies for rent geared to income, and waiting list priorities, among others. I could read to you other sections of the bill that talk about local standards and how they apply and when they don't apply.

Subsection 72(4): “A service manager shall establish local occupancy standards.” Here’s another one, subsection 73(4): “A service manager may establish local priority rules for rent-gear-to-income assistance and local rules take effect on the date specified by the service manager.”

So if they’re deciding who qualifies, who is eligible for housing, what is the provincial role? That’s quite clear. These new superbureaucracies have been given the new responsibility of setting up a new and separate system to deal with what they call special-needs housing. It’s currently administered by the Ministry of Housing. There will be inevitable chaos. It is something the provincial government itself has been unable to organize. What they’re doing is they’re saying, “We can’t do this. We’re going to throw it into the lap of the area of Orangeville, and now you have to go ahead and deal with it. You go ahead and merge the list.” I’m telling the member from Orangeville, from Dufferin-Peel, there’s no way they’re going to be able to handle that, no way they’re going to be able to accommodate that. They’re saying to 47 superbureaucracies, “Set up the system yourselves. Try and do it,” in 47 different ways, what the provincial government, with all the powerful legislative tools, with all the financial muscle, couldn’t do. In Stoney Creek it’s going to be a disaster as well. It makes little sense and it really seems, to me at least, to be a recipe for disaster.

Here are where some of our concerns lie in the area of flexibility, the way these lists are going to be administered. As an example, it’s going to vary from jurisdiction to jurisdiction. Let me highlight it for you this way: you have a municipality, let’s say, just outside the city of Toronto which decides that they no longer wish or they don’t have the financial wherewithal to be able to house people in their housing projects. They change the asset requirements or the priority requirements. They change some of the ways that they can, through local rules in this bill. So where are those people going to go? They’re going to go to York region, or they’ll go to Halton, or they’ll go to Toronto. So what are those municipalities going to do? They’re going to change their asset limits, they’re going to change their eligibility requirements, and they’re going to force people to move from place to place to place. It is, in fact, ethnic cleansing of the poor. That’s what in effect will happen.

There’s one really interesting section that is specifically in here which does not prohibit it. It is subsection 73(7). It says, “A priority rule cannot rank one household in priority to another household just because the former resides within the applicable service manager’s service area and the latter does not.” So if you live outside a particular city, the city of Toronto or the city of London or the city of Stoney Creek—

Hon Mr Stockwell: On a point of order, Mr Speaker: I’m hoping the member didn’t say what I thought he had said with respect to accusing the government of “ethnic cleansing of the poor.” I mean, it’s hard to believe, if

that’s what he said, and I presume he’s going to withdraw the remark.

The Acting Speaker: I didn’t hear it. Member for Don Valley East.

Mr Caplan: I did say it, but I’m not withdrawing it.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker: It may be prudent to withdraw, but I don’t think I’ll demand it.

Mr Caplan: I withdraw, Speaker, but I can tell you it is definitely an unsavoury aspect.

Co-op housing providers in Toronto may have the ability to maintain their own waiting lists, whereas co-op providers in Ottawa may have to add their names to the chronological waiting list, thus delaying people by years in the administration of their project. Things will vary from one place or town to another.

1740

As I mentioned earlier, how about the issue of local occupancy centres overriding those of the province? If a municipality wanted to make its housing portfolio less attractive than that of its neighbouring area, it could change the number of people allowed to reside within a certain size of apartment. It could change the number of rooms that a family was entitled to reside in. It could make living conditions considerably less bearable than those in the neighbouring municipality, and thus try to drive people off their waiting list into their neighbour’s.

It can only lead to one thing: a downward spiral, a race to the bottom. It’s a domino effect, pitting one municipality against another. The province needs to set clear, unequivocal and strict standards, and show leadership to municipalities on how to deliver services in a fair way—not in a way that allows them to slash and burn and compete against one another to get to the bottom.

This is another Tory bill. Of course, there’s another reference to a fraud squad in here. That stuff has been cleaned up over time, as lists were centralized, but of course you have the gratuitous shot in here; it has to be in here.

There are issues for the housing providers themselves, and I want to try and highlight some of those.

Standardized agreements: right now in the province of Ontario there are legally binding contracts, operating agreements between the federal or provincial or municipal level of government and the housing provider. The Harris government obviously doesn’t believe it should have to honour those agreements. In this bill, they are abrogating each and every one of those agreements, rewriting those agreements to suit themselves, and they are putting it in here.

There is one section in those agreements which I find really interesting, and I wanted to share that with the House. When it comes up with the idea of subsidy, there is a very complicated formula that they use in here. You’ll find it on page 65 of the bill, in subsection 98(2), under “amount of subsidy.” “E” is the amount equal to 50% of the amount of the provider’s surplus for the fiscal year in respect of its housing projects in the service area,

or such lesser amount as the service manager may determine.”

Let me see if I get this right. If a housing provider is adequately managing—in fact, managing better than they had thought—and generates a surplus, they have to give half of that surplus away to the local district manager. Correct me if I’m wrong, but there is no longer any incentive at all for a housing provider to generate a surplus, because they have to give it away. What you get is the kind of situation that you had in the past at school boards, at municipalities, hospitals and other transfer agencies. When it comes to the end of the year, if there is any money left in their budget, they have to go ahead and spend it all, whether it’s budgeted or not.

This is a government which likes to pride itself on being businesslike. This is perhaps one of the most bureaucratic and inefficient ways of doing business that they could possibly put in here. It’s a real contradiction about what Mike Harris and the Conservative government say and what they do when they would put a provision like this in a bill.

It’s very interesting as well that they want to share the surpluses but they’re not willing to share the deficits. It’s very interesting that that provision is not in the bill.

The province continues to be responsible for mortgage renewals and risk management and the distribution of federal dollars. That’s in a section under the social housing services committee that was referred to earlier. I was interested to hear the comments from some of the earlier speakers when they said this board was going to do some things. The Social Housing Committee which originally met recommended that if there was to be this provincial board, they should be responsible for managing risk and for mortgage renewals and for the distribution of the federal dollars, and the province should be responsible for the other things set out under the objects for the Social Housing Services Corp. Well, the Harris government, in whatever perverse wisdom and logic, turned those two around. They’re now taking control of risk management, of mortgage renewals and of distribution of federal dollars. I suspect it’s because they want to skim some of the money off. I suspect it’s because they want to keep some of those dollars for themselves. I suspect it’s because they don’t want the money to flow on to municipalities, on to the local level.

In fact, the creation of the Social Housing Services Corp is a bit of boondoggle. This body, whose board is going to be composed of a majority of municipal representatives, is overloaded for the GTA. I see members here from across the province, certainly from the north, from the Niagara region, from the southwest, from the east—

Interjection.

Mr Caplan: Well, if you think it’s acceptable that a provincial board is going to be dominated by Toronto people—and I know that the member from London-Fanshawe said, “We don’t believe in Toronto solutions”—read your legislation. Gentlemen, you just created a GTA-dominated committee. It makes no sense.

It’s going to be responsible for group insurance, for pooling reserves, for ongoing benchmarking, for best practices, for creating opportunities for cost savings. The member from Owen Sound might think that’s a great idea to have it centred in Toronto. I know that there have been so many good decisions made to favour Toronto, and Owen Sound or other areas of the province have not done as well, but maybe that’s the *modus operandi* of the Harris government. Those are some of the issues with the roles.

There is no indication of what the provincial government’s initial benchmark of funding is going to be. There’s been no consultation with the providers. The only tool the government is going to use, I think, to offer up to the municipalities is to set those benchmarks at such a level that it’s going to really cut into the kind of programming offered and some of the ability of the housing providers to provide housing.

There’s something else that’s very interesting. It’s something called targeting. What will happen is, under subsection 93(1) “the Minister shall establish a targeting plan for the housing project and shall give written notice.” It’s very interesting that it’s not what exists today. It’s not the number of units that are there, but it’s the minister deciding by fiat what is going to exist.

There’s one other concern, which is how housing providers are going to operate. There’s a clause in the bill that says—I was looking for it; I lost my mark—there will be a penalty if the provider fails to operate a housing project properly. There’s no definition of what “properly” means or who decides or how that is administered.

This is incredibly unbusinesslike. This is bureaucratic; 47 superbureaucracies.

Just in conclusion, because unfortunately I’m down to the final minute or so, this bill is a financial nightmare. It is a property tax increase for ratepayers, for homeowners, for hard-working families, for businesses across Ontario. The provincial government is saying, “Trust me. Trust me with all of these regulations. Trust us to make the right moves.” I don’t trust them. I know the people across this province don’t trust them.

This bill, Bill 128, doesn’t have any particular substance. It will not allow for the creation of any new housing at a time when we have a housing crisis in this province. This bill is an abomination. It is time to stop the downloading. It is time to stop shirking provincial responsibilities. It is time to stand up and say that housing is a priority and that the province will come to the table and that it will put its money where its mouth is.

Dalton McGuinty and the Ontario Liberal Party will not be supporting this bill.

The Acting Speaker: Questions or comments?

Ms Martel: I think that municipal taxpayers right across the province ought to be awfully concerned about the implications of this bill which are, in fact, that the upgrading of social housing is going to fall directly back on to those same municipal taxpayers.

I listened earlier to some of the Conservative members try and say publicly that there was wide consultation on this bill, and they would give you the impression that there was also wide approval with respect to the terms and conditions of the bill that is before us.

I, for one, find it hard to believe that most municipalities are very enthusiastic or support the fact that they now have become liable for financial repairs, for future repairs of the housing stock. I find it really difficult. In fact, I don't believe that municipalities are supportive or enthusiastic at all of having that cost downloaded on to them and then, in future, on to their municipal taxpayers.

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The bill makes it really clear. In subsection 46(2), it says, "A transferor"—that means the province of Ontario—"is not liable to any person for the state of repair of an asset transferred by a transfer order and is not liable to any person to fix such an asset, despite a requirement otherwise imposed by another act or a rule of law."

So it's very clear that the liability for future repairs rests exclusively with the municipalities. I heard some government members try to talk about some of the investment that the government has made, but it's clear from the study done in Peel that the investment that was made is far outstripped by the costs that are out there for the upgrade of that capital asset, and that in fact, over the next number of years, the bulk of the costs for that upgrade are going to fall on our municipalities.

Mr Brad Clark (Stoney Creek): It's my pleasure to rise and respond to the member from Don Valley East as a member of the Chicken Little party. Apparently they continually cry, "The sky is falling," on everything this government does.

I recall—and I want to remind the viewers at home—when we talked about downloading land ambulances, the Liberals screaming and crying, "Woe is us," that all of this was going to happen to municipalities: we've downloaded such horrendous costs on the municipalities and all the ambulances are going to be privatized. Lo and behold, that didn't happen. As a matter of fact, the ambulances were privatized and the majority of the municipalities have brought them back to the public sector. In Hamilton-Wentworth alone, they've saved \$2 million doing it. The members of the Chicken Little party who continue to cry, "The sky is falling," whenever we do any of these restructuring issues are completely wrong.

The member also mentioned downloading—that big, bad word. The government does downloading. They talked about the downloading costs to the municipalities. I want the member to listen very carefully. Hamilton-Wentworth, this past year, had a \$23-million surplus. The year before, it was a \$17-million surplus. If there was such horrendous downloading, wouldn't there have been a deficit? I don't see a deficit. I see a surplus, because attached to that was lots of room for manoeuvring for the municipalities.

So while the member from the Chicken Little party continually harangues us about the fact that we're downloading and putting such horrendous pressures on the municipalities, he should also put the facts out there that we're offering the funding to go with it, that we're making sure the standards are there, that we're meeting the needs of the municipalities and the residents who live in not-for-profit housing.

Mr Bartolucci: I stand to congratulate my colleague from Don Valley East on the excellent presentation for the entire hour he spoke about the facts of this particular bill. He spoke about the horrendous costs that municipalities are going to have to accept because this provincial government wants to abdicate its responsibility for social housing.

I want to congratulate the member for outlining, in different regions of Ontario, how this government hasn't addressed the problem of social housing and now is trying to wash its hands of it. I would suggest to you that the Association of Municipalities of Ontario certainly hasn't come out in support of this, regardless of what the member from Stoney Creek might say. In fact, the president of AMO, Ann Mulvale, has indicated her approach should be and will be that the government should upload as opposed to download to municipalities.

There is a time when enough is enough. Clearly, the time has come for this government to understand that it has downloaded all it can to municipalities. The municipalities cannot bear any more.

I worry about what's going to happen to the property tax base in Sudbury because of this downloading, and also because of the \$24-million price tag which has been what the chair of the transition board is saying is the cost of restructuring in Sudbury. I suggest to you that unlike the member from Stoney Creek, I am concerned about what happens to our property tax base in our municipality, and that's why I will be with my colleague from Don Valley East and will not be supporting this bill.

Hon Mr Stockwell: I guess we have to deal with the fundamental principles to begin with. This program was really begun under the Liberal administration with respect to social housing and the growing of the social housing portfolio under Mr Curling in the Liberal regime and it grew and expanded under the NDP.

The problem I have with it is that it just wasn't working. Anyone who was involved in at least Toronto politics and the social housing program within Toronto knows it wasn't working. First off, the waiting list was growing and growing. Year over year it would grow. Every year it would get higher. Vacancy rates were nowhere. There was not any opportunity for anyone to go anywhere, and if you represented a riding in Toronto you knew full well that the communities around these projects had nothing but trouble with them.

Interjection.

Hon Mr Stockwell: There was always confrontation—you can shake your head; you obviously weren't elected—because I spent a lot of time trying to mediate disputes and concerns between the social housing compo-

ment and the communities that were around them. The status quo wasn't working. It was costing us \$1 billion a year in interest payments just to pay. You'd never see that money back. That was just \$1 billion a year gone. So the frustration was obviously high. The status quo wasn't working.

Every step we've taken to change, manage and adjust the social housing component in this province has been resisted by those opposite. I understand you're opposed. You prefer the old system, which frankly created a ghetto-like setting in my riding for the social housing projects that were underfunded, that were losing money, and the costs were spiralling out of control.

What this administration decided to do was to deal with the issue, and constituents were asking us to deal with the issue. You want to know the sad part about it? People who lived in these projects were asking us to deal with the issues, so we did.

On the passdown, the costs the municipalities are incurring are easily offset by the provincial commitments, plus there's going to be a management side of—

Interjections.

Hon Mr Stockwell: Mr Speaker, with great respect, the cackling from the bombastic members opposite seems obvious, but I have been trying to explain to them. The fact of the matter is that when you can amalgamate the two systems you have efficiencies, you have savings. You've got a certain amount of money that was being spent provincially and a certain amount municipally. By blending them together, there have got to be savings.

The member opposite suggested there are surpluses, there are potentials for savings. I am arguing that the status quo didn't work.

The Acting Speaker: Response?

Mr Caplan: I'd like to thank the members from Nickel Belt, Stoney Creek, Sudbury, and from Etobicoke Centre the Minister of Labour, for their comments. Perhaps I'll deal with them in reverse order.

The Minister of Labour says we have to deal with it. What a strange way of dealing with it: trying to hand it off to somebody else. If that's your idea of dealing with it, I want to see what your notion of responsibility and accountability is. Frankly, sir, creating 47 super-bureaucracies is a madness. There's absolutely no justification for going ahead and doing something like that. But also to say that this stuff wasn't working is blatantly wrong. You're blatantly wrong. It's unfortunate, Speaker, that I can't use all of the vocabulary because some of it would be unparliamentary.

To the member from Stoney Creek I say that the notion that the portfolio that's being downloaded is just fine—you should ask the city of Hamilton. When it came to inspect the roads and bridges and the sewer mains and the waterworks, they found out that the provincial claim that everything was in good repair was wrong and in fact established considerable funds in reserve. But when it comes to the same case for housing, the provincial government has established nothing, virtually nothing.

Your government's whole plan is to in fact transfer the responsibility and the cost on to hard-working families, on to businesses, on to everybody else but yourself to get the province out of living up to its responsibility. That's very sad, because leadership is taking responsibility and having some accountability, and that's what you're running from.

The Acting Speaker: It being past 6 of the clock, this House stands adjourned until 6:45.

The House adjourned at 1801.

Evening meeting reported in volume B.

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