



**Legislative Assembly
of Ontario**

First Session, 37th Parliament

**Assemblée législative
de l'Ontario**

Première session, 37^e législature

**Official Report
of Debates
(Hansard)**

**Journal
des débats
(Hansard)**

Tuesday 28 November 2000

Mardi 28 novembre 2000

Speaker
Honourable Gary Carr

Président
L'honorable Gary Carr

Clerk
Claude L. DesRosiers

Greffier
Claude L. DesRosiers

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Tuesday 28 November 2000

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Mardi 28 novembre 2000

*The House met at 1330.
Prayers.*

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

AGRICORP

Mr Steve Peters (Elgin-Middlesex-London): I rise today to address misconceptions about Agricorp and the Ontario whole farm relief program. The Minister of Agriculture has stated that at no time was any Agricorp money used for illegal purposes. The Provincial Auditor disagrees. The law was broken. The Agricorp Act is very clear. The OPP must be called in.

On October 2 the minister stated that "at no time was any money that was designated for the farm assistance program or the farm safety net program in danger." Who is he trying to fool? The whole farm relief program is a safety net and it was put at risk. There are no ifs, ands or buts about this. It doesn't matter whether the money was put back, because it should never have been touched in the first place.

Add to this sorry state of affairs the ongoing debacle with the whole farm relief program, a bungled program racked with confusion and mismanagement. Now, suddenly there are a series of focus groups being held, behind closed doors and by invitation only. Do they address the real issues here? No. They only look at operational changes, ignoring funding levels and other problems that led to this mess in the first place.

This must be dealt with immediately. Programs for both 1998 and 1999 must be reopened and reassessed before any more damage is done. Based on past actions, this suggestion apparently contains too much common sense for this minister, this ministry or this government to ever consider. How sad.

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

Mr John O'Toole (Durham): It gives me great pleasure to rise this afternoon and speak about a private member's bill I will soon introduce to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to amend the Environmental Protection Act, entitled An Act to regulate the spreading and storage of sewage sludge and biosolids.

Over the past five years, the people of Ontario have told us clearly not only to protect the environment but to stand up and do the responsible thing. They want healthy

food to eat, clean water to drink and fresh air to breathe. In short, Ontarians want to know their environment is safe.

The same is true of my constituents in Durham. A group of residents have formed an organization known as Protect the Ridges, an organization deeply concerned about the integrity of the Oak Ridges moraine and the potential impact of the storage of paper sludge on this delicate ecosystem.

I share their concerns. This legislation is intended to establish a uniform system of testing, recording and reporting of the spreading and storage of sewage sludge and other biosolids, including paper sludge. Its purpose is simple and very clear. It will allow the government to determine which materials may be introduced safely into our natural environment, and how and which will be introduced at all.

I want to thank all the members of the Protect the Ridges group for keeping me informed of their hard work, including Deb Vice, Tony Pratt, Kevin Campbell, John London and of course Jane Rowe, who is a councillor, and Troy Young, who is a councillor as well. There are others.

I trust that the lines of communication will remain open. I encourage all of us to remain vigilant about protecting and putting our environment first. It is in fact our living legacy.

IMMIGRANT AND REFUGEE SERVICES

Mr Tony Ruprecht (Davenport): It always puzzles me why the Harris government is slashing, cutting and cancelling services for newcomers, especially those services designed to bring and make immigrants into productive citizens who contribute to our economy.

Why would this government gut English-language classes for newcomers? Robert Courchene, who is president of the Teachers of English as a Second Language Association of Ontario, says you are leaving these kids behind. Jan Bivall, curriculum consultant for the York Region District School Board says, "The long-term implications for students will be grave."

We're stacking the odds against these kids. We want Ontario to be global. We need people who are bilingual and even trilingual. If these children aren't successful in school, they are going to weigh on our society and be failures.

To the Minister of Citizenship, I simply say you have received \$35 million from the federal government for

newcomer services and you've sat silently on your hands and done nothing while other ministers have taken away that money from you. The Treasurer has folded \$35 million into general revenues.

I say to the minister, shame on you. It is about time we have to invest in newcomer services.

KITCHENER-WATERLOO ECONOMY

Mr Wayne Wettlaufer (Kitchener Centre): In a recent report, the governor of the Bank of Canada, Gordon Thiessen, predicted that the Canadian economy will grow at a rate of 5% this year. This is good news for all Canadians.

What Mr Thiessen might have added to his report is that the Ontario economy is not only the fastest-growing and strongest in Canada, but it is also recognized as being the fastest-growing and strongest among all jurisdictions within the G7.

The best indicator of just how strong the Ontario economy is is the fact that Ontario accounts for over 40% of all new jobs being created in the country, a fact the federal Liberals have managed to overlook as they clamour to take the credit for many of the accomplishments of this government.

I am very pleased to advise you that the Kitchener-Waterloo region is one of the strongest regional economies in the province and in the country. Ironically, the success of our region's economic growth has brought with it a number of problems, the major one being serious skilled labour shortages. The shortages are not limited to just high-tech companies but have also affected other sectors such as construction, truck transportation, engineering, food services and accommodation.

However, the most surprising to me is the fact that the labour shortage in our region is also causing problems in the recruitment drive of the Waterloo regional police department. Sergeant Greg Lamport, who oversees the Waterloo regional forces recruitment drive, has stated that the recruitment shortage is not limited to our region, but that overall in Ontario there's a shortage of applicants for police jobs. This must be a first, and it is a sign of our prosperous times. The Waterloo region should be congratulated for its excellence and its respect, but I also encourage many young women and men to respond to the career of police.

DIANE HAMRE

Mr George Smitherman (Toronto Centre-Rosedale): Today I wanted to stand and pay tribute to a public servant, the mayor of Clarington, who recently retired after nine years of service in that position. Diane Hamre has had a distinguished career in working on behalf of the people of Clarington and of Durham region.

I wanted to stand to recognize that last Thursday I had the opportunity, on behalf of Dalton McGuinty, the leader of the Liberal Party, and members of our party to be there in Clarington, along with about 400 local resi-

dents, to recognize the efforts that this member has made on behalf of that very progressive community in Durham region. Diane Hamre has not only made a contribution during her nine years as mayor there, but she has also made significant contributions as a member of Durham regional council at the Greater Toronto Services Board and as a member of the GTA mayors and chairs.

I had the opportunity in a past life, when I served as chief of staff to Toronto Mayor Barbara Hall, to meet that mayor, and she worked very hard, alongside other mayors, to begin to develop more progressive policies with respect to the development of the greater Toronto area.

While her service to that community will no doubt be missed, she looks forward to having the opportunity to spend more time with her family. I hope that all members would join with me in passing on our warmest regards to her as she moves along.

Clarington has the motto, "A city with a future." We can only hope that the work she has done will live on, if this government opposite doesn't choose to amalgamate that municipality.

DOCTOR SHORTAGE

Mr Gilles Bisson (Timmins-James Bay): For many years, we have had a desperate shortage of doctors in communities across northern Ontario. In fact, in the communities of Timmins and Kapuskasing we now find ourselves with over 10,000 patients without doctors. Hearst is in a similar situation, although the numbers are not as grave.

The part that really bothers all of us in northern Ontario, as most people, is that the government back in 1995, when Mike Harris was running, said they had a solution to finally solve the issue of bringing doctors to northern Ontario. We're six years later and we have fewer doctors now than we did six years ago.

I say to the government across the way, obviously what you're doing is not working, so why don't you for once listen to somebody else, listen to what we in the NDP are saying, listen to what doctors and district health councils are saying when it comes to creating a northern medical school in order to train people in northern Ontario in the discipline of medicine?

We know that the best way of keeping doctors in communities is by being able to promote people within in order to go into the profession, where they can come back to their own communities and provide much-needed health care as doctors in communities like Kapuskasing, Kenora, Iroquois Falls and other communities that are looking for doctors.

I say to the government across the way, what you've done hasn't worked. Admit it. It hasn't worked; it's been a failure. Why don't you listen to the people of northern Ontario for once and start working toward the implementation of a northern medical school to finally find a solution to what is happening in northern Ontario?

1340

NEWMARKET CIVIC SERVICE AWARDS

Mrs Julia Munro (York North): I rise today to honour the recipients of the town of Newmarket's Civic Awards 2000. I had the privilege of attending the awards ceremony last Tuesday. This annual event honours volunteerism in the town of Newmarket. I would also like to take the time to mention the recipients by name in recognition of their service to their communities.

The five-year volunteer service award winners: Kirk Kelly, Rita Stones and Chris Kalan Tidmad. The 10-year volunteer service award winners: Kelly Anderson, Cheryl Aslett, Jim Greco and Beverly Verwey. The 15-year volunteer service award winners: Jean Crossland, Gail Desveaux, Debbie Nurse and Ted Williams.

The chair's award went to Ken and Fran Hill. The youth volunteer award went to April Pezzaniti. The visual arts and culture award winner was Garry Gatti. The recipient of the Herb Cain Memorial Sports Award was Jim Wells Sr. For outstanding achievement the award went to Ildiko Luxemberger. Our outstanding team sports recognition awards went to the Newmarket Redmen Minor Atom AA, the Newmarket Minor Softball Senior Mite Boys rep team and the Newmarket Redmen Midget AA team.

The seniors' award went to Herb Mays. The music award went to Donna Waterworth. Police Officer of the Year is Constable Stephan Pleskina. The Raymond J. Twinney Memorial Award is Jamie Suderman. Lawrence Lassaline won the Citizen of the Year Award.

SCHOOL EXTRACURRICULAR
ACTIVITIES

Ms Caroline Di Cocco (Sarnia-Lambton): Sarnia-Lambton had no history of problems regarding extra-curricular activities, but now, thanks to the mismanagement of education by the Harris Tories, we're having some real problems. I want to read an excerpt from one of the students. He says:

"I am a grade 12 student at SCI&TS. I am active in school music department activities..., drama, and also sports activities. The coming cancellation of the activities that I choose to participate in has upset me greatly."

He goes on to say: "Also, because of these cessations and cutbacks in school activities the morale at my school is at an all-time low. The teachers are upset that they can't run the activities" and "the students are upset because they can't participate in the activities...."

"Teachers do not try to force propaganda on us like certain government officials who, wasting several million dollars in the process, tried to...."

"The government assumes that youth are not intelligent enough to know what is happening in the schools or in politics.... We are smart enough to know when people are unhappy at school and we know why everyone is unhappy. I hope voting adults would take a serious look ... at what is happening in the schools and try to rise

above the ... 'tax breaks' which the Harris government has bribed you with."

This student wrote this article in the paper, he felt so strongly about the issue.

SCHOOL TEACHERS

Mr Marcel Beaubien (Lambton-Kent-Middlesex): I'd like to share with you an editorial which appeared in the Sarnia paper yesterday. The title is, "Teachers Show Who Comes First."

"Four hours and 10 minutes a day in the classroom, and it's too much. That's what local public high school teachers are saying.

"To make their point, they're offering their students—the ones they claim they are so committed to—a winter term without extracurriculars. They're also planning not to cover classes for absent teachers, provide assignment supervision, participate in bureaucratic requirements that take time away from teaching, use ministry programs that don't work, or complete forms required by the provincial government.

"There are few professionals, unionized or not, who would publicly balk at spending four hours and 10 minutes a day on the primary function of their work.

"As a whole, society recognizes and appreciates that teachers must do more than their required hours of teaching, but that appreciation is wearing thin.

"We have heard that teachers put in at least as many hours doing non-teaching duties as they spend in the classroom. Unless our math is wrong, that would be eight hours and 20 minutes a day when school is in. The other half of the year, school is out.

"Other people who are frustrated by their career choice or workplace situation leave it. How many teachers have actually left the profession?"

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

STANDING COMMITTEE
ON PUBLIC ACCOUNTS

Mr John Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands): I beg leave to present a report on the Family Responsibility Office from the standing committee on public accounts and move the adoption of its recommendations.

The Speaker (Hon Gary Carr): Does the member wish to make a brief statement?

Mr Gerretsen: Yes. The report contains nine very useful recommendations that the committee hopes the Family Responsibility Office will take note of and implement so that they will benefit all those people who have anything to do with the office, whether they're recipients or whether they're payers into the system. Only with the implementation of the nine recommendations will the office truly work for the benefit of all Ontarians.

I move adjournment of the debate.

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

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AMENDMENT ACT, 2000 LOI DE 2000 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR LA PROTECTION DE L'ENVIRONNEMENT

Mr O'Toole moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 149, An Act to regulate the spreading and storage of sewage sludge and biosolids / Projet de loi 149, Loi réglementant l'épandage et le stockage des boues d'épuration et des matières sèches biologiques.

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

The member for a short statement?

Mr John O'Toole (Durham): Thank you, Mr Speaker. I've been working with the Minister of the Environment, the Honourable Dan Newman, as well as the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs, the Honourable Ernie Hardeman, to find a solution to establishing a uniform system of testing, recording and reporting for the spreading and storage of sewage sludge and other biosolids, including paper sludge.

Its purpose is simple and very clear. It will allow government to determine which materials may be introduced safely into our natural environment and how, and which will not be introduced at all.

I wanted to thank all the members of the Protect the Ridges group for keeping me informed and for their hard work, including Deb Vice, Tony Pratt, Kevin Campbell, John London, Jane Rowe and Troy Young, to name a few.

I trust that the lines of communication will remain open and I encourage all of us to remain vigilant in protecting the environment. It's the right thing to do. It is our living legacy.

DEFERRED VOTES

LABOUR RELATIONS AMENDMENT ACT (CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY), 2000 LOI DE 2000 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR LES RELATIONS DE TRAVAIL (INDUSTRIE DE LA CONSTRUCTION)

The Speaker (Hon Gary Carr): We now have a deferred vote on the motion for third reading of Bill 69. Call in the members. This will be a five-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1349 to 1354.

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

Ayes

Arnott, Ted	Johns, Helen	Runciman, Robert W.
Baird, John R.	Johnson, Bert	Sampson, Rob
Barrett, Toby	Kells, Morley	Snobelen, John
Beaubien, Marcel	Klees, Frank	Spina, Joseph
Chudleigh, Ted	Marland, Margaret	Sterling, Norman W.
Clark, Brad	Martiniuk, Gerry	Stewart, R. Gary
Clement, Tony	Maves, Bart	Stockwell, Chris
Coburn, Brian	Mazzilli, Frank	Tascona, Joseph N.
Cunningham, Dianne	Molinari, Tina R.	Tilson, David
Dunlop, Garfield	Munro, Julia	Turnbull, David
Elliott, Brenda	Murdoch, Bill	Wettlaufer, Wayne
Flaherty, Jim	Mushinski, Marilyn	Wilson, Jim
Galt, Doug	Newman, Dan	Witmer, Elizabeth
Gill, Raminder	O'Toole, John	Wood, Bob
Hardeman, Ernie	Ouellette, Jerry J.	Young, David
Harris, Michael D.	Palladini, Al	

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

Nays

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

Clerk of the House (Mr Claude L. DesRosiers): The ayes are 47; the nays are 40.

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

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

VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon Gary Carr): Just before we begin question period, I bring the members' attention to the east gallery, where we have a former member, Mr Doug Rollins, the member for Quinte in the 36th Parliament.

Mr Mario Sergio (York West): I want to inform the House that we have the pleasure of being joined today in the west gallery by a wonderful class from Daystrom Public School in the wonderful riding of York West.

Mr James J. Bradley (St Catharines): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: In light of the bill presented today by the member from Durham, I would like to request unanimous consent for the Minister of the Environment to explain why he's allowing Dombind to be used for two more years, contrary to what Norm Sterling said.

The Speaker: Is there unanimous consent? I heard some noes.

ORAL QUESTIONS

EMERGENCY SERVICES

Mr Dalton McGuinty (Leader of the Opposition):

My question is for the Premier. You are now in your sixth year of government, and despite all your promises and all your very expensive TV ads, your government is still failing to provide Ontarians with the emergency health care that I feel they deserve and are entitled to. Doctors and nurses on the front lines are telling us that the mess in our emergency rooms is worse today than it's ever been before in the history of this province. During this time of crisis, your Minister of Health has appeared dazed and confused, and she said it's all some kind of mystery to her.

Premier, it's clear that neither you nor your Minister of Health have a clue as to how to bring about some kind of conclusion to this terrible mess we find ourselves in when it comes to emergency care in Ontario today. As I said, you've been on the job for six years, and things are worse today than they've ever been before. How much longer are Ontarians going to have to wait before you clean up the mess you've created in our emergency rooms?

1400

Hon Michael D. Harris (Premier): I think the Minister of Health can answer.

Hon Elizabeth Witmer (Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): I'd like to indicate to the member opposite that we have a plan in place to deal with the situation. As the Leader of the Opposition knows, these pressures in emergency rooms are a long-standing problem. In fact, as the Fleuelling inquest pointed out, this situation is not unique to Ontario or Canada; it is worldwide. It is a systemic problem. It is a problem of long standing.

In 1998 we brought a group together, and we have been moving forward. We have been hiring additional nurses, we have been putting in place alternative payment plans for doctors, we have started the construction of 20,000 beds, we have expanded home care services and we have introduced preventive measures such as the flu vaccination program.

Mr McGuinty: I want to remind you, Minister, that it's been six long years. We are tired of your excuses, and we expect and demand some solutions.

Let's take a look at what has been happening recently in my home town of Ottawa. On Wednesday of last week 50 patients were left waiting in the emergency room at the Ottawa General Hospital because no hospital beds were available. On Sunday, in what is becoming a regular event in Ottawa, seven more surgeries were cancelled because no hospital beds were available.

Minister, if you don't believe the doctors and nurses who are telling us these kinds of things, then listen to these facts: the amount of time the Ottawa Civic emergency room was closed to ambulances has doubled

in the past year. At the Ottawa General, emergency room patients in desperate need of a bed are now forced to wait 11 hours and 12 minutes. That's up 31% from last year. At the Ottawa Civic Hospital, patients are now waiting 10 hours. That's up 15% from last year.

I want to ask you the question I put to the Premier: why, after six long years of Mike Harris Conservative government in Ontario, have you not been able to get a grasp of the problem and come up with a solution in the interests of Ontarians?

Hon Mrs Witmer: I might put the question back to the Leader of the Opposition: why, when you knew of this problem in the late 1980s, did you not develop a solution to deal with it? Maybe we need to remind you of the quotes in the newspapers. The Toronto Star, November 10, 1986: "One of the major reasons for bed shortages is the number of beds being taken up by chronic patients who should be in special long-term-care facilities and not occupying active care beds."

Why did your government, in 1988, stop constructing long-term-care beds? If you had continued, we'd be in a position today where we had additional long-term-care beds. You had to wait for us to make a commitment and build 20,000 additional long-term-care beds, which we are doing.

Mr McGuinty: Maybe we should gather the children together, because Aunt Liz is going to tell us some stories about the 1980s. Let's jump forward to the 21st century, Minister, and talk about what's happening here today, since you've now been on the job through your government for six years.

As dangerous as the hospital situation is in Ottawa, what's happening in Hamilton is nothing short of a death waiting to happen. Here's what the local paper had to say: "The emergency room crisis got so bad in Hamilton last month that there were no more beds, no more heart monitors, no more nurses to call in for help and no more hallways to put the overflowing patients in. On October 18 and 19, all four Hamilton hospitals declared it would be unsafe for ambulances to bring any more patients into their emergency rooms." The situation stayed that way for nearly 48 hours.

Need I remind you, Minister, that Joshua Fleuelling died because there was no room in a hospital. Kyle Martyn died because he had to wait too long for treatment. I ask you again, on behalf of Ontario's sick and their families: your government has been on the job for six long years. You've created a mess. It's going to get worse. When are you going to get a handle on it, and when are you going to fix the mess your government created?

Hon Mrs Witmer: Unfortunately, again I remind the leader of the opposition that it's a long-standing issue. If you had had a plan and if you had developed solutions, we would be further along to moving forward. We have a plan. We have moved forward. We have invested over \$700 million. We have hired additional nurses. We have opened additional beds. We are opening 20,000 long-term-care beds.

I would just like to share with you that in Ottawa we have invested more than \$100 million to improve access to hospital emergency services. This includes funding for 115 flex beds, 17 discharge planners and one regional coordinator to accommodate additional patient needs for beds and to facilitate and expedite hospital discharge.

When it comes to the Hamilton hospitals, I want to again assure you that in Hamilton they have indicated that they have taken the steps necessary to buy more heart monitors, open more beds and create—

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

NURSING STAFF

Mr Dalton McGuinty (Leader of the Opposition): My question to the same minister. If there's been one clear and consistent plan during the course of the past six years when it comes to our health care system, yours has been to blame previous provincial governments or to blame the federal government or to blame anybody rather than take responsibility for dealing with the situation. That's been your clear and consistent plan for six years.

I want to talk now about an essential part of the solution to this mess that you've created, and those are our nurses. After spending over \$400 million on severance costs prior to the election to fire thousands of nurses, just before the election you had a change of heart. Your Premier made a very specific commitment. He said he was going to rehire the thousands of nurses he fired and he specifically committed to hiring 12,000 nurses by the end of this year. Minister, we are 33 days short of the end of this year. Where are those 12,000 nurses?

Hon Elizabeth Witmer (Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): To the Leader of the Opposition: we are not blaming anyone. We are acknowledging that there are pressures within the system and we are also stating that we are prepared to deal with the pressures, unlike your government, which saw problems and took no action. We have a plan. We recognize there are pressures. That's why we set up the Nursing Task Force in 1998. The task force was comprised of the Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario, the union—the Ontario Nurses Association—and it was that task force—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon Gary Carr): The minister take her seat. I would appreciate it if it members wouldn't sing in unison like that, please.

Hon Michael D. Harris (Premier): Throw them out.

The Speaker: Thank you very much. I'll deal with it, I say to the Premier.

Hon Mr Harris: I'm two seats away and I can't hear her.

The Speaker: I say to the Premier, I'll deal with it. I thank him to stay out of it. I will deal with it.

Hon Mrs Witmer: I would just like to remind the Leader of the Opposition that these are long-standing problems. We are taking steps to move forward and ensure that our system continues to have the resources

necessary to meet the needs of a population that is rapidly growing and also aging, and as a result the pressures continue to increase. But I would say to you we have hired over 6,000 nurses to date.

Mr McGuinty: You didn't promise to hire 6,000 by the end of the year 2000. You promised to hire 12,000 by the end of the year 2000. I'll tell you why I'm raising this with you today, Minister. Just late last week a document came across my desk, The Ontario PC Daily Bulletin. It says, "To date, we have created almost 6,000 new nursing positions in Ontario, which will ultimately add 12,000 nurses to the system in the next three years." You specifically promised that you were going to give us 12,000 by 2000. Now you're saying 6,000 by 2000, "and then we'll come up with the other 6,000 by the end of the year 2003." The Premier made a specific commitment for 12,000 by the end of the year 2000. I ask you the same question again, Minister: where are the 12,000 nurses you promised to have on the job by the end of this year?

Hon Mrs Witmer: Our government has made available the \$375 million that we have committed in response to the recommendations of the task force. The money has flowed. The Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario is working on a plan of recruitment and retention of nurses with the government. I'm pleased to say that everyone is redoubling their efforts in order to ensure that we do have the nurses in place.

1410

As you know, recently we have provided additional money to our hospitals. We're funding hospitals today at the number of about \$8.2 billion. That is the highest amount of funding ever given to hospitals in this province. We are providing more funding than ever before for community access centres, long-term care and primary care, and for the first time in the history of this province we now have nurse practitioners, and other provinces are following our lead.

Mr McGuinty: Minister, let's go over this one more time. We have an emergency room crisis in Ontario because of your own doing. We are short of nurses because you fired nurses. We're short of beds because you closed beds. We can't reopen the beds until we get the nurses. You said you were going to hire nurses. In fact, your Premier made a specific commitment prior to the last election and he said, "We will hire 12,000 by the end of the year 2000." Now you are telling us this is no longer true, that he has no intention whatsoever of keeping his promise. You're buying into this and you're telling us "No, it's OK as long as we get 12,000 by the end of the year 2003."

You know what? The busy season is just around the corner when it comes to our emergency rooms. They are already plunged into a state of crisis this very day. Because this Premier is breaking his promise, Ontarians are going to be placed at even further risk at the Christmas season and just after that.

I ask you, Minister: as an advocate for Ontario patients and for their families, as the advocate for our health care system, how are you going to tolerate this Premier

breaking his specific commitment to hire 12,000 nurses by the end of this year?

Hon Mrs Witmer: Perhaps the Leader of the Opposition wants to consider and remember the tremendous negative impact on the health system, not only in this province but throughout Canada, because the federal Liberal government decreased the—

Interjections.

The Speaker: Order. Minister, take a seat. The member for Kingston and the Islands, last warning to him. We're not going to have you shouting out and yelling like that.

Minister of Health.

Hon Mrs Witmer: Perhaps you've forgotten it was your federal cousins that decreased the amount of funding. In fact, it is so unfortunate that despite the huge federal surplus, when the agreement was reached with the provinces and territories in September of this year, they elected not to flow the money until next April. Every health minister at the last meeting talked about the shortage of nurses, the shortage of doctors, the shortage of radiation therapists, and said we need a plan. We're still waiting for the federal government to work with us on a human resources plan.

PROPERTY TAXATION

Mr Howard Hampton (Kenora-Rainy River): My question is for the Premier. It is about the Premier's latest property tax bill, Bill 140, and how much it will penalize homeowners across the province. You know that when you read the fine print of your legislation, what it does is move massive property tax increases on to homeowners and away from business properties. You know that you are all set up to ram this legislation through this Legislature with no public hearings and with no opportunity for the property taxpayers across the province to know what's in it and what's going to hit them.

Before you force massive property tax increases on to homeowners, don't you think you at least ought to hold public hearings so people will have a chance to comment and know what you're doing to them?

Hon Michael D. Harris (Premier): I am quite surprised at a leader of a party that, when they were in government, had nothing but massive tax increases provincially and the kind of downloading that let to massive tax increases on the property tax, in addition to the largest education property taxes that we'd seen since the Liberals were in office. I admit their tax increases were even larger than your tax increases.

Now you're talking about my tax increases. Since we have been in office, we have had nothing but tax freezes or cuts on every provincial tax that we inherited. Secondly, the only thing that we have done on property taxes is to take \$2.5 billion off the property tax of all the taxes across Ontario. In addition, the only thing we have done with the remaining portion of education property tax is to have tax cuts both residentially and in commercial-industrial. So don't talk to us about your abysmal record

on tax hikes and our record on tax cuts, because the facts are out there for everybody to see.

Mr Hampton: It was a simple question. I asked the Premier to hold public hearings before he rams this legislation through the House.

Premier, everyone out there knows that you've downloaded the cost of seniors' housing and social housing on to municipalities, and it's going to be a huge cost for them. We know that you're downloading the cost of ambulances on to municipalities, and that's going to be an additional \$100 million, given the standard they're going to be held to. We all know that if municipalities are going to meet that, they're going to have to do something at the property tax level. What your bill is going to do is force all of those downloading costs on to the homeowners.

It's a simple question. Will you hold public hearings on your legislation before you stick it to the homeowners across the province with higher property taxes? Yes or no?

Hon Mr Harris: I guess if my government were taking any action that would cause a tax to increase by any level of government, including the municipal government, that would be a cause for concern. Fortunately, unlike you and the Liberals, we're not doing that.

The Speaker (Hon Gary Carr): Final supplementary.

Ms Marilyn Churley (Toronto-Danforth): What hogwash. Let me remind you that we live in a democracy, or at least we used to.

Many homeowners across Toronto will be shocked by your new property tax bill. They will be crushed. Thousands of homeowners in cities across Ontario are going to be upset when they get that property tax bill, yet you have denied them an opportunity to be heard.

But, Premier, listen to this: not only that, but your time allocation motion does not allow for clause-by-clause consideration so that we can make amendments. I have amendments to make on behalf of homeowners and small business and on behalf of city of Toronto councillors, yet you are denying us that opportunity. Will you at least allow clause-by-clause examination of this bill so we can make amendments?

Hon Mr Harris: When I think of the massive tax increases under this party and the significant tax cuts as a result of our policies, both at the municipal level and at the provincial level, I find it hard to fathom that you are not in full support of a bill that in fact extends protections to homeowners, extends protections, tax relief, to low-income seniors and disabled homeowners, extends an exemption for portions of homes built for people with disabilities, extends tax relief for people in hardship, that brings in fairness to the tax system that your government didn't have the courage to do and the Liberal government didn't have the courage to do, which is why the problem was magnified when we took over. This is a bill that simply extends these protections.

I don't know why you're opposed to that. I don't know why you want to hold up a bill that offers further

tax reductions and protections for taxpayers in the province. I don't understand that logic, other than that you're tax hikers, you like governments to have more money, and we don't.

TENANT PROTECTION

Mr Howard Hampton (Kenora-Rainy River): This is also to the Premier, and isn't it interesting that the Premier is afraid to hold public hearings on a tax bill?

Premier, another part of the story is that the Ontario Property Assessment Corp, OPAC, has released new figures on property assessment values. They show that your gutting of rent control has been a financial bonanza for landlords. In the city of Toronto alone, landlords have seen the value of their rental properties increase by \$5.3 billion. That's how much the increase has been.

Premier, since you are so generous to the landlords, since the gutting of rent control and the massive increase in rents—

Hon Chris Stockwell (Minister of Labour): That's called prosperity.

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The Speaker (Hon Gary Carr): Would the member take his seat? Minister of Labour, come to order. Sorry for the interruption.

Mr Hampton: Since your gutting of rent control and the massive increases in rents have increased the value of the landlords' property so much, don't you think it would be a good idea to impose a rent freeze now, so that maybe the tenants could get some benefit out of this?

Hon Michael D. Harris (Premier): Since our extension of rent controls, actually using the same formula that was developed by the New Democratic Party to ensure that every tenant is extended the full protection of rent controls, and since we combined that policy with a policy of growth and prosperity, where people's property does go up—the properties of homeowners in Toronto have gone up an average of 21% since we took office. I think this is a great thing. Isn't it marvellous that people's property is now worth more than it was? When your government was in power their properties devalued, commercial properties devalued, people were unemployed, we had record unemployment, record numbers of people were on welfare. Why do you want to go back to those depressing old days? I don't understand that.

The Speaker: Supplementary?

Mr Rosario Marchese (Trinity-Spadina): The Minister of Labour was laughing hysterically at the question and the Premier didn't answer it very well, but I'm going to try it again. Multi-unit residential rental property values went up 40%—that's true—and the value is \$5.2 billion. That's fine. OPAC, the Ontario Property Assessment Corp, attributes this increase to higher rents—yes, Minister of Labour, higher rents—and to a low vacancy rate. That's what they said. I didn't say it; they said it. So I don't know why you're laughing hysterically.

The Minister of Labour and the Premier should know that in Toronto alone, and many other areas, rents have increased by 1,000 bucks for a two-bedroom apartment.

You should know that, or ought to know that. Meanwhile, evictions are up everywhere across Ontario and many more people are having a hell of a time making those payments.

Premier, doesn't it bother you just a little bit that landlords have made \$5.2 billion in value off your rent de-control while tenants are being thrown out in the street? Doesn't it bother you just a little bit?

Hon Mr Harris: When we extended full rent protection to every tenant in the province when we took office, we also extended the formula to that extension of full rent protection for every tenant in the province, and that has led last year, for example, to the lowest increase allowed in 25 years.

Residential properties are going up in value, business is making more money, more people are being employed and last year we had the lowest rent increase allowable under law under our full rent protection for all the tenants than we've had in 25 years. I thought you'd be standing up and saying, "Is this a great province, or what?"

MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

Mrs Lyn McLeod (Thunder Bay-Atikokan): My question is for the Minister of Health. Scott McLennan is 35 years old and has suffered from schizophrenia for the last 16 years. Last January, presumably in the throes of delusion, Scott attacked his mother, stabbing her several times.

He was admitted briefly to an assessment centre but was later transferred to jail. The judge ordered a treatment program for Scott, but he was released from jail on to the streets and the treatment never happened. Since then he has been briefly in and out of a psychiatric hospital and in and out of jail three more times. He has spent far more time in jail than in a hospital bed.

Last month, Scott was released from the Elgin-Middlesex Detention Centre. He was released into the community once again with no supervision, no support and no place to go. No one knew where he was until last weekend, when a cousin found him in a hospital, held once again for assessment.

Minister, Scott's mother is in the gallery today and she's afraid. She's afraid for her son, and she's afraid for others who might be endangered if Scott becomes violent again. Bernice McLennan wants to know why there has never been anything for her son but a jail cell.

Hon Elizabeth Witmer (Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): As the member knows, we have been very committed to creating a modern, accessible mental health care system that responds to the needs of all Ontarians. We have been moving forward in that regard now for the last number of years. What we've been endeavouring to do is to ensure we have a system that is integrated, that provides hospital beds when necessary, but that we also give people the opportunity to live in the community because this is certainly what has been asked for.

As you know, as recently as last week I made an announcement, and that announcement involved an

additional \$72 million to help house and support people suffering from severe mental illness. That announcement means that more than 2,600 people who are homeless or at risk of being homeless will have the opportunity for the immediate and needed housing that is so necessary. The people, as well, who are living in the community are supported by ACT teams, 24-hour support teams—

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

Mrs McLeod: It's important to know that Scott's not alone in his experience with our mental health system. I had another case very much like his in my constituency office just last Friday, and there were three other cases in my office alone in Thunder Bay last week, where people with mental illness could not get the help they needed.

Brian's Law is to be proclaimed on December 1. It's a law that holds out hope to the families of schizophrenics but causes extreme concern for those who don't believe there will be the community supports in place that will make it work. You held off proclamation of that law until December to ensure there would be adequate community resources in place, and it hasn't happened. You have invested some \$150 million in the mental health system; at least \$600 million is needed. The money you announced last week was announced two years ago. You are just now getting this year's program underway.

Scott McLennan and others like him are still falling through what is not a crack but a huge gap, yet you are moving ahead with the closure of psychiatric hospitals. The judge said last spring in sentencing Scott that he was going to give him another month in jail to let the health system catch up and be ready for him. It hasn't caught up yet. I ask what you will do to make sure that Scott McLennan and the people around him are kept safe.

Hon Mrs Witmer: We have been moving forward. In 1998, under the parliamentary assistant I had at that time, we undertook a review of the mental health system. As you know, this is a group of individuals who suffer from severe mental illness. I think all of us in the province wish to ensure that the services these individuals need will be provided. I would also remind you that we put a moratorium on the closure of psychiatric hospital beds to ensure the community services would be there for all people in this province who needed them. We have been moving forward with new ACT teams that are providing the 24-hour support that those who are severely mentally ill require. We will continue to make the significant investments in the mental health system that we have been doing.

I would remind you there has been significant new funding. There have been significant new supports put in place, new homes for these individuals. As you know, the community organizations that have received this money are working as hard as they can.

LABOUR LEGISLATION

Mrs Brenda Elliott (Guelph-Wellington): My question is for the Minister of Labour. As Bill 139 works its way through the legislative process, constituents in my

riding of Guelph-Wellington are being bombarded by news reports focusing on misleading spins from union bosses who are wrongly suggesting our government is somehow imposing a 60-hour workweek. This is in spite of your many statements to the contrary.

I'd like to turn your attention to the Blueprint, in particular to the section called "Jobs, Growth and Opportunity," and to page 14, where under the section called "Expanding Workers' Rights," we've promised the people of Ontario, "Whether you're in a union or not, we think the focus should be on protecting your individual rights. That's why we've worked to restore the balance of power between unions and employers while strengthening the rights of individual workers."

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A little further down: "With the way the workplace is changing, more workers and companies want to set up arrangements other than the traditional Monday-to-Friday workweek. We'll give workers and employers more flexibility in designing work arrangements to meet their needs, such as flex-time and four-day weeks."

Minister, the people of Ontario have come to expect the Harris government to be a government that makes promises and, more importantly, keeps their promises. In Bill 139, are we or are we not keeping our promises to the Ontario voters?

Hon Chris Stockwell (Minister of Labour): Thank you for the question. Yes, we are. You're absolutely right.

Interjection.

Hon Mr Stockwell: I understand why the Liberals would snicker. It's a foreign thought to you guys.

In Bill 139 and in Bill 147, we're bringing forward changes to the legislation that talks about a flex workweek, that talks about a four-day workweek, in fact. It does. Today, if you wanted to have a four-day workweek, working 10 hours a day and 40 hours a week, you couldn't do it. You've got to seek a permit. It's against the law. We want to create flex workweeks. We want to create opportunities for employees to create their own workweek because the workplace has changed. It's a different place than it was in the 1960s when this bill was originally passed.

When we campaigned in 1999, we talked about these specific issues in the Blueprint. These issues were addressed. We dealt with them here in the House. We've introduced legislation. We made a commitment to make these changes.

Another good example is the 10-day crisis leave. We made a commitment to create 10 unpaid days for crisis leave for employees who work in businesses of 50 employees or more. We've done that, and I think we should be proud of the fact that we're delivering on our promises.

Mrs Elliott: I actually want to refer to the Blueprint again. On page 35, I refer to a section called "A Better Future." On page 37, an entitlement is "Family Crisis Leave," and I quote: "We've all been in situations where sudden family crisis makes it impossible to go to work—

a child is suddenly hospitalized or an aging parent is diagnosed as being terminally ill. We think families deserve our support in helping teach other through these kinds of emergencies.

“In order to help people care for their children and other family members in medical emergencies, we’ll allow employees of companies with 50 or more workers to take up to 10 days a year of unpaid, job-protected family crisis leave for recognized family and medical reasons.”

I understand that is in this bill, Minister. I would like you to reiterate to my constituents who are being given false information about this bill that this is indeed in there in its entirety. Today we are again completing another promise that we made to the voters during our election campaign.

Hon Mr Stockwell: The difficulty is that a lot of information is being sent out that is just flat out inaccurate. The simple fact is that the—

Interjection.

Hon Mr Stockwell: Look, I can understand why the Liberals would be very upset about this question simply because when we make a commitment, we live by it and we’re doing it.

Interjections.

Hon Mr Stockwell: Here we go. There’s Mr McGuinty. It’s lucky I just happen to have this quote that Mr McGuinty made in the past. We talked about the teachers, ordering them back to work, just last week. Remember? On the Monday, Mr McGuinty said his party would support speedy passage of the bill. Now on the next day—you know, that’s code language to Liberals. All of us would think, “Hey, I support that bill,” but in code language to a Liberal when they say to you his party would support speedy passage of the bill, it means, “I’m against it and I’m voting no.” That’s the Liberal definition of “speedy passage” to a bill. And not to be outdone, the member for Hamilton East could even make Mr McGuinty look straightforward.

The fact is, we have kept our commitment. There will be 10 days of unpaid leave. We said we’d do it. We’re carrying forward doing it for the workers and employers in the province—

The Speaker (Hon Gary Carr): Order. The minister’s time is up. New question.

OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH AND SAFETY

Mr Dominic Agostino (Hamilton East): My question is to the Minister of Labour. Minister, I want to ask you about health and safety in the workplace.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon Gary Carr): Stop the clock.

Interjections.

The Speaker: Order. Start the clock. Sorry for the interruption.

Mr Agostino: I find it interesting that as I get up to ask a question about injury and death in the workplace,

the Tory government finds it humorous and starts cracking jokes.

Minister, let me ask you about your ongoing attack on working men and women. You’ve passed legislation today and in the next week or two you’re going to pass further legislation in this House that all leads to the same end result: that it is harder for working men and women to unionize, more difficult for working men and women to have safe working conditions, whether it’s in construction or on general work sites, whether it’s in workplaces across Ontario.

Minister, you know the stats—whether it’s construction, whether it’s factory work, anywhere you want to look at—that sites or places that are non-unionized have a greater risk of death and injury to working men and women than sites protected by unions. Your legislation continues to take us down that path of less safe workplaces, more injury and more death to working men and women. The stats are clear. Unfortunately, it is going to happen. Minister, how are you and your government going to deal with the increase of injuries and deaths in the workplace as a result of your legislation?

Hon Chris Stockwell (Minister of Labour): I do consider this a very important issue and I don’t think the Liberals should laugh about it either. I think it’s a very, very important issue that faces the province of Ontario.

I don’t think the broad assumption you make is too accurate. Simply put, the assumption you make is that there are more deaths in non-union construction sites than there are on union construction sites. The whole number’s true, but there are more non-union construction sites than there are union construction sites. So when you work it out on a percentage basis, the simple fact, considering that there are significantly more non-union sites, is that there are more accidents per ratio. It’s like making the argument that more male bus drivers get into accidents than female bus drivers. That’s probably true; there are more male bus drivers out there.

Your argument isn’t fair. Of course there are more accidents on non-union sites simply because there are significantly more non-union sites. It’s a slam against the non-union construction sites to say that they’re not safe, that they’re unsafe, that you go to work and you’re going to die. Simply put, you’re telling the people of this province that if you run a non-union workplace, you’re somehow an unreasonable, unfair employer who doesn’t care about your employees. That’s crazy. You shouldn’t say that.

Mr Agostino: Unfortunately, the minister doesn’t know his stats. The sheer numbers aside, when you look at the percentage of accidents, there is a 2.5 times greater chance of death or injury on a non-unionized construction site than on a unionized one, Minister. Those stats are clear, and you’re wrong.

An inquest was recently held in Hamilton into the death of Donald Crawley, killed on the job at Dofasco. That inquest has recommended more visits by inspectors and an increase in inspectors to visit work sites.

Over the last five years, your ministry has slashed the health and safety operations division by \$8.2 million and a staff reduction of 20%. Those are the cuts you have made to the division that is supposed to inspect health and safety in workplaces. The division's supposed to be in charge of preventing death and injury in the workplace. Your track record, Minister, is atrocious when it comes to protecting workers on the job, frankly, whether they're unionized or non-unionized. Your cuts have shown that.

This inquest in Hamilton has asked for a greater increase here. You've gone the other way. Again, why do you continue to bring in legislation and make cuts that risk the lives of working men and women every single day on the work site in the province of Ontario?

Hon Mr Stockwell: In typical form, the member stands up and says "2.5." Where do you get the number? You won't tell us where the number comes from. You just stand up and say "2.5." He doesn't cite the author, doesn't site the—

Interjection.

The Speaker: The member for Hamilton East, last warning. Once more and you're out. Minister of Labour.

Hon Mr Stockwell: The member stands up and makes this charge. You want to analyze—

Mrs Sandra Pupatello (Windsor West): They are your own numbers.

The Speaker: Order. The member for Windsor West, please. I just sit down and you start yelling; one takes over. I'd appreciate the co-operation.

Hon Mr Stockwell: If you want to provide an actual comprehensive review of the situation, you're more than entitled to. The Workplace Safety and Insurance Board is beginning to compile these kinds of statistics. They don't exist. So making this argument that somehow non-union sites are not as safe, or, simply put, that if you go to work at a non-union site you're going to get injured or die on the job, is really reprehensible. You're slandering, in my opinion, good, honest, hard-working Ontarians who provide good, honest work for non-union construction sites.

We're not suggesting that there shouldn't be union and non-union sites, but we don't have it in our head, we don't make it part of our policy, that anyone who doesn't belong to the union is bad and anybody who does is good. That's Liberal-NDP philosophy.

HIV/AIDS AWARENESS AND PREVENTION

Mr Doug Galt (Northumberland): My question is directed to the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. Minister, I'm aware that the World AIDS Day is quickly approaching. If you walk up to anyone on the street and ask them about AIDS, you'll probably get a pretty good response. People really understand that particular condition, and that's probably because during this last decade or so the problem of AIDS has grown on a global basis. Also, a great number of people around the world have been promoting AIDS awareness and prevention.

Minister, can you please tell the members of this House what our government in Ontario is doing to help to promote AIDS awareness and its prevention?

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Hon Elizabeth Witmer (Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): I would like to take this opportunity to officially recognize that Friday, December 1, is World AIDS Day. I can assure the member and all members of this House that HIV/AIDS prevention, care, treatment and support remains a top priority for the government.

Our government this year, 2000-01, will be spending over \$53 million for HIV/AIDS-related programs. This figure does not include the doctor billings to OHIP. Also, in March 1998 we announced \$10 million to establish the Ontario HIV Treatment Network, the community-based services evaluation unit and the intravenous drug user outreach program.

I'd also like to share with you a letter from David Hoe, the co-chair of the Ontario Advisory Committee on HIV/AIDS, of April 30, 1998:

"On behalf of the members of the committee, we'd like to express our appreciation for the significant shifts that have supported and steered into health policy and programs related to HIV/AIDS during your time of office.

"Many of the recommendations that have come from your advisory committee have been facilitated"—

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

Mr Galt: Thank you very much, Minister, for that very informative response. From your comments, I can see that our government is indeed very serious about HIV and AIDS awareness, as well as prevention and care.

There's no question that AIDS has become a global epidemic, one of very significant international concern. I would hope that our federal government is putting just as many resources into HIV and AIDS as our government. Can you enlighten us as to what the federal government's commitment is to AIDS awareness and prevention?

Hon Mrs Witmer: As I say, the advisory committee that we have set up in this province certainly has been beneficial in helping us move forward with programs committed to prevention and the care and treatment of people who live with HIV/AIDS. We take a look at the fact that we're spending over \$53 million this year for HIV/AIDS-related programs, plus the OHIP billings on top of that. On the other hand, the federal Liberal government today is spending \$10 million less in order to provide funding for all of Canada. That's all the provinces and the territories. So obviously the federal contribution to HIV/AIDS is considerably less than what we're spending in the province of Ontario.

DRIVER EXAMINATIONS

Mr Peter Kormos (Niagara Centre): I've got a question to the Premier. I'm telling you, sir, that the people in this province want to know why you're putting private profits ahead of safer highways. You've decided to priva-

tize drivers' tests here in the province, a function that the Ministry of Transportation has handled now for almost four decades. You're going to fire skilled, professional examiners and let the private sector turn another piece of the public safety net into a profit centre, just as you did, with those tragic results, with the Ministry of the Environment.

Premier, why are you putting the lives of motorists at risk? Will you do the right thing, the safe thing, and keep the government in the business of testing new drivers?

Hon Michael D. Harris (Premier): The Minister of Transportation can respond.

Hon David Turnbull (Minister of Transportation): We have always committed to better customer service delivery. Last fall, MTO committed to review driver examination services, and indeed this is a continuation of this. A request for qualifications will determine the level of interest of external organizations in driver examination businesses. But let me emphasize to the member that MTO will continue to set and enforce standards. We will continue to review our programs to find efficiencies to improve customer service.

Mr Kormos: Minister, you're rolling the clock back. You should know that in 1961 the then Conservative government made a major breakthrough in highway safety when they abolished the private fee examiners and introduced a universal, province-wide, single-standard, government-operated driver examination system. Testing new drivers is a matter of life and death. You know that. You're prepared to turn that responsibility over to the private sector. You're turning getting a driver's licence into the equivalent of going to the corner store to buy a long-distance calling card.

The people of Ontario deserve safe highways. They want new drivers to be government tested by properly trained professionals. You're abandoning the government testing; you're firing the trained professionals. Why don't you put the red light to your dangerous proposal, or is it acceptable to you that the system loses its integrity and becomes corruptible, and that drivers' licences are available to anybody who can pay the appropriate fee?

Hon Mr Turnbull: I fundamentally disagree with the premise of the question. Our government fought in the last election on a Blueprint commitment to look at improving customer service and alternate service delivery systems. In the time since we became the government, we have moved to make Ontario roads the fourth-safest in the whole of North America, a better safety record than when you were the government. We will continue along that line, because we will enforce tough safety standards. But we will continue to look at better ways to serve the public.

EMERGENCY SERVICES

Mrs Marie Bountrogianni (Hamilton Mountain): My question is for the Minister of Health. The amount of time that hospitals close their doors to ambulances in Ontario is the highest it has been since the critical call

registry started collecting statistics in 1989. On October 18 and 19 in my community of Hamilton, all emergency rooms were too busy to take any more patients well in excess of 90% of the time. Dr Baillie, medical director for the Ontario CritiCall Resource Registry, blames the shortage of long-term-care beds on an ongoing home care strike by workers of the local CCAC.

To add to this crisis, the Minister of Colleges and Universities recently announced in London, Ontario, that the new initiatives to enhance nursing education commitments need to be revisited, which basically means "need to be slowed down."

Clearly the measures your government has implemented aren't sufficient. We've had our warning from a credible source, Dr Baillie, saying things are going to get worse. Now is the time to act. Can you commit today to additional measures to deal with this impending catastrophe?

Hon Elizabeth Witmer (Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): I would advise the member to read very carefully the report by the medical director. I would also encourage her to take a look at the responses that have been made by the hospitals in Hamilton. As you know, the executive vice-president of St Joe's, Kevin Smith, was quoted as saying he did not believe care was compromised. He believed they were meeting the needs of critical care patients. Also, the Hamilton Health Sciences Corp and St Joe's have vowed that all patients will get good emergency care. As you know, they have moved forward to purchase more heart monitors, they have opened temporary beds and they have created a task force to ensure they can deal with the emergency room backlogs. Again, the flu shots are being provided. They predict that these measures will reduce the amount of time that hospitals are in that particular circumstance.

The chief of emergency at the superhospital says, "I remain optimistic"—

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

Mr Ted McMeekin (Ancaster-Dundas-Flamborough-Aldershot): My supplementary is for the Minister of Health. I've had the privilege of serving in this House for two months as of today.

Applause.

Mr McMeekin: Thank you.

During that time, I've heard some great questions and some not-so-great questions, and to be fair, there have been some great answers and some not-so-great answers. I'm a pretty simple guy, and I want to ask a simple, straightforward question and hope we can get a simple, straightforward answer.

Last week the government-appointed supervisor talked about changes to the Hamilton Health Sciences Corp that would cost approximately \$250 million. He suggested that \$125 million of that should come from the property tax base. I'm concerned that our already beleaguered property taxpayers are going to get hammered some more, and I'm wondering if his comments reflect govern-

ment policy. Is this the thin edge of a new downloading wedge?

Hon Mrs Witmer: I appreciate the points that have been raised by the member opposite. What I would like to respond in return is simply that at the present time we're reviewing the information that was provided for us. Obviously at such time as we've done a thorough review of what may or may not happen in Hamilton—at this time we're not in a position to make a response to the request. We didn't receive the information until it was made available last week to the public and the media in Hamilton. So our staff haven't had an opportunity to review it.

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GRAPE AND WINE INDUSTRY

Mr Bart Maves (Niagara Falls): My question is for the Minister of Consumer and Commercial Relations. Minister, I have a question for you that directly affects many people in my riding. Last May you travelled to Europe to try to improve trade relations with the European Union to facilitate the export of Ontario wines to that region.

I remember that when you returned you were optimistic that the wine trade between Ontario and Europe, specifically Italy and France, would improve. Unfortunately, this does not seem to have happened. Could you please update us on what has happened since your trip to Europe?

Hon Robert W. Runciman (Minister of Consumer and Commercial Relations): I want to thank the member for Niagara Falls for his strong interest in the health of the Ontario wine industry. I have to tell him, regrettably, that there has been very little progress since Mr Brandt and I and some representatives of the Wine Council of Ontario visited a number of the European Union countries earlier this year to deliver the message that we are very unhappy with the current situation, where the Europeans are selling through the Liquor Control Board of Ontario approximately \$390 million worth of product on an annual basis and allowing virtually nothing through their borders. Last year France and Italy accepted not one bottle of world-class, award-winning Ontario wine. That's a situation we will not allow to continue.

Mr Maves: This is becoming an increasingly frustrating situation for both myself and of course my constituents. The very countries denying access to our wines are the same countries giving international awards to our wines for quality.

Three questions: What are your plans now that the progress you made overseas seems to have been forgotten? How do you plan on reminding them that Ontario's product is worthy of their attention? Finally, is there any chance that our newly elected, do-nothing federal Liberal government will eventually do their job and take up this trade fight with the European Union?

Hon Mr Runciman: The federal Liberal government has failed Ontario producers and grape growers miserably. When we travelled through Europe, they were not aware of the situation in Ontario and the disparities in terms of trade volumes and dollars.

Mrs Sandra Pupatello (Windsor West): I know what you should do. You should disband the task force.

The Speaker (Hon Gary Carr): Will the member take his seat. Member for Windsor West, this is your last warning. I can't continue on with you screaming across. Minister.

Hon Mr Runciman: We've certainly delivered the message. The Minister of Economic Development and Trade is travelling to the European Union in the next couple of weeks to redeliver the message, but I want to say that we indicated strongly during our visit that we are not going to sit still for this to continue. All other New World producers are allowed access to the European Union. Canada is the exception.

We are, as I said, making an announcement hopefully in the next couple of weeks with respect to a first step. I want to ask consumers in Ontario to join with us in this fight for fairness in terms of their purchase decisions around wines this holiday season. Send the European Union a message in a bottle: buy Ontario.

PROPERTY TAXATION

Mr Michael A. Brown (Algoma-Manitoulin): I have a question for the Premier. As you know, Bill 140 relates to property taxes and assessment, and you also would know that shortly we will have a time allocation motion, or closure, on that bill and there will be no opportunity for public input.

Right now I want to bring to you the situation in one of my municipalities. According to notes from their treasurer, if the town was to move to the recommended range of fairness in this bill, the commercial tax class will see a 19% increase, with the residential class seeing a 62% increase in taxes this year.

Premier, do you think that's fair?

Hon Michael D. Harris (Premier): Then the municipality doesn't have to do anything. If it has no tax increases, nobody's tax will go up one cent—commercial, industrial or residential. That's their option, and I encourage them to take it.

Mr Brown: If you don't know you're wrong, you should. Last year I wrote to the Minister of Finance on behalf of constituents. This constituent paid \$4,070.31 more in taxes than the same business across the road, which, by the way, was assessed for more money. Your minister said to my constituent by way of letter that it was the municipality's fault, exactly what you just told me. The fact is, in this situation you're the municipality. It is an unorganized area. You did this. It isn't the municipality.

Premier, will you understand that this property tax bill will attack residential taxpayers and will attack small business people dramatically? Will you not recognize

that, slow down, take your time, and maybe this time we could get it right?

Hon Mr Harris: Since we are only decreasing taxes, for which we are responsible in unorganized areas, tax decreases for both commercial and industrial, as has already been announced by the minister with the introduction of Bill 140, we will be accelerating the tax reductions for commercial and industrial as well. That leaves the option in organized and unorganized areas to help ensure that that poor business whose taxes are significantly higher than in a neighbouring municipality or area—that we can start to slowly correct that problem without impacting on residential taxes.

WINTER HIGHWAY MAINTENANCE

Mr Garfield Dunlop (Simcoe North): My question is to the Minister of Transportation. As we enter into the winter season, the people of Ontario are preparing for the upcoming months of cold and snow. Boats and other watercraft have been put in dry dock, winter road maintenance vehicles are ready to work this winter, and snow tires are being installed on the family car. What initiatives is your ministry undertaking to promote safe winter driving in our province?

Hon David Turnbull (Minister of Transportation): Excellent question. Ontario's snow and ice control standards are among the best in North America. MTO has produced an information booklet called Snow and Ice Control on Ontario's Highways. It's being distributed free of charge. This booklet provides driving tips and a 1-800 number for the most recent road conditions for your region, as well as MTO maintenance standards and practices. The booklet, as I've said, is available free of charge. It will be available through government information offices—MPP constituency offices will be receiving it—government bookstores, and driver and vehicle licensing examination centres. Also, MTO provides a winter driving conditions update on a Web site, www.mto.gov.on.ca.

Mr Dunlop: Those sound like some effective initiatives from which all Ontarians will benefit. It strikes me that it would be a good idea if a lot more people in Ontario could be informed of how to drive more safely in winter conditions. As Minister of Transportation, what suggestions and advice do you have for the motorists of our province about how they can adjust to driving to suit winter road conditions?

Hon Mr Turnbull: Above all, it's important that everybody using our roads take the time to make sure their vehicle is well prepared. Plan ahead. Check weather forecasts and road conditions before you leave. Top up your gas tank in case there must be a change of your route or even the need to turn back during a storm. If a storm is expected, consider delaying or cancelling your trip, and respect, above all, road closures. Despite the best efforts of our ministry—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon Gary Carr): Order. Sorry to interrupt the minister. We've got conversations going

back and forth. We're almost over. If you have conversations, please take them outside. The minister is wrapping up. Sorry, Minister.

Hon Mr Turnbull: Despite the best efforts of both our ministry workers and municipal workers to remove snow and ice, extreme weather conditions may prevent roads from being reopened quickly. Please don't pass snow plows and don't go between snow plows as they are laying down salt. These are important. Of course, obviously, adjust your speed accordingly, and get this booklet.

1500

PETITIONS

NORTHERN HEALTH TRAVEL GRANT

Mr Michael Gravelle (Thunder Bay-Superior North): Petitions keep coming forward to us related to the northern health travel grant.

The Speaker (Hon Gary Carr): On a point of order, the Minister of Labour. Sorry to interrupt the member.

Hon Chris Stockwell (Minister of Labour): During the interchange I had with the member for Hamilton East, he cited some numbers. He said he would provide me with those numbers. He still hasn't done that. I'm waiting.

The Speaker (Hon Gary Carr): Sorry for the interruption. We will start all over.

Mr Gravelle: Petitions keep coming forward by many northerners very upset by the gross discrimination being faced related to the northern health travel grant. I'd like to read this petition.

"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; and

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

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

"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; and

"Whereas we support the efforts of the newly formed OSECC (Ontarians Seeking Equal Cancer Care), founded by Gerry Loughheed 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 elim-

inate the health care apartheid which exists presently in the province of Ontario.”

They keep coming in. I'm pleased to once again add my name to this petition. We will not give up the fight.

PROTECTION OF MINORS

Mr Raminder Gill (Bramalea-Gore-Malton-Springdale): I've got a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

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

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

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

“To enact legislation which will:

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

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

Since I agree with it, I affix my name to it.

NORTHERN HEALTH TRAVEL GRANT

Mr Rick Bartolucci (Sudbury): I have another 1,000-name petition. It is a petition to the Ontario Legislature. It is northerners demanding the Mike Harris government eliminate the health care apartheid and the discrimination being practised in Ontario.

Mr James J. Bradley (St Catharines): That's not eliminated yet.

Mr Bartolucci: It is not eliminated yet.

“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;”—and that's discrimination—“and

“Whereas a cancer tumour knows no health travel policy or geographic location;”—and that's a fact—“and

“Whereas a recently released Oracle research poll confirms that 92% of Ontarians support equal health travel funding;”—and that's fairness—“and

“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 of Ontario; and

“Whereas we support the efforts of ... OSECC (Ontarians Seeking Equal Cancer Care), founded by Gerry Loughheed 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 and the discrimination which exists presently in the province of Ontario.”

I affix my signature to this petition because I'm in full agreement and give it to Katherine to bring to the table.

HUNTING AND FISHING LEGISLATION

Mr Garfield Dunlop (Simcoe North): To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas Premier Mike Harris committed in August of this year at the International Symposium in Ottawa to see hunting and fishing legislation introduced at Queen's Park;

“Whereas the Minister of Natural Resources, the Hon John Snobelen, has vowed on several occasions to bring forth legislation pertaining to hunting and fishing;

“Whereas hunting and fishing continues to be an important industry in Ontario because of its recreational, economic and humane benefits to the province of Ontario;

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

“That the provincial Ministry of Natural Resources bring forward as soon as possible an act entrenching hunting and fishing in the province of Ontario.”

I'll affix my name to that too.

SERVICES FOR THE DEVELOPMENTALLY DISABLED

Ms Caroline Di Cocco (Sarnia-Lambton): This is a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

“Whereas it has been determined that recent funding allocations to the developmental services sector in the communities of Sarnia-Lambton, Chatham-Kent and Windsor-Essex have been determined to be grossly inadequate to meet critical and urgent needs;

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

“That the Ministry of Community and Social Services immediately review the funding allocations to the communities of Sarnia-Lambton, Chatham-Kent and Windsor-Essex, and provide funding in keeping with the requests made by families or their agents.”

I affix my signature to this petition as I agree with its contents.

PROTECTION OF MINORS

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

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

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

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

"To enact legislation which will:

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

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

I'm pleased to affix my signature to this petition.

HEALTH CARE FUNDING

Mr James J. Bradley (St Catharines): The petition reads as follows:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas cancer patients in Ontario requiring radiation treatment face unacceptable delays and are often forced to travel to the United States to receive medical attention;

"Whereas many prescription drugs which would help patients with a variety of medical conditions such as macular degeneration, multiple sclerosis, arthritis, diabetes and heart failure are not covered by OHIP;

"Whereas many residents of St Catharines and other communities in Ontario are unable to find a family doctor as a result of the growing doctor shortage we have experienced during the tenure of the Harris government;

Whereas many assistive devices that could aid patients in Ontario are not eligible for funding from the Ontario Ministry of Health;

"Whereas community care access centres have inadequate funding to carry out their responsibilities for long-term and home care;

"Whereas the Harris government has now spent over \$185 million on blatantly partisan government advertising in the form of glossy brochures and television and radio ads;

"We, the undersigned, call upon the Conservative government of Mike Harris to immediately end their abuse of public office and terminate any further expenditure on political advertising."

Of course I sign this petition as I'm in complete agreement with its content.

REGISTRATION OF VINTAGE CARS

Mr John O'Toole (Durham): I'm pleased to present a petition. A lot of work has been put into this by Dave Boyd, who's one of my constituents, and others who are antique car collectors and restorers.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas there are many Ontarians who have a passion for perfection in the restoration of vintage vehicles; and

"Whereas unlike many other jurisdictions, Ontario vintage automobile enthusiasts are unable to register their vehicles using the original year of manufacture licence plates; and

"Whereas Durham MPP John R. O'Toole and former MPP John Parker have worked together to recognize the desire of vintage car collectors to register their vehicles using vintage plates; and

"Whereas the Honourable David Turnbull as Minister of Transportation has the power to change the existing regulation;

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

"To pass Bill 99 or to amend the Highway Traffic Act to allow vintage auto enthusiasts to use year of manufacture plates."

I'm pleased to support this on behalf of thousands of antique car enthusiasts in Ontario.

HUNTING IN WILDERNESS PARKS

Mr Michael Gravelle (Thunder Bay-Superior North): This is a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario. I've received many petitions relating to this issue and I hope we get a formal response from the ministry soon.

"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;

"Whereas opening wilderness parks to hunters undermines the principles the parks were established to fulfil, 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."

I support this petition and I'm pleased to add my name to it.

1510

EMPLOYMENT STANDARDS

Mr David Christopherson (Hamilton West): I have a petition forwarded to me by UAW local 251 in Wallaceburg. The petition reads as follows:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the proposed changes to the Employment Standards Act would take us back to the late 1800s' standards; and

"Whereas most jurisdictions in the world are reducing the level of overtime required; and

"Whereas these changes would allow companies to force overtime up to 60 hours per week; and

"Whereas the proposed changes will allow companies the right to average overtime over three weeks to escape paying the appropriate level of overtime pay;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, demand that the Ontario government implement the following improvements to the Employment Standards Act:

"Tough, proactive policing of standards.

"A living wage to ensure no one lives in poverty.

"Overtime pay after an eight-hour day, 40-hour week.

"Three weeks' vacation after five years of service.

"More paid holidays.

"Paid breaks. We need a guarantee of rest breaks in each half-shift;

"Above all, we're calling for the right of all non-union workers to vote to join a union."

I'm proud to add my name to this petition.

HIGHWAY SAFETY

Mr John O'Toole (Durham): I'm pleased to present another group of petitions from not just my riding of Durham but on behalf of all the people of Ontario: a resolution to prohibit the use of hand-held cell phones while operating a motorized vehicle.

"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 hand-held cellphones, portable computers and fax machines while operating a motor vehicle."

"We further respectfully request that" Bill 1-O'Toole—pardon me, "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 Legislature."

This could be passed immediately. I'm pleased to sign and endorse this petition.

SPECIAL EDUCATION

Mrs Leona Dombrowsky (Hastings-Frontenac-Lennox and Addington): "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas this government has reduced funding for Ontario's special education programs without regard to the impact these changes are having on some of the province's most vulnerable children; and

"Whereas these special-needs students are now struggling with reductions in the amount of support they require with respect to special education teachers, educational assistants and classroom resources; and

"Whereas these high-need children thrive on consistency and routine and these disruptions in their educational support are negatively affecting their progress and self-esteem;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to restore fair and equitable funding to special education so that parents and teachers can provide the best future for our children."

HIGHWAY SAFETY

Mr John O'Toole (Durham): I have a number of petitions here from Joan Lonergan, who is a convenor for the St Joseph the Worker council of the Catholic Women's League. I present this on their behalf. It's to myself and 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 increases the risk of collisions; 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 hand-held cellular phones, portable computers and fax machines while operating a motor vehicle. We further respectfully request that Bill 102," by member John O'Toole, "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 provincial Parliament of Ontario," and that this be passed immediately.

I'm pleased to endorse and submit this.

NOTICE OF DISSATISFACTION

The Acting Speaker (Mr Tony Martin): Pursuant to standing order 37(a), the member for Hamilton East has given notice of his dissatisfaction with the answer given by the Minister of Labour to his question concerning workplace health and safety. This matter will be debated today at 6 pm.

MOTIONS

COMMITTEE SITTINGS

Hon Frank Klees (Minister without Portfolio): I request unanimous consent to move a motion relating to the justice and social policy committee.

The Acting Speaker (Mr Tony Martin): Do we have unanimous consent? Agreed.

Hon Mr Klees: I move that the committee be authorized to meet beyond their normal hour of adjournment this afternoon, in order to complete clause-by-clause consideration of Bill 128.

The Acting Speaker: Agreed? Agreed.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

TIME ALLOCATION

Hon Frank Klees (Minister without Portfolio): I move that pursuant to standing order 46 and notwithstanding any other standing order or special order of the House relating to Bill 140, An Act to amend the Assessment Act, Municipal Act and other Acts with respect to property taxes, when Bill 140 is next called as a government order, the Speaker shall put every question necessary to dispose of the second reading stage of the bill without further debate or amendment, and at such time, the bill shall be ordered for third reading;

That no deferral of the second reading vote pursuant to standing order 28(h) shall be permitted; and

That the order for third reading of the bill may then immediately be called. When the order for third reading is called, the remainder of the sessional day shall be allotted to the third reading stage of the bill, the debate time being divided equally among the three caucuses, after which time the Speaker shall interrupt the proceedings and shall put every question necessary to dispose of this stage of the bill without further debate or amendment; and

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

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

The Acting Speaker (Mr Tony Martin): Mr Klees moves government notice of motion number 76.

Hon Mr Klees: With the permission of the House, I would like to turn over the floor to my colleague from Willowdale.

Mr David Young (Willowdale): I appreciate the opportunity to speak to this matter, a matter of some importance for a number of reasons. It is essential that this Legislature consider the contents of this very important bill so that our municipal partners will have appropriate legislation in place for the year 2001. Many in this Legislature will recall that the current legislation and some of the provisions contained therein will expire on December 31 of this year. For that reason in and of itself, it is of the utmost importance that this legislation be considered with all the haste that is reasonable.

In order to fully consider whether or not time allocation is appropriate in this instance, I would suggest to you

that it is necessary not only to consider the contents of this bill, but to consider the history of the matter with which this bill deals. It is important to consider the number of years—not weeks, not months, but years and, in fact, decades—over which the contents of this bill have been debated. I'm going to talk about that in the time I have this afternoon, because it's of some importance that we consider this is not a new initiative. This is not a matter that was introduced and discussed a matter of days or weeks ago. It was a matter of considerable debate within this province as early as 1963.

1520

I will over the next short time discuss what was involved in that debate and what numerous independent third parties had to say should be done and what governments of all political stripes did or did not do, and frankly most of it relates to the latter. Most governments simply chose to ignore the issue of property tax assessment because it was a difficult one, and it remains a difficult one. There should be no doubt about that. So government after government, regardless of their party affiliation, over the years chose to ignore this problem.

As a result, the problem continued and it festered and it grew worse and worse to the point where we, when we embarked upon this endeavour a number of years ago following the Who Does What panel, were faced with a situation in this province where in some municipalities there had not been a reassessment, a calculation of the worth of properties, for in excess of five decades, almost 60 years in some instances. So what you had was properties on the same street, similar or identical properties on the same street, in the same municipality, receiving the same services, paying markedly different taxes.

This was a problem, as I said, Mr Speaker, that did not arise over the last year or two. It's a problem that has been present for many decades. So, with your permission, what I would like to do is talk a little bit about the level of consultation, the level of investigation that has been undertaken with reference to this initiative as far back as 1963, and then talk a little bit about what has been done over the last short while and about discussions leading up to the actual bill in front of this assembly this day.

I mentioned 1963 because that is when then-Premier Robarts asked for a committee to look into this matter. It was called at the time the Ontario Committee on Taxation. This process began in 1963 and came to a conclusion of sorts on August 31, 1967, at 1 pm that afternoon. The Ontario Committee on Taxation prepared a report and provided it to the then government, a Conservative government.

To the credit of some of the members opposite, and in particular the member from Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke, partly because he has experienced some of this history himself but also because he is a student of the activities of this Legislature, he in his remarks last week acknowledged the long history, the long set of difficulties that have been wrestled with by government after government. He acknowledged that the government of the day some 25 or 30 years ago tried to do the right thing

and because of political pressure had to back away. Other governments, as I'll explain in a moment, didn't even head down this road. Even though the evidence was very clear in front of them that something had to be done, other governments didn't even head down this road because they knew it would be a bumpy one; they knew it would be a dangerous one. But it was the right thing to do. They knew that, as did the government of Mr Robarts when this report was put in front of them.

The report said a great many things, but let me summarize one of its first conclusions by saying that it clearly indicated that in 1967 business taxes in this province were far too high. I'm quoting from that report: "Local business taxes that arbitrarily add from 10% to 150% to the property taxes of business would be replaced by a uniform occupancy tax." It goes on to talk about how that may take place.

The report also talks about property assessment reform, and this is particularly relevant to the contents of the current legislation that we've been debating over the last week or so. It says, "Province-wide reassessment of property to reflect current values is a must. This too will be a matter of some years, but is indispensable because existing assessments are completely outdated and inequitable." That was in 1967, and no one who seriously considers this matter would suggest that things got better over the next 30 years.

That's where the Robarts government was, and they made some movement forward but chose not to proceed with any major reform. In 1977, approximately 10 years after the issuance of the report I previously referenced, Premier William Davis said that something had to be done and he too commissioned a report. The report, as was the case with the earlier report, the Smith report of 1967, and the subsequent report prepared by Willis Blair, were compiled by individuals who had no particular political affiliation but were in fact independent experts who could fairly view and assess and opine about what needed to be done. I will take a moment and quote from what the second report, Mr Blair's report, suggested.

It said in its earliest recommendations, at the very front of the recommendations portion of this document, "That all real property be assessed at market value." It also said, and made a point of highlighting, "That similar property used for similar purposes be treated in the same manner, irrespective of the status of the owner or its location." Of course, that's exactly what the current legislation in the year 2000 will do, if passed. But for various reasons, and many of them were political realities, no significant action was taken after the issuance of that report.

More time went by, in this instance approximately another eight years. At that point in time, in 1985, we in this province found ourselves with a Liberal government, that I believe was elected on June 25, 1985, and was in place for approximately five years in one form or another. To the credit of then-Premier David Peterson, he wasted no time to deal with what was clearly an issue of some importance. He wasted no time in commissioning another report. He wasted no time in asking the Minister

of Revenue at that time, his parliamentary assistant, who was Herb Epp, to opine about this. They got a gentleman by the name of David Goyette to assist in this regard. Mr Goyette by all reasonable assessments would be considered a fairly independent and forthright individual who at that juncture had considerable expertise to offer. That's undoubtedly why then-Premier Peterson engaged Mr Goyette to report to the minister what needed to be done in order to redress the enormous inequities that existed within this province, dealing with property tax.

In August 1985, the Minister of Revenue initiated this process and, to the credit of those involved, in October of that very same year a report was tabled. The report said a lot of things. One of the first things it said was, "The assessment and taxation of improvements to property and residential taxes in particular needed to be considered." There was a rather extensive discussion about what should be done in order to ensure that similar properties were taxed in a similar way. They consulted with in excess of 60 parties before coming to their conclusions. I might add that our consultation process was considerably more extensive; there were a great many more individuals consulted in the year 2000 by our government before bringing forward this bill, which some of my friends may wish to consider as they decide how to vote on the time allocation motion.

Let's go back to the report that Mr Goyette prepared, the one from October 1985. Here is what he said: "Assessment practice must proceed to an end state where similar properties are consistently assessed in a similar manner." Mr Speaker, I would encourage you, I would encourage my colleagues in this Legislature and I would encourage those watching, including our municipal partners, to consider the bill we have tabled, to consider Bill 140, and they will find that is exactly what we have done.

The Liberal government was told that "assessment practice must proceed to an end-state where similar properties are consistently assessed in a similar manner."
1530

Let me go on a bit because Mr Goyette, in his rather comprehensive report, made some other recommendations that were not acted on by the then Liberal government at any point in time during their five years in office; no action whatsoever on these key recommendations. But these recommendations are included in Bill 140, which we have tabled in this Legislature and hope to see passed, if it is the will of the members present.

The Goyette report talks about the following: that "the property taxpayer should be provided with an improved level of understanding as to the purpose and functioning of tax." Mr Speaker, I remind you and my colleagues and the people of Ontario that in fact we will have distributed throughout this province in the not-too-distant future a uniform tax bill, a tax bill that will be transparent, that will clearly enunciate and articulate to taxpayers exactly what they are paying, where it's going and why they're paying what they are paying.

The Goyette report, tabled with the Liberal government, said the following: that "there should be a higher

degree of predictability afforded to taxpayers in the determination of their property assessment and taxation.” That sounds very much like the rolling averages and the OPAC assessments that are underway now and are the subject of a great deal of discussion, both in the media and in this assembly. We acted upon it. Other governments before us, including the Liberal government that asked for this report, did nothing in that regard.

The Goyette report also says that “there should be an improved level of assistance and information provided to taxpayers who undertake to appeal their property assessment.” There is a proposed process that would allow for that if our legislation is passed.

I’m going to try to jump forward as quickly as I can, but I think it is worth noting that the other opposition party in this Legislature also recognized the problem. They also realized that property taxes were a problem when they were in government. When Mr Rae was the Premier of this province and was in a position to do something about the clear inequities that existed throughout this province on the subject matter of property tax, he had the opportunity to do something and he started down the road.

He started down a road that he knew was going to be dangerous. Unfortunately he didn’t complete his journey. What he did was that in April 1995, just before the actual election that followed in June of that year, he had Anne Golden and others investigate this very matter to determine what would be appropriate, what would be fair. The GTA task force was one that, I think by reasonable assessment, would certainly not be called a Progressive Conservative coalition of parties. It was one that brought together some considerable expertise, and it was one that said very clearly, when discussing the property tax situation, particularly in the GTA, the following, and I’m going to quote from the press release that was put out by Ms Golden at the conclusion of her investigation in January 1996:

“The task force undertook a thorough analysis of the property tax system and the options for eliminating the two most pressing problems—the erosion of the assessment base through successful appeals and the inequities in the property tax system. Extensive research conducted for and by the task force led them to the conclusion that a system based on actual value assessment is the most stable, reliable and equitable assessment system.”

Our government, the Mike Harris government, unlike its predecessors, acted upon the direction we received from the authors of that report and others. We knew there was a problem and we knew that it would be difficult to correct the problem, that it would be difficult for a great many reasons, which included the inaction of many of our predecessors and the fact that many municipalities just weren’t prepared to make difficult decisions when it came to taxation within their communities. But we did the right thing. Within four months of the election of the Mike Harris government, we proceeded with a process that we are here today as a part of. I said at the outset of my comments that in my view this is not a time alloca-

tion motion dealing with a debate that has been ongoing for 10 days or 10 months. It has been years; it has been decades.

The Who Does What panel was commissioned in May 1996, and it made a number of recommendations. I won’t read from that rather comprehensive report, other than to say that the panel recommended “a province-wide value-based property tax system with values that are up to date and kept up to date.” The report went on to say, “Province-wide, three-year rolling averages should be used to help smooth out sharp fluctuations in property assessments. All properties should be assessed at their current values based on current use.”

That is what the report we commissioned recommended, and that is exactly what we’re doing. When viewed in the context of the history that existed over the last three and a half decades, the idea that we are attaching some efficiency to this debate, the idea that we wish to have this legislation passed in an expeditious manner, really makes a great deal of sense.

In my remaining time I wish to point out the following: in order to draft this legislation, the Minister of Municipal Affairs and the Minister of Finance engaged in a very extensive consultation process which lasted in excess of two years and resulted in dozens and dozens of stakeholders being consulted. I’m going to take a moment, if I may, to talk about the sorts of groups that were consulted. They included representatives from the city of Toronto, from the Mississauga area, from London, Ottawa, Hamilton, Sudbury, Cobourg, the region of York, Peel region and Wellington county, to name just a few. They included extensive consultation with the Association of Municipalities of Ontario, the body that is the spokesperson for municipalities across this province. They included ongoing consultation with the Municipal Financial Officers’ Association as well as discussions with the Association of Municipal Managers, Clerks and Treasurers. The Association of Municipal Tax Collectors was also consulted, as was the Ontario Property Assessment Corp.

Their input is the reason we are now in a position to table this bill, which includes so many provisions that municipalities are welcoming, including the elimination of the frozen assessment listing, which municipalities were very anxious to see eliminated and which will make the role of municipalities across this province much easier than it has been in many years in the calculation of property taxes.

We also consulted with the business sector—and there should be no hesitation on the part of anyone in acknowledging this—because it’s essential that this continues to be a province that sends a very clear message to our business partners that we welcome them, that we are not here to put up impediments, that we are not here to place hurdles in their way, that we’re here to be fair with them, because they, especially those in small and medium-sized businesses, create jobs and create wealth within this province.

We consulted with organizations like the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, an organization, by

the way, that is a spokesperson for small and medium-sized businesses across this province, an organization that has said wonderful things about this legislation, that welcomes it. We consulted with the chambers of commerce, we consulted with the Toronto Board of Trade, the Fair Rental Policy Organization, airport authorities, power dam corporations, charitable associations and farm associations. It is as a result of that extensive consultation that we are here today in a position to discuss a piece of legislation that is fair, that is balanced, that provides continued protection to the taxpayers across this province and that I would encourage the members in this assembly to pass as expeditiously as possible in the circumstances.

1540

Mr Gerry Phillips (Scarborough-Agincourt): I'm pleased to follow the thoughtful comments of the member for Willowdale, just to say to the public that what we're dealing with here is a property tax bill of immense importance to every resident, every citizen of the province of Ontario. Among other things, it gives Premier Harris the authority to raise for the province about \$6 billion worth of property tax. It has profound implications for everybody in Ontario.

The public should recognize that this is being rammed through. This was introduced a week and a half ago, quietly tabled in the Legislature. I think we've had three days of debate. What we in the Liberal caucus and my leader, Dalton McGuinty, and I believe the NDP caucus have proposed is that at the very least this bill should be referred to a committee. We've requested that in writing. We've assured the government that we understand that this bill has to pass before we adjourn this session at Christmas. We've given our undertaking that we will commit to making sure that it passes.

It is clearly about making sure that the public and those who are most dramatically impacted by the implementation of this, and that's the municipalities in Ontario and the professional staff, the group called the clerks and treasurers—but the government has decided to allow no opportunity for a committee to take a look at this bill. I think that's unfortunate and it's wrong. There's absolutely no reason why it could not take place, other than the government is determined that there be no public debate on this.

I want to raise with the public several issues within the bill that should be open to debate. The first and I think the most significant part of the bill is that it will require municipalities that may be forced to increase taxes—by the way, the member for Willowdale said that much of this came out of the Who Does What committee. Dave Crombie and the Who Does What committee warned the government not to put on property taxes social assistance, social housing, ambulance services, but the government went ahead and did that. They put some of the most sensitive services on to property taxes. Crombie said, "Don't do it." For public information, Crombie headed up a panel called the Who Does What committee, hand-picked, 14 of them, by Premier Harris, to recommend what things should be funded by the province and what

things should be funded by property taxes. The government ignored their advice. They unanimously and strongly said, "Don't put these things on the property tax." But it has been done.

We know that municipalities in the months and years ahead are going to be in a position where they have services that are in immense need in their communities, but this tax bill will mean that the only way they can fund the increased costs is on single-family residential. That's a big part of this bill that the government does not want publicly debated.

I say to municipalities around the province, get this list of municipalities where you will be forced to put any increased needs on to single-family residential. I'll just read off several: Brockville, Guelph, London, the region of Niagara, North Bay, Owen Sound, Peterborough, Stratford, the region of Waterloo, and others. So when the public is watching this debate, there's no opportunity for any public input into this, no opportunity for this to go to a committee. This motion that the government will be forcing through on a vote this afternoon essentially cuts off all debate. In fact, the bill cannot be amended. Not one word can now be amended in the bill.

I just warn the government that as municipalities become aware of this—and by the way, many municipalities in the province of Ontario are only getting into the detail of the bill; they just found the bill a week ago. They're looking at the implications for themselves and will be surprised when they find that this thing was rammed through in a matter of a few days, from introduction to third reading, and they had no opportunity for input. This has a profound impact on municipalities. Those municipalities that I talked about, if they have increased needs in their communities, are going to be faced with an almost impossible decision. They will have to take the tax rates up dramatically on single-family residential, because that's the only source that will be left to them, or they're going to have to cut essential services in their communities.

So I say to us all, surely we owe the public and our municipal partners an opportunity to come before us to express their views on this bill. As I say, this particular part of the bill has enormous implications for municipalities. I repeat that no one wants to see property taxes increased, but with the services that have been down-loaded on to municipalities, the slightest economic downturn will have an immediate and substantial impact on municipalities. We are passing the bill not just for one year; we'll require them forever to put the increased costs on to the residential property tax.

The second thing I want to talk about is that the member for Willowdale was saying it doesn't make sense that you can go down a street in Ontario and on one side of the street a business is taxed at one rate and an identical business on the other side of the street is taxed at a completely different rate. That was what the previous seven property tax bills were supposed to be fixing. Remember that this is the eighth major property tax bill we've had in the last three years. This has been almost a

public comedy of major bills being introduced to fix problems created by previous bills before the previous bills had even been passed. That's the language the clerks and treasurers used with us, saying nothing could prove more that this is being made up on the fly than the fact that one bill is introduced to correct a previous bill before the previous bill has even been passed.

I want to remind us that for commercial and industrial businesses in the province of Ontario, more than half of the property taxes on their businesses is set by the province. I'm not sure many businesses in the province understand that when they get their property tax bill, over half of it goes to education, and that tax is set exclusively by Premier Harris and his cabinet. It's not set by the Legislature because they've taken that responsibility and they deal with it in something called regulation.

Here we have now, three years after the government began this property tax reform, a study conducted by the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, an organization that represents business; it does fine research in the province of Ontario. They advocate on their members' public policy issues, and they do it quite well. They did a study across Ontario of what businesses pay in education property taxes. Remember, this is set by the province; the municipality has nothing to do with it. Premier Harris took over education. He wanted to be in complete control of it. He now is in complete control of it. He sets the property tax rate. By the way, it raises \$6 billion. The fourth-largest source of revenue for the province of Ontario is property taxes.

1550

What we found were identical businesses valued at \$500,000—this is education property tax—in Toronto paying \$25,000; in London paying about \$20,000; in Brockville, \$23,000; in Barrie, \$12,000; and in Parry Sound, \$5,000. So you have our business community scratching their heads, saying, "Wait a minute. I thought the province took over this to provide equity. Here we are three years after they took over the education property tax, with totally identical businesses, valued by the Ontario Property Assessment Corp equally, and one's paying four or five times as much education property tax as another business. One business in Brockville is paying almost five times as much as the same, identical business would in Parry Sound."

Nothing in this bill fixes the Brockville-Parry Sound issue. When we raised it here in the Legislature, the government said, "Well, you can't fix these problems overnight." All right, but this is the start of the solution and it's not there.

Actually, it was rather ironic that when we were debating this one evening, one of the government members said, "Oh, well, Mr Phillips, you should understand that these taxes are identical to what they were four years ago and we just simply continue them." Then he went on to say, by the way, that they are the fault of the school boards from 20 years ago. I was a school board chair more than 20 years ago, and he said, "Mr Phillips, you set these tax rates 20 years ago." I see the North Bay one

here is way out of whack. Who was the chair of the North Bay school board 20 years ago? Mike Harris. So it's Mike Harris's fault. Twenty years ago he set these tax rates, according to Mr Gilchrist on the government side. This is the government that likes to blame everybody but themselves. They blame me from more than 20 years ago, that I'm still responsible for this. I just say, well, I'll hold Mike Harris accountable then for the North Bay problem, because he was the chairman of the school board 20 years ago. Mr Gilchrist and Mr Harris are going to have to get together and he'll have to explain why he's blaming Premier Harris.

In any event, here we are now into our fourth year of "reform" and businesses on one side of the street are paying four times what businesses on the other side of the street is paying. When we said, "Where's the solution in this?" there is no solution.

Interjection.

Mr Phillips: The former Minister of Transportation is choosing to raise issues. I would just say to him, without trying to get him angry, you really should get that trucker issue solved that you promised to solve. Three weeks ago you said you had a solution; it unravelled. You said you had a solution two weeks ago. You really should, in the interests of Ontario, finally deliver on what you promised, on that solution. But you're going to have to explain to the businesses—

Hon Al Palladini (Minister of Economic Development and Trade): It's called parity.

Mr Phillips: Mr Palladini's going to have to explain to a business here in Toronto when they phone up and say, "Al, I found out that if I had my business in Parry Sound, I'd be paying property taxes one fifth of what they are in Toronto. My business is valued exactly the same. I know that that Parry Sound business is valued exactly the same. You're telling me, Al, that education opportunity is exactly the same, that no matter where you live, you get exactly the same educational opportunity. Tell me again, Al, why am I paying five times what they are in Parry Sound?" There has to be an explanation that goes beyond just, well, the finance minister's in that area. There has to be a solution in this bill.

As I say, if I could see that the government was moving to a solution in property taxes in Brockville versus Parry Sound, then perhaps we could understand, but here we are today with the government unwilling to even allow this to go to committee. The public might say, "What's so important about it going to committee?" This bill will allow Premier Harris to set \$6 billion worth of property taxes. It will handcuff—

Hon Mr Palladini: It's the municipality that determines it, Gerry.

Mr Phillips: Now, this is interesting. Mr Palladini says the municipalities will determine this. If you believe that, Mr Palladini, you don't understand this bill. This bill gives Premier Harris the authority, the right—and he will do it—to set \$6 billion worth of property taxes. No question about it. If any municipality tried to do this behind closed doors, as he does—he's setting these taxes

down the hall, behind closed doors, with no opportunity for public input into it. It's just simply wrong.

The best illustration of that is the fact that here we are and there's not one opportunity for any municipality to let their voice be heard. There's not a moment for any public hearings on this. It is designed to essentially handcuff many municipalities.

I say to the public, it's a terrific opportunity to see the way this government likes to work, and that is to ram through a bill and give those who are impacted no opportunity for input. I can guarantee that in the spring, when the problems really get severe, Premier Harris will do what he does every time. He'll blame somebody, anybody. In this case he'll blame the municipalities, even though he downloaded on to the municipalities against their will. Against the advice of his own Who Does What committee, he downloaded social assistance, social housing and, I might add, transit, ambulance service. We heard from the auditor just last week. The auditor is saying that's a mistake, but the government is proceeding with that. All of those things are happening without even an opportunity for some input by the affected parties.

Mr Speaker, you can understand why we in the opposition think it's wrong that a bill of this importance be dealt with this way. By the way, this bill should have been produced weeks ago, but the government kept it hidden until after the municipal elections, dumped it out, and is now ramming it through. It's just a bad way to make public policy. I find it unfortunate. I would warn the municipalities that want to get involved in this bill that, tragically, at 6 o'clock today the opportunity for any input is completely and totally gone. I think that's unfortunate.

Mr Rosario Marchese (Trinity-Spadina): I'm happy to be engaged in this debate. We are on live. It's 4 o'clock and it's Tuesday afternoon, the day after the election. What a disaster that was, in more ways than one. But we're here to discuss yet another problem, Bill 140.

It was interesting to hear the member from Downsview. We have discussed this issue for so long, he said, it's time we move on. We don't need hearings, he said. I was surprised by that comment. Imagine that we could advance the argument that this issue was so old that we really don't need any debate in committee because it's been presumably dealt with by somebody, the government or maybe municipalities. By the way, if some homeowners are about to be whacked by a market value assessment that puts them at a higher level and all of a sudden they look at that bill and say, "Oh, my God, what the heck did this?" and they start screaming about the problem, you see—

Hon Mr Palladini: It's not a bill.

Mr Marchese: What, Al?

Hon Mr Palladini: It's not a bill.

Mr Marchese: It's not a bill. This bill is not a bill?

Hon Mr Palladini: No.

Mr Marchese: The assessment is not a bill.

Hon Mr Palladini: The assessment is not a bill.

Mr Marchese: When you get your current value assessment on your house, it shows the value of your home. It's assessed at a certain value. If it's assessed at a higher value this year than last, you're going to get whacked with a tax bill. It means you're going to have to pay a whole heap more money than before. That's what it means.

1600

Let me suggest to you, good citizens of Ontario, why the Conservatives are not taking this bill into committee. The reason we're not doing it is because some of you homeowners might find out a little more about what this government is doing and, if you found out a little more about what's going on, you might end up wanting to make a deputation in those committees. You might want to have your say about what gives here in the province of Ontario.

The government wants to be able to slough this off as quickly as it can to the municipality so that it can say, as it always does, "We've given them the tools to deal with this fairly. In the event there is some unfairness that arises out of this bill, the city has the tools to fix it. It's not us. It's them. But don't you worry. With the tools, they'll be able to mitigate those effects, so it ought not to be a problem." I think that's the way the reasoning would go if they articulated it that way, but they don't. The way they articulate a defence for not taking it to committee is, "It's been discussed. Everything is OK. We are achieving through this bill a great deal of fairness, because that's what Conservatives are all about."

If you accept, good taxpayers of Ontario, that this government is achieving fairness, which some of you might at first blush decide is the case, then you don't have to look at the bill any further. But the bill is a thick one, and I said last week that most of the Conservative members don't read those bills. They might claim that they do, but I know they don't. To be fair, it's not because they don't want to, but because they can't, because they introduce so many bills in this House, one after the other, that if they read the bills they just wouldn't be able to think, they wouldn't be able to speak, they wouldn't be able to act on anything. As a result, bills are introduced. They have a caucus meeting every Tuesday, as every other government did preceding them, and they're given the line. The line is, "This is a good bill, it's a fair bill, and let's move on."

So, taxpayers of Ontario, homeowners, those of you who are about to be whacked, and whacked with fairness, you better wake up, because when you look at that reassessment bill, that market value assessment of your home, it's going to show that you've got to pay some hefty amount for that little house of yours. The only asset you own is about to go up in value. People say, "That's the market. What's wrong with that?" What's wrong with that is that as your house goes up in value, it may be a good thing down the line if you're no longer here, it might be good for your children, but in the meantime you're stuck with a little home that's gone up in value and your property taxes are going up all the time. You're

saying, "Good God, I'm just a senior citizen and I've got very little money. I've got some, but it's not enough to pay for these problems."

Mike Harris is not coming to his aid. Most of those people are not getting the \$200 rebate. They don't have enough money to pay taxes; therefore they don't get the \$200 rebate that's supposed to make them rich. So they're not helping. The federal government gives them a little meagre sum, their meagre pension, to survive. And so they're stuck. Property value is up, taxes go up on the home, and you're on your own, taxpayer.

The member for Willowdale says, "Don't you worry about it because it's been dealt with." Sure it's been dealt with, and the people being left stuck with the problem are the municipalities that now have to find a way to help you out of the mess.

Remember the mess this government caused in its previous assessment bills? Remember that, you small business people who from time to time watch this program if you have the time? Do you remember when this government was going to whack you with 100% assessment increases, some of you 200%, some of you 300%? You were going crazy. That's what this government was doing to you the last time with all those seven bills.

We New Democrats—and Liberals, to be fair—were out there in the streets with small business saying, "This is an outrage. It will drive small business out of our cities." Lo and behold, what we take pride in, having residential and business side by side in the downtown core, would be ruined. We wouldn't have the cities we've had that Americans are proud of and come to visit. They marvel at why we can have a residential sector and small business side by side in the downtown core."

We said to the Conservative government, "You can't allow it." Where were they defending you, taxpayers, small business people of Ontario when you were about to be whacked good? They weren't there. We had to fight against them.

Remember, this is the government that said, "We are going to fix the reassessment problem." Oh, yes, they were going to fix it, and they were going to fix you good. If not for the protests, you small business people would have been in trouble and our communities in the city core of Toronto and in many other city cores across Ontario would have been in trouble. We had to protest and we did that in the streets.

What we're saying here today is, "Don't shut down the debate. People have concerns. They need to be heard." That's what democracy is all about. It's not about your passing the bill and heading off, saying it's been dealt with. That is not democracy. Democracy is about having a say. If you don't even know what's contained in Bill 140 and if they don't give you an opportunity to read it or to be heard so you have a sense of what you're about to be hit with, that is not democracy. It is most undemocratic. It's autocratic, yet this is the way this government behaves. This is the modus operandi of this Conservative government. You know that, yet you still give some of these people the credibility they don't deserve. You still

allow them to act by fiat, where you at home, not having any opportunity to know what the heck is going on, rely on these people to give you the line on what's fair and not fair.

If you accept it, that's OK, but I'm telling you this bill is not about fairness. This bill bans many municipalities, including Toronto, Hamilton, Sudbury, Niagara region and many others, from increasing the overall tax rates on business and rental apartment buildings. That means any overall tax increase would have to be borne exclusively by homeowners. Do you understand that, taxpayers of Ontario? As much as we protected small business in the past, this bill now leaves the homeowner to shoulder the burden of any tax increase. They said, "OK, we screwed up on the small business sector in the previous bills we introduced. We're not going to let that happen again." Good thing, fine, but what about the homeowners you have now left on their own to fend for themselves with any tax increases that are faced by cities? You can't deny it. It's in your bill. That's what it says. But we're not going to have any hearings on that because the member for Downsview said that we've dealt with it, that we've had too much discussion.

While we say, "It's good that you have helped small business," you're now about to say to the homeowner, "You will have to shoulder any tax burden as the result of anything the city might want to do to pay for some of its problems." I say to you, taxpayers of Ontario, this is a bad thing.

For Toronto this means a property tax increase that would have been 5% had it been spread across the entire assessment base will amount to 16% on homeowners alone. "Toronto is facing cost pressures due to transit capital needs, arbitrator labour settlements, repaying provincial loans of about \$200 million and other items. The initial estimate is that these pressures exceed revenues by \$150 million. That would amount to a 5% increase over the whole base and about 16% if it affects homeowners alone." Do you see, taxpayers, what we mean? You're about to get whacked and it's not going to be pleasant.

This government continues to download everything to the municipality, and that is a serious problem you ought to be concerned about. Mike Harris used to say—what year is this? Good God, 1992. He said to Bob Rae, the then Premier, who was considering changing the assessment system—we didn't; we backed down, because cities told us if we didn't back down it would cause the ruin of many of our cities. Some of the Tories laughed as if to suggest, "Ha, ha, they didn't do it," as if to suggest by his laughter that if we had done it and caused the destruction of our cities, he presumably would think that that was a funny thing.

1610

It's amusing, but here's what the Premier said: "Why haven't you understood that the heart, the core, of our capital city, of this province, of this country"—he was referring to Toronto—"is being threatened?" Mike Harris, the leader of the third party at that time, said that.

"It is being threatened every day. Why haven't you done an impact study on these changes in conjunction with the other changes that are happening?" That was Mike then. He was so worried that—he's not laughing any longer, the member across the way. He was so concerned. He said, "You should do an impact study, because our cities are being threatened." So at the time, Mike Harris knew we could have caused a serious problem in our cities. How things change when you get into government from the third party.

Mr Leach—do you remember him, good citizens of Ontario? He's doing OK. Don't worry about him; he's doing fine. He's got a couple of good pensions; he's OK. Here's what he said: "What we're going to do is to make sure that no segment of business and no segment of residential property taxpayers get hurt as a result of bringing in property tax reform." That was mon bon ami M. Leach. He said we're going to make sure the residential sector doesn't get hit and we're going to make sure the business sector doesn't get hit. That was mon ami M. Leach, who left us.

Mrs Marie Bountrogianni (Hamilton Mountain): Where is he now?

Mr Marchese: He's doing OK. He got an appointment from Mike Harris. He's doing OK. But he left this disaster on their hands to defend, right? I'm referring to quotes from Hansard when mon ami M. Leach was here, just for the fun of reminding them what they said.

Let me go to another quote from—I don't want to skip any; it's so important—Mr Turnbull, who is right here and is now the Minister of Transportation, although he should be the Minister of Highways because he doesn't really have transportation any more. He has downloaded transit, and he's downloaded the GO trains. What does he have? A couple of highways. I don't know why they call him the Minister of Transportation. Here's what the Minister of Transportation said at the time—

Interjections.

Mr Marchese: I have so little time. Please let me finish this quote. This is Mr Turnbull in 1991: "I would just point out that we feel"—remember that good voice you had, David? It was very sonorous and would resound from one wall to the other. Remember that? You said, "This started under the Liberal government"—

Interjection.

Mr Marchese: Hold on, David. You can't hear if you're talking. "There is too much downloading on property taxes." That was David. That was 1991. I know that things change, because society evolves. And third parties change as well, presumably for the better. He goes on to say—

Hon David Turnbull (Minister of Transportation): Are you going to talk about the tax room we created?

Mr Marchese: Hold on, David, let me read it for you. This is what you said—

Hon Mr Turnbull: Be fair, be fair.

Mr Marchese: I am trying to be fair. I'm reading from what you said. "It is inappropriate to have such a

major portion of education costs borne by property taxes."

Hon Mr Turnbull: That's why we took it off.

Mr Marchese: No, David, you can't say that. Speaker, he said, "That's why we took it off." Half of education is still—

Interjection.

Mr Marchese: Are you going to let me speak or do you want to speak? It's up to you. What do you want to do?

Hon Mr Turnbull: Do you want me to take over?

The Acting Speaker: Would the Minister of Transportation allow the member for Trinity-Spadina to speak?

Mr Marchese: Minister of asphalt and a few highways, you said you removed education from property taxes. You didn't do that, David. Half of the property tax is still education tax, only you collect it. Half of it is still education. But in 1991 you said there was too much downloading and it was unfair—inappropriate, not unfair—to have such a major portion of education costs borne by property taxes. That was then, and this is now, the year 2000. How things change. Good taxpayers of Ontario, how things change.

I have a few other quotes that I want to share with the good public. Here's another one from Mike Harris, the leader of the third party in 1995, when he was in opposition: "Let us remember, there is only one taxpayer. We must stem the old politics of downloading one government's problems on to another. During the last 10 years, governments believed that our tax capacity was unlimited," and he goes on and on. That was Mike, the leader of the third party, saying there was too much downloading. How quickly he forgets. He's been downloading one thing after the other. Good God, we're downloading everything. We've got transportation downloaded to the poor cities—I just mentioned they're only looking after asphalt and highways—ambulances downloaded, public health downloaded, more welfare downloaded to the cities, to the property tax base, to homeowners and tenants. Housing, child care, more child care downloaded to the city level, and half of the education taxes are still on the backs of the homeowner and the tenant.

Is that fair? Of course it isn't. Is it fair, based on the comments by then-leader Harris and then-former member of the third party, Mr Turnbull, now Minister of Transportation, and M. Leach, who left us? Is that fair? They said downloading was profoundly inappropriate. Harris said, "We're downloading more and more to the lower levels, and it's inappropriate." Mr Turnbull said, "It's inappropriate." But once they were in government, I guess it was appropriate to download more and more on to the backs of the homeowner, whose sole value is the property he or she owns.

Unless they are independently wealthy, most human beings have one thing they value most, that they put all of their assets, their time, their life, their sweat into: their home. That's all they've got. Many don't have any of the

extra money to pay for the luxuries some of these people have on the other side. All they've got is their house.

They said, "Market value assessment is fair. If their house goes up in value, that should be a good thing. That's capitalism. It's good." And the poor old senior says, "Capitalism be damned. I've just got a little home here, and I'm about to get whacked with another thousand bucks on my property taxes and it doesn't feel good." Capitalism just doesn't feel good sometimes. Harris says, "It does feel good, because it's fair." If you're crouching a little and you get a little kick every now and then and say, "I can't afford it," that's OK, because it's fair.

Harris also said in his Blueprint, "We will work closely with municipalities to ensure that any actions we take will not result in increases to local property taxes." You can bet your boots on that one. Yes, they've been consulting with municipalities. They've got the tools at the lower levels to fix any inequity that may arise from a bill—unintended to be sure, never intended. But I just read to you a few moments ago that in most cities across Ontario it is forbidden to increase the overall tax rate on businesses and rental apartment buildings. Who do you think that leaves to shoulder the burden? You, good taxpayers of Ontario, the ones with the big pockets, presumably, to deal with the fairness you're about to get whacked with. They're leaving you that burden.

I say to you it's unfair. I say to you that income distribution ought not to happen at the municipal level, but must happen at the provincial level, where we collect income tax on the basis of income, ability to pay. Most of us in Canada have generally agreed that it's a good and fair philosophy, that if you want to distribute income according to people's ability to pay and if you want to distribute income according to issues that really matter to all of us, it ought to be done at the provincial level through the collection of income taxes done by the province. But if you distribute housing, transportation, education, child care and welfare downward, on the backs of the homeowner and the tenant, it is not fair, like Mr Turnbull said; it's inappropriate. It was inappropriate in 1991. I tell you it's inappropriate in 2000 and on.

1620

Ms Mulvale, the president of AMO, the Association of Municipalities of Ontario, said, "The government has been clear that it wants to see the property tax burden on business to decrease significantly." Then she goes on to say, "This is a reasonable goal, and one supported by AMO. Achieving it is important to the competitiveness of Ontario. However," she adds—remember, this is a Tory individual, perhaps a red Tory, I'm not sure; I don't know her very well. But she's at least concerned that as much as you want to help business, you then have the problem of helping the other people who are about to be hit with an increase. She says, "If the current income redistribution program remains on the property tax base, eg, welfare, social housing etc, achieving this goal shifts more tax burden to the residential taxpayer."

You see, it's not just me saying that because I feel I want to say that. I am reflecting the concerns of Con-

servative city councillors and the president of AMO, who say the same thing. Income redistribution is wrong if it's on the backs of the property taxpayers. It's wrong. She says it; I say it; we say it as a party. What Ms Mulvale said is, "We've got to upload, not download," and she said that's what she's going to be working on, as the president of AMO, for the next couple of years. God bless. I hope she has an effect on this government in a way that we in opposition do not, or appear not to be able to influence this government. I'm banking on people like Ms Mulvale to raise their voices and their experience as a way of protecting residents from this inequitous bill that we're about to be confronted with.

Mr Gerry Martiniuk (Cambridge): Inequitous?

Mr Marchese: You, as a lawyer, would know what that word means. It's part of the vernacular of your trade.

Another matter that I remember the member for Niagara Falls raised, because other people raised it: they said, "What about the senior citizens?" The member for Niagara Falls said, "That's OK, we've got that covered. They'll be protected." Here's what it says: "Municipalities will be able to give relief to homeowners who have taxes that are 'unduly burdensome.'" What does that mean, "unduly"? What's the threshold? What's the cut-off? Who's affected? Who's not affected? Do you know? Do the members know? They haven't got a clue. We don't know, in opposition, but they don't know in government what that means. Why? Because they're downloading to the city. "Let them worry about it." This is a positive thing, say some, because it gives municipalities flexibility to respond to the needs, for example, of low-income people.

It goes on here, "Relief for low-income seniors and disabled homeowners will be mandatory." But the amount of relief will be at the discretion of the municipality. Note: "Relief for low-income seniors and disabled homeowners will be mandatory." Isn't that neat, for the Conservative government to make it mandatory so that the municipalities are forced to provide relief. Now, it doesn't say what kind of relief. "Relief" isn't defined, just like "unduly burdensome" isn't defined. So we don't know who's going to be helped.

Some people with disabilities may be helped and some may not. It depends presumably on the amount of money they've got. It doesn't matter, if you've got a couple of dollars stashed away, you may not be able to qualify, yet you have a disability that renders you unable to earn a living that would allow you to pay for these absurd tax increases that some of you are about to face.

Remember, if relief is given by the city to one sector, it has to make it up by taxing another sector, so while you have been magnanimous in giving the city the power to make it mandatory that some people get relief, what happens is that if you give relief to one group, you've got to shift it to another. Who do you shift it to? In most municipalities, it makes it impossible to shift to business and makes it impossible to shift to the landlords of this province. If that's the case, who is stuck with the burden? It's the homeowner. That's why we're saying to these

people that the download has caused a tremendous burden on municipalities, one that leaves them very vulnerable now, in good economic times, and will leave them more than vulnerable in bad economic times. You certainly know, taxpayers, that if there are bad economic times as we experienced in 1990 to late 1994, the cities won't have the money. They don't have the tax base. Their only tax base is property tax and user fees on the services they provide. It's all they've got.

What do you think, taxpayers of Ontario, will happen? If the city's able to prevent some of these market value assessment shifts by the tools it adopts, but there are pressures because of the download to increase property taxes generally, the city, not being able to do that in bad economic times, will have to reduce your services that you're so proud of and you will be complaining, "Oh, my God, these cities are not the same any more. They don't collect garbage as often as they used to. They don't clean our streets. We've got vandalism all over the city. It's going to the dogs. What is happening?"

What's happening is that these people, these barking MPPs on the other side, are downloading the responsibilities to the city and it's costing them big time. They're broke. Some cities are saying they're broke. Yes, the cities are able to manage with the download. Of course they are able to manage the download. But it comes at a great cost. It comes at a cost of cutting the programs many of you value. That's OK with Tories, isn't it, MPP Tories? It's OK with you if they cut services, isn't it? Of course it is. You can delightfully say, "It's the city that has done that, not us. If you don't like it, go after the city. It's not my problem; it's their problem; they have to solve it."

That is what they're doing. They're shifting responsibilities to another level, as they do with the boards of education, where the boards of education become the foil; however skeletal they are, they become the foil for their dirty deeds. They keep them as skeletal as they are so they can continue to say: "It's not my problem here in terms of the negotiations that are going on with the teachers and boards; it's theirs. They are the ones who have to negotiate. They have the power." Isn't it beautiful? They use them as foils. Boards of education don't have the money any more because they centralized education financing. It's taken away from them. It's in their hands, centralized here in Queen's Park.

As a result, boards no longer have any flexibility, but the Conservative government says, "Oh yes, they do. They get a lot of money from us." So when they negotiate between themselves, teachers and the unions, as they call them, "Please, don't come to us. We're not the problem. Go to them and let them sort out the problems."

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Do you see what I mean by using the structures that are in place as their foil for the evil that they do unto us? That's why I say it's an outrage that many of you sometimes don't see these connections. Only by seeing and making these connections will you become such a critically minded individual that with that critical con-

sciousness you'll be able to fight back. But you can't if you're not armed. You can't fight back unless you have the information, and they're not about to give you the information. We're not having any hearings on Bill 140 because they said, "We've already had enough debate." Do you see the point I was making earlier on? You need to make the connections about what this government is doing and the assault it is waging against our municipalities and the disgraceful manner in which the burden is shifting to the homeowner, whose life is devoted solely to paying for his or her little home. It's all they've got.

Market value assessment is profoundly unfair because it fluctuates all of the time. At least for the next three or four years we'll see these fluctuations that will affect many, many citizens of Ontario. There's so much trend shifting and so much fluctuation happening in one area. Depending on who decides, Cabbagetown today is much more valuable than before, people flock to it and all of a sudden property values shoot right up. The people who are there, who have lived there for such a long time on their modest income in their modest homes, face huge increases as a result of people deciding that Cabbagetown is the place they want to live in. There's nothing fair about that. There's nothing fair about protecting business and leaving the homeowner on his or her own. There's nothing fair about that.

Mr Leach said at the time, "Fairness means making sure we protect small business and making sure we protect homeowners." That's what he said then. That's what this government said then, and they're not doing it. They said downloading is inappropriate and wrong. It was wrong then, and it's wrong today. And more downloading is happening with the passage of time. As a result, you, citizens and taxpayers, are on your own. You're on your own to fend for yourself. It's Darwinism at its best. It's a Darwinian world. You survive on your own or you do not.

There's no point in coming to cry to one of the provincial members, saying, "Oh, my God, what am I going to do?" because they're just going to refer you to the city. They're going to say, "Go to the city. Let them fix it." But it's they who are culpable, because they're the ones who introduce the laws like Bill 140, and they're saying, "Go to the city. They've got the tools to fix it." You won't be able to say, "Oh, woe is me. What shall I do now?" because these members are not going to be there to protect you, to mitigate the problems for you, because they've just protected business, which we argued was good, but they're not protecting the homeowner, which we argue is bad and unfair.

There's nothing fair about this bill. Good citizens, if you believe what we're saying, you have to go after these Tories, you have to go after the Premier, you have to go after these ministers and these MPPs. You have to demand hearings, you have to demand they bring back fairness, as they said in 1991, 1992, 1993, 1994 and 1995.

Mr Joseph N. Tascona (Barrie-Simcoe-Bradford): I'm very pleased to join in the debate with respect to Bill

140, which is entitled the Continued Protection for Property Taxpayers Act, 2000. Certainly we've heard from a number of speakers here today. What we're trying to achieve here is tax fairness and to continue to provide protection for Ontario's businesses. This bill reflects the intent of our government to restore fairness to the property tax system, not in one day or one week or one year but over a period of time that is manageable and through a system that respects the needs and concerns of all stakeholders.

I reflect on my time as a municipal councillor, which spanned two terms on the Barrie city council, from 1991 until 1995. Everyone who has been a municipal councillor has heard over the years provincial leaders, provincial politicians and municipal politicians say over and over that the existing tax system in the province of Ontario was both outdated and unfair. Yet year after year, nothing was done about it; a lot of talk but no action. The same talk occurred on the unfairness that existed in policing services across the province in the lost decade.

There was a certain will, but only the will to create words. "Disentanglement"—remember that one from the NDP? Bob Rae, Floyd Laughren and Ed Philip used it every time they addressed municipal leaders, but did nothing. David Peterson was going to avoid duplication and so was his Minister of Finance at the time, Bob Nixon. But they were so busy raising taxes, adding civil servants and increasing the welfare rolls that they did nothing about duplication of services between the municipality and the province. One only needs to look at the operation of Ontario Hydro between 1985 and 1995 to see the non-leadership they provided. It is this government that had the courage to reform the property tax system, a system that was grossly out of date and extremely unfair.

Of course, restoring fairness to such an outdated tax system is a monumental task which is complex, to say the least, starting with over 700 municipalities. First of all, it requires a great deal of knowledge and the willingness to learn from provincial and municipal leaders as well as financial administrators. Second, it requires time and patience because inevitably unforeseen problems will arise. My understanding is that when the state of Florida implemented property tax reform, the process took over 10 years to achieve fairness.

Mrs Leona Dombrowsky (Hastings-Frontenac-Lennox and Addington): Count the ballots.

Mr Tascona: The members from the other side are talking about counting ballots. One can only hope for the US presidency that they'll take a shorter period of time to count the ballots in all the counties that are in Florida. That brings up a point, because everybody probably knows that there are 67 counties in the state of Florida.

In the province of Ontario we had some assessment bases that hadn't seen any change in over 50 years. That was certainly the case in the county of Simcoe, where my riding of Barrie-Simcoe-Bradford is. Before January 1, 1994, Simcoe county contained a total of 33 municipalities, including the separated cities of Barrie and Orillia. Under the County of Simcoe Act, the county of Simcoe

restructured itself on January 1, 1994, and now has 16 municipalities, plus the city of Barrie and the city of Orillia. As part of the restructuring process, an analysis was done on the financial impact of amalgamating municipalities. It became very clear that there were severe inequities in the existing assessments. A county-wide market value assessment was proposed as one option; however, the ratepayer associations from across the county lobbied against the MVA. In the end, the county backed away from MVA and ended up with a mishmash of assessments.

Clearly, leadership and reform with respect to assessment had to come from the province. That leadership came in June 1995, when Mike Harris formed his first majority government. Municipalities began working with the government through AMO, in a process called Who Does What. A series of subcommittees was formed to look at overlapping responsibilities between the province and municipalities. Included in the Who Does What discussions was assessment reform. I think that a lot of municipal leaders felt that Who Does What committees were simply more of the same rhetoric that had been seen with Bob Rae and his disentanglement, or David Peterson and his elimination of duplication.

When you hear the members opposite or municipal representatives talk about downloading today, one must wonder how many of them sent a fax, a letter, or attended a meeting of the Who Does What committee. The fact is that the Who Does What committee provided municipalities with an opportunity for ample input, but today people want to forget that. However, by January 1998 it became very clear that many of the Who Does What recommendations would be implemented, including assessment reform. You might remember that January 1, 1998, was also the date that the new city of Toronto, under the leadership of Mayor Mel Lastman, came into existence—another courageous move by the Mike Harris government that other governments had badgered about for 25 years.

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Today, when you look at the amalgamation of the city of Toronto, one wonders, when you look at the tax base of this community, why they haven't sold off the old city halls, why they still remain in the possession of and as the property of the new city of Toronto. Wouldn't that be a prudent measure to ensure that residential taxpayers are treated equally across the city of Toronto?

As municipalities faced assessment reform, there is no question that they faced some very complex and difficult decisions. We in Simcoe county were very fortunate to have in place a very dedicated and competent treasurer at the county, Treasurer Henry Sander. Henry was not only able to work closely with treasury departments of the lower-tier municipalities, but worked closely with the Ministry of Finance staff as well. In the city of Barrie at that time there was a man by the name of Lorne Knowles, who passed away a short time ago. He was a tremendous contributor in terms of the financial situation the city of Barrie is in today, which is a very enviable situation. Those administrators took a leadership role.

As I mentioned earlier, we expected assessment reform to be complex and controversial, and of course it was. The largest inequity problems were in the commercial, industrial and multi-residential property tax classes. Without any capping or looking at any of the tools provided to implement current value assessment, it was clear that some properties would see increases in the area of 200% or 300%, whereas a property similar in value in another municipality would see its tax decrease by 50% or 75%. Of course, those facing huge increases were very vocal, and for good reason. Some businesses simply could not afford the increases and would be forced to close. On the other hand, other businesses that saw a proposed decrease wanted the decrease immediately, saying they had already been paying too much in taxes for too long.

Although it appeared to be difficult to implement, when the government brought forth Bill 79, which capped increases at 10%, 5% and 5% for 1998, 1999 and 2000, Bill 79 made life somewhat complex for ministry staff and treasury departments of municipalities, but it did make it easier for municipal politicians. They had somebody to point the finger at. By capping at 10%, 5% and 5%, we would allow businesses the opportunity to add those increases into their operations. Those businesses that were overtaxed would slowly see decreases because their taxes were already built into their operating budgets. At the same time, the Mike Harris government was creating an economic climate here in Ontario that was creating growth, prosperity and confidence in all sectors of the economy. Companies were beginning to hire, jobs were being created, construction was growing and Ontario was back on track.

But Bill 79 was a three-year plan. We must now move forward with the Continued Protection for Property Taxpayers Act, 2000. The bill itself amends parts of different acts with respect to property taxes, including the Assessment Act, the Municipal Act, the Education Act, the Electricity Act, 1998, the Municipal Tax Assistance Act and the Provincial Land Tax Act. We're not going to go into any details with respect to how each act would be amended except to say that once again bringing fairness to property tax is a complex process that affects many pieces of legislation.

In the 1999 budget our government made a commitment to maintain limits on property tax increases beyond 2000 to ensure the continuation of the manageable transition from the former outdated assessment system to the new current value system. That is why Minister Eves introduced this act. If passed, the bill would provide municipalities with the mitigation tools to meet the limits on tax increases. Mr Eves's plan is to accelerate business education tax cuts that will result in a further \$130-million saving for Ontario businesses in the year 2001. The \$130 million is double the reduction that Ontario businesses saw last year.

In closing, I just want to say that the total benefit from business education tax cuts amounts to \$325 million annually. This proposed legislation basically limits prop-

erty tax increases to 5% annually, replacing the 10%, 5% and 5% for 1998, 1999 and 2000. We should be clear that the city of Toronto will have the option of maintaining the 2.5% limit it chose in 1998 or moving to the 5% provincial limit. The city will have until February 28 of each year to decide whether to apply the 2.5% limit; otherwise the 5% limit would apply. The new 5% limit will start in 2001 and will remain in effect until current value assessment is fully achieved in each municipality.

One can only comment with respect to the treatment of the city of Toronto that they have hundreds and hundreds of millions of dollars in assets in terms of the unsold old city halls resulting from the amalgamation of seven municipalities in the city of Toronto. That could certainly go toward lending relief to any taxpayer base within this community.

Mr Speaker, those are the remarks I want to make.

Mr Bruce Crozier (Essex): I'm pleased today to rise to speak to this motion, that being a time allocation motion. My mother used to say, when you lost track of the count of things, that we're doing this for the umpteenth time. I think that's appropriate today in this time allocation motion, although I did take time to have a look and see that we have in this Legislature used time allocation motions to an almost unprecedented height, and that's unfortunate.

In any event, part of what's being spoken to today is the bill itself, Bill 140, and part of what's being spoken to is the fact that the government once again has chosen to choke off debate. Part of the reason they've had to do this is because, as was alluded to earlier by one of the speakers, this bill should have been brought forward a long time ago. If, after seven times, they haven't been able to get it right and knew that they were going to have to do it again, it shouldn't have been brought in so late that it has really left no option but to bring in time allocation today. As part of that motion, when it's called for third reading, there will only be one day of debate—part of a day by the time that particular event comes around.

There will be no public meetings, which is a shame. This bill affects every property taxpayer in the province of Ontario. Everyone in one way or another will be affected by this bill—good, bad or indifferent. Yet, because of the government's delay of this bill, there will be no opportunity for anyone in Ontario outside of this Legislature to comment on it. There will be, as I've said, a limited time in which we can even comment on behalf of the taxpayers in Ontario.

I want to refer for a minute to a paper written earlier this year by my colleague and seatmate, Richard Patten from Ottawa Centre, called Democracy in Ontario. I just want to quote briefly from that. He says, "Perhaps it would be instructive for us to take a closer look at what else this government has been up to that you may not have been aware of." He says in his paper, and he did an extensive amount of research for this, "The unprecedented, constant usage of time allocation to cut off debate on legislation. A tool put into the rules for use on the odd occasion when legislative debate is bogged

down, it is now in everyday use by the government.” As a footnote, he says, “It should be noted that there have been no filibustering tactics by the opposition in the last two years.”

It’s now in everyday use by this government. “Both the total number of times it has been used and the percentage of times used as per the government’s total legislative agenda are staggeringly high. Debate was summarily terminated over 70% of the time in the last session. This is far beyond the bounds of any previous government in provincial history.” So this government is sure making history by choking off debate in the Legislature. He goes on to say, “It is in excess of the combined total of all other provinces” that use it. So they’re sure making a mark in that respect. My colleague Mr Patten concludes this part of his report by saying, “The government does not want to sit in the House, but they proceed to stifle debate when they do.”

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So much for this motion today of time allocation. But I do want to say a little bit about the bill itself in the short time that we’re given to debate it, and I’ve mentioned that this particular bill is going to affect every property taxpayer in the province of Ontario in one way or another.

I want to read into the record, though, what one taxpayer has said, because as part of this bill there will be the opportunity for municipalities to give tax relief for low-income senior and disabled homeowners. It would allow municipalities to provide relief from all tax increases, including municipal levy increases, not just reassessment and related issues. It would also require relief to be provided from tax increases that result from future assessments. Again, as was pointed out earlier, and I reiterate, whenever you adjust one person’s tax down, it’s going to have an upward effect on someone else. I’m not saying that in cases of hardship or for seniors who own property whose value has escalated they shouldn’t receive some relief, but I want to read to you what one taxpayer has said.

One senior facing a big tax hike was surprised to see Premier Harris drop by a coffee shop last Thursday morning, and she had the opportunity to talk to him about this bill. I was as surprised at what he said as this senior resident of Toronto was to see him there. His answer to her: “... if you can’t afford it, defer your taxes until either you sell or pass on.” Isn’t that a compassionate way to address a senior who’s concerned about escalating taxes? Die; then it won’t be your problem. That’s scary.

What the Premier was saying to this senior whose taxes are going to escalate under this bill is, “Well, if it goes too high we’ll just let the municipality put a lien on your property.” This may be—I don’t know in this particular instance, but I think it applies to many—the only accumulation of some small bit of wealth that somebody has had. Seniors don’t like debt, but that’s exactly what the Premier was saying to them. “If you don’t think you can pay those taxes, why, just pile it on debt on your house, and you won’t have to worry about it if you die;

it’s whoever inherits the house. Or you can sell your house to pay your taxes.”

This Toronto taxpayer went on to say in this article in the Toronto Star dated November 28, “I never heard anything so disgusting in my life. If you want to stay in your house, you have to spend your children’s inheritance.”

That’s what we’re dealing with today in the eighth bill that’s supposed to be before us in words of “fairness.”

They’ve had some pretty fancy titles for the other seven bills they’ve brought before this House that dealt with property tax. There was the Fair Municipal Finance Act in 1997. If it was fair in 1997, why have we had to have a series of bills to fix it up? Then there was the Fair Municipal Finance Act in 1997, presumably to fix the first fair municipal finance bill. Then there was the Education Quality Improvement Act. We know what happened to quality education in Ontario. There was the Tax Credits to Create Jobs Act and then there was the Small Business and Charities Protection Act and then—whoops, another Fairness for Property Taxpayers Act, More Tax Cuts for Jobs, Growth and Prosperity Act. The titles are fancy. I wonder what they’re going to title the next bill that’s going to be used to fix up this one. In these eight bills that have come before us, it’s a shame they use the words “fairness” and “tax” in the same sentence, because it’s very difficult to do that.

I know there are others in my caucus who want to speak to this bill in the limited amount of time we have, so I thank you for listening to me to this point, Speaker.

Ms Marilyn Churley (Toronto-Danforth): Actually, I call this the “home invasion act.” It’s a sneak attack on homeowners across the province. I raised the question a couple of times to the Premier and to the minister in the Legislature to get some answers about some of the implications of this bill, and we have not received those answers.

Let me say at the outset that I know very well from having been in government, sitting around the cabinet table, that it is not easy to reform the tax system. It’s a very complex problem, particularly around municipal property taxes. I sat for a short time on Toronto city council and, having had the benefit of sitting as a councillor and as a cabinet minister in this place, I understand fully the complexities of changing a tax system and trying to make it fairer. We shouldn’t pretend it’s easy.

The fact of the matter is, when people talk about tax change or tax reform, everybody wants their taxes to go down. That’s the reality. When anybody talks about changing taxes, or reform in particular, people think, “I should get a tax reduction.” But that’s impossible. When you’re playing around with taxes, especially in a complicated formula such as property taxes and market value assessment, and the fact that the province is involved now in terms of taking about half of that property tax to pay for education and the downloading added to the city from the province, it’s all very complicated and the formula is very complicated. The reality is, somebody somewhere has got to pay more.

What's happened with this bill is the government's decided to put all the onus on homeowners to pay for any tax increases. That is incredible. That's an incredible attack on the homeowners across the city.

My colleague from Beaches-East York wanted me to speak on her behalf today as well because she's in committee and cannot come out to speak. She wanted me to tell you that the time allocation motion today denying opportunity to speak on behalf of her constituents and the ability of her constituents to come in and speak to members of the Legislature is absolutely outrageous. She wants me to tell you and all members in the House and those watching on television that the Beaches area properties have risen by an average of 34% over this assessment period. There are a lot of seniors and people on fixed incomes living in a lot of those homes. She tells me the Beaches-East York area is going to have the highest increases across the province.

1700

My riding, what is now called Toronto-Danforth, is also going to get some very major increases. I live in south Riverdale. It's not, I suppose, one of your gentrified areas yet, although it's getting there. It's a mixture of working-class, I guess you could say, and middle-class folks. There are a lot of people living there who own their houses who bought them many, many years ago, who don't make a lot of money and will clearly have a hard time dealing with higher taxes.

But what concerns me most about this bill—because we're not really debating the bill today; we're actually really debating the time allocation motion. For those who may be watching this on television, who don't know what that is, let me explain. I've heard others talk about what's in the bill and not in the bill and it can be confusing to people because the Tories are giving a very strange version of what they think, or they've been told, is in this bill.

Anyway, back to time allocation. What the government did was bring forward a resolution that actually cuts out any opportunity to have public hearings. Even worse in some ways is that they've cut out an opportunity for a legislative committee made up of all members, albeit they have the majority, to make amendments to the bill. This is particularly alarming in view of the fact the government had to introduce eight or nine bills the last time they brought forward changes to property tax, because they kept getting it wrong. They had to keep bringing in new bills because they kept finding mistakes or municipalities were pointing out mistakes to them. There were a lot of problems. They had to keep coming back and doing it over and over. The ability for the community to come, particularly homeowners, and express their concerns is really important.

Furthermore, even failing that, to take away the opportunity from us, the members, and I would think some of the government members would want this opportunity as well, to actually sit and examine this bill, clause by clause, and make amendments to the bill here. As I said in the question to the Premier today, I actually

have some amendments I wish to make. Some city of Toronto councillors want me, on their behalf, to make some amendments. Some of them are technical in nature and some of them deal specifically with some of the clauses in the bill that they think are unfair and will make it unworkable for them.

I don't have that opportunity now to do that. Not one member in this Legislature has an opportunity to make an amendment to this bill. Well, last I heard, we lived in a democracy, although there are a lot of people questioning that assertion today. I certainly am. This is—I mean, it sounds like a cliché—outrageous that this bill, which has such horrific implications for some people, the unfairness of it for homeowners, was introduced about, what, a week and a half ago, and we've had a few hours' debate over three days, no hearings and no opportunity to make amendments. Others have pointed out today that with the downloading—and I'm speaking specifically to Toronto now. With the loan from the province that Mike Harris decided to give the city of Toronto because he desperately wanted to be able to say, both he and Mel Lastman, "Hey, the megacity's working out"—when in fact they weren't able to make ends meet, so Mike Harris gave the city of Toronto a loan to help them balance the books and there were no tax increases in the last three years. We're now expecting tax increases and/or massive cuts to essential services. Some of these services have been downloaded from Mike Harris, and others have pointed them out: social housing, public transportation, public health, ambulance, some welfare and child care. It goes on and on.

I don't want those services cut. Do you, Mr Speaker? I think not. The government did in fairness take on—they talk about trading services. They took on some services and education, but it wasn't a fair exchange. Every municipality says that they've been burdened—I didn't mention ambulances, for instance—with an incredible load of community services they have to pay for.

I want to speak briefly about small business. One of the amendments I want to make relates to small business. I want to tell the government something. I heard one of the government members speaking earlier, saying they had consulted with the small business association and the chamber of commerce and the this and the that, and they loved this bill.

I've got to tell you I met with a couple of the BIAs in my riding, one of which was the Danforth By The Valley. They just had their annual general meeting. They're not happy. They know they're capped. They were the people, along with the Chinese Chamber of Commerce, who were out—we were the first out in the street. Everybody from the opposition parties talks about that and it's true there were a lot of people out in the streets, but my riding and the small business owners in my riding were the first out on the street and I like to say others followed. We were very pleased they came with us.

But they're not happy now because they want certainty. They're pleased they're capped again, but there

are two problems here. They don't like to be pitted against the homeowners. They know that the homeowners in their community, the people who shop in their stores, the people who buy their goods, have to pick up the major portion of a tax increase. They don't like that. They want to support their neighbours. They don't like the cap in that there is no certainty.

They made a motion at that meeting that they want the city of Toronto to work with the province to come up with a special category for small business. I think that makes sense. That's where we need to go. They made it abundantly clear to me that they want this fixed. They've been having trouble planning ahead over the past three years—this is what they tell me—because they don't know what's going to happen. They've had trouble, since the last cap was put on, knowing what was going to happen. Was the cap going to be put back on this time or not? They didn't know so they were having a hard time planning.

Those are the reasons why at least some of the small businesses in my riding are not happy about this bill, not nearly as happy as the government claims. They want that certainty.

I also want to make an amendment around an error, actually, that was made in the last bill that was never corrected; it was partially corrected in this one. There are a few hundred businesses that got caught in a loop where some were new businesses and some had just recently had their category changed. They got caught and they didn't get the cap. They were paying a hundred, two hundred, three hundred, I don't know how much more tax, than the small businesses around them. They got caught. They've been protesting ever since. I know Mr Chu in my riding was one of those caught in that loop.

The reality is that finally the government admitted—let me reiterate that—it was an error. They corrected it. Starting in 2001, I believe it is, they will start getting the cap the same as everybody else. They want it to be retroactive, and so it should be. It's outrageous that those people were paying thousands and thousands of dollars more than their neighbouring small businesses, and now the government has finally corrected that error but it's not retroactive. That is one of the amendments I really want to make and I would appreciate an opportunity to be able to do that. For the few hundred people—I don't know how many across the province—who got caught up in this error, it's been fixed, but they're not going to get their money back. They've paid it and it's been unfair, and I think in some words the government has admitted that.

I regret very much that we're standing here again today debating a time allocation motion. I think we all agree. We understand the government wants to get it through before Christmas and we would be willing to do that. We've written a letter asking for extensive hearings. Sometimes there are trade-offs, right? We need those extensive hearings, right? If that would be part of the deal—I don't like making deals with these guys, but having hearings is the most vital thing we need right

now, and the opportunity to make those amendments for our constituents, and I would say to the government members, for your constituents too. Some of your homeowners are going to be affected by this and you're going to hear about it. No matter what kind of claptrap we're hearing from day to day in here about, "It's not going to have an impact on homeowners," it is and you know it, and you're going to hear about it over Christmas, so get ready.

1710

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Michael A. Brown): The member for Ancaster-Dundas-Flamborough-Aldershot.

Mr Ted McMeekin (Ancaster-Dundas-Flamborough-Aldershot): Mr Speaker, a special thanks for getting the name of the riding right. It's difficult, so I appreciate that.

I rise to speak to the motion to limit time and want to say that I'm very concerned that this government seems to be moving under virtually the cover of darkness, waiting until the municipal election is over and sliding this in. If there is any one area in terms of potential partnership between municipalities and the province that we have ample outward and visible evidence as being in need of ongoing discussion and consultation, it's the whole area of taxation, particularly with what is becoming increasingly apparent to those who have followed this scene, as a number of the members of this House and I have over the last little while, that there appears to be a major transformation going on in Ontario, and that's a social transformation, a move to have property taxes play a dramatically enhanced role in terms of covering the costs of services, many of which the Who Does What commission—some referred to it as the Who Does What to Whom commission—said clearly shouldn't be happening.

It's been said that good judgment is based on experience, and experience invariably on bad judgment. If I could be allowed to use that as a segue, I would want to suggest to members of this House that it's OK to make mistakes. One never wants to make a mistake deliberately, but it's OK occasionally to make mistakes as long as they're new ones. My concern is that this government doesn't seem to have a commitment to making new mistakes; it seems to have a commitment to making old mistakes. As my late mother used to tell me, "Anybody can make a mistake, but anybody who makes the same mistake twice is a fool." I think there is some real foolishness here as we look at what is happening.

I would urge and plead with the government to do it right. As one who has had the privilege of being involved in a municipal leadership role, I can attest from experience that the consequences of doing it wrong, the confusion that is set in, the expense that ends up having to be picked up by the taxpayer—we keep hearing a lot of talk about there only being one taxpayer. Well, confusion around legislation like this ends up costing money.

I can recall a time when we pleaded with this government not to inflict municipal downloading and current value assessment at the same time. We spoke about

issues like the business education tax and the fact that in Hamilton-Wentworth—a community which I had the privilege of representing, and a community within that community—the business education tax, which the Minister of Finance said several years back would be moving to a provincial average, in fact left communities in the Hamilton-Wentworth area some 44% less competitive. I need to say to the honourable members opposite that that had a profound effect in terms of driving the desire of people in my municipality in particular, Flamborough, to affiliate with that great municipality just to the east that is represented by my good friend Cam Jackson, who I note is here in the House today.

The honourable member on this side of the House who spoke just a moment ago made reference to the acts and the different names of the acts that were there. He talked about the fancy names. I suppose we could call it the Fair Act, the Fairer Act and the Fairest Act and, I don't know, maybe somebody will want to call this the New, Improved and by Far Fairest Act to Date Act. But my hunch is, particularly given that we know from AMO and the Association of Municipal Clerks and Treasurers of Ontario that there has been nowhere near enough consultation on this act, that we'll be back.

I can say for the record that there are some good things in this act. I like in particular the attempt that's being made to restore confidence in the business community and to treat with fairness that sector, particularly the small business sector. The issue of targeting tax ratios is also a welcome step and one that is potentially helpful if it's done right. But I would note, and I think it's fair to note this, that municipalities tend to be pretty suspicious of moves in this area, particularly those that seem to be rushed, as this clearly does.

That fear is exacerbated by the historical reality that with the coupling of downloading and current value assessment in the last round, in my municipality there were all kinds of dumps. There was an \$80-million cut in the non-conditional grants. On an \$800-million budget, that was significant. In addition to that, there was a \$36.4-million shortfall in the so-called revenue-neutral provisions around the downloading, and that's assuming things are good. Then there's the \$35-million shortfall which I elaborated on a few moments ago related to the business education tax.

As of just a few days ago, we learned that the government-appointed supervisor for the Hamilton Health Sciences Corp seems intent—and I hope it's not government policy—on downloading another \$125 million in costs on a community whose property taxpayers, particularly in the business sector—and I gave the government some credit for attempting to respond there—are already very much beleaguered.

If we took some more time and heard from some of the people that we need to hear from, this government could easily avoid chapters 9, 10 and 11 of the Fair, Fairest, and By Far the Fairest Act to Date Act. I would respectfully suggest that there is never a wrong time to

do the right thing and that it would make some sense to slow down just a bit and do it right, hear from AMO, hear from the municipal clerks and treasurers, acknowledge that the situation where we used to have 18 property classes—we talk a lot about red tape and other things. It's now become in the neighbourhood, I'm told, of 157 tax classes with this new, simpler, improved Fairest of All Fair Acts Act.

Then there's the area of assessment drift and area rating, in which I think municipalities would have some significant input to make. I would suggest this government respect that and hear that input so that they could gain from it and value it and come up with a better bill, one that would help us all build the stronger, healthier Ontario communities that we want.

Mr Michael Bryant (St Paul's): I am pleased to speak to this bill now. It's obviously in the context where we've got yet another closure motion before this House. It's ironic in some ways that it would be on this particular bill, a taxation bill. We all know and all remember as students the story of no taxation without representation. This is a fundamental democratic right, the idea that there is some accountability and democracy involved in taxation.

It turns out that when it comes to this bill, we really have taxation without representation. I'll tell you why. Let's start with the fact that we're not really having a debate on this at all. We're not sending Bill 140 out for hearings. We're not sending it out to committee. The government is not considering amendments and really, yet again, the government isn't even letting further debate continue on the bill, on an issue that affects, as I said before, all Ontarians, every single homeowner and, indirectly, everyone who gets the services that are funded by property taxes. We'll talk about that in a moment, but that's everybody. So that's number one. There's no debate on the eighth property tax bill in three years. For those who can't believe it—"Do they really have to amend this eight times, eight cracks at it in five years?"—it's true, and we've heard all the seven bills preceding this during the debate to date.

1720

Next? Well, megacity. The bill that brought in megacity—and I'm talking obviously right now about the greater Toronto area—was brought in against the will of the people of that city. They didn't want a megacity; they even had a plebiscite on megacity. There were thousands of people marching in the streets, as we heard before.

Mr McMeekin: We had two.

Mr Bryant: The member says they had two plebiscites on it. Where?

Mr McMeekin: In Flamborough.

Mr Bryant: Next, after megacity was forced upon the city of Toronto against the will of the people of Toronto, we got downloading: downloading of social housing, public transportation, ambulance services, social services. What did that do? That's like taking a vehicle that has been driven by the province, siphoning out its gas, and handing the keys to the municipality and saying,

“Now drive this across the city. It’s all yours. But of course we’re not going to give you the fuel for the tank; we’ve taken that from you.”

Again the downloading of these services in this case was not wanted by the people of Toronto. Even David Crombie said, with respect to the property tax allocation, that in fact income redistribution programs should not be financed from the property tax base. Crombie said that in the Who Does What exercise. This bill does nothing to address that concern.

Then you have a government, specifically on property taxes, where in 1995 a number of its candidates in the greater Toronto area told the people of Toronto, “We will not impose market value assessment. There’s no way we’ll put in MVA.” They had very good reasons to say that, but then guess what happened? We got it. Now we have in the riding of St Paul’s and across the greater Toronto area pockets of people who are paying for the megacity, who are paying for the downloading, and who are paying for the failed exercise of eight bills to try and fix our property tax assessment system.

How are they paying for it? Obviously, we were told the megacity was going to be revenue-neutral, and I think everybody understands that’s just not the case. As a result of the transition and as a result of spreading the services across the GTA, we have ended up with a system which has not been revenue-neutral. On the contrary, it has cost the taxpayers of the greater Toronto area.

Next, they have to pay for the downloaded services. This has led to what has been referred to already as a regressive tax system. Why? Because it really doesn’t necessarily have to do with people who can pay. It’s like the sales tax—the property tax, that is. You might say, well, if people are wealthy enough to own homes, they should be able to afford to pay property taxes.

Number one, tenants don’t fall into that category. They’re not wealthy enough to own homes. In fact, for whatever reason they’ve either decided to rent or, in just about every case of tenants in the riding of St Paul’s, they’re doing it because they are saving their money; they can’t afford to purchase at this time. They’re paying an enormously regressive property tax, and in a far greater proportion even than homeowners, it turns out. They don’t get to see it; they don’t get a bill that says, “This is what your property tax assessment is.” It’s just put into their rent. Whenever there is a decrease in a particular area, I have to go out and try and help tenants recoup that cut, although obviously that is not going to happen under this new system.

We’ve got this bill. The people, I know, of the riding of St Paul’s and all over the province don’t want to have a system of unrealized capital gains tax. That was really the reason why a number of the Tory candidates in 1995 said they would never run on the MVA, but then they put it in anyway. At every turn there is no representation with respect to this taxation.

This is the ultimate part of being a member of society. There are certain entitlements. You pay for those entitle-

ments. Maybe you pay for entitlements you don’t even use in any one year. You’re a member of a society and that’s how it works, but there’s got to be some rationale to it. There has to be some fairness to it. The economists and the tax experts talk about regressive and progressive taxes. It’s about how we are going to assess people.

This system doesn’t make sense, so what happens? I get a lot of phone calls at my constituency office from all over the riding of St Paul’s, from McCord Road, from Shallmar Boulevard, from Russell Hill Road, from Oriole Road, and that’s just to name a few, from all over the riding, particularly in this eastern part of the riding in Leaside, and particularly in Forest Hill.

Some may say that’s not regressive because those people have an ability to pay. If the person is a senior or the person is on a fixed income, then that’s just not the case, and that’s not fair. They’re living in that neighbourhood, they’re getting a certain income and they end up having to pay for the fact that the neighbourhood gets hot. How is that fair?

“Well, don’t worry,” says the Premier, who actually went to St Paul’s. I wish he’d listen to this debate instead of just dropping by a coffee shop, but he wanted to check out what was going on, it was reported. He went to Leaside and he talked to people at a coffee shop and said, “Don’t forget that you can put a lien on your house and basically have a mortgage on your house and have it paid for through the deferred payment if you qualify.” Here’s what one lady, Ms Swallow, said in the coffee shop, it was reported. “I never heard anything so disgusting in my life,” she said to the Premier. “If you want to stay in your house, you have to spend your children’s inheritance.” Those people don’t want to put that lien, don’t want to mortgage their futures, as it were, and I don’t blame them. Besides, it doesn’t deal with the vast majority of people.

Then we heard this suggestion from the government that the province will offer some property tax break through the hardship provisions. This is the government handing over the truck with the empty tank and saying, “Drive it across town.” They’re not assisting. They’re telling the municipality to assist, the same municipality that has been subjected to the megacity and to the downloading and to the market value assessment. It doesn’t make sense and it’s not fair to those people.

I told you about the Tory candidates who said they wouldn’t bring in MVA. They did anyway. It’s this one-size-fits-all solution that is just not working. It’s not working in my riding. It’s not working in the riding I represent. I think I’ve got a new slogan for the government. One of their election slogans was—I think I’m right—“Tax cuts create jobs.” Actually it turns out tax cuts just create new taxes. This is a shell game, a result of the downloading and the megacity and all the property tax changes, a result of the cuts, a result of the borrowing of money to pay for the tax cuts, a result of wasting money printing up \$200 cheques.

There has been a revenue loss. There has been a loss of services. So where are they getting it from? There’s

the shell game. It's the property taxes, and the government is fervent in its desire not to be held accountable and responsible for that shuffling. They say, "No, it's the municipalities, it's the corporation. Don't blame us for your property tax raises."

1730

The government's fiscal mismanagement with respect to the property tax system, with respect to the whole tax base and with respect to provincial-municipal relations has resulted in the new slogan for the Harris government in the year 2000: "Tax cuts create new taxes; it's a shell game." No one is fooled in the riding of St Paul's. No one was fooled in the coffee shop the Premier went to, when he tried to explain to these people who said that what he was doing was disgusting, that this is anything but a shell game.

I urge everybody in the riding of St Paul's to call my office, to go on to the Web site and download the request for reconsideration and the appeal forms. We will work with councillors to try to get the best solution we possibly can. But make no mistake about it, folks: if you find yourself in the middle of a property tax mess, it's Mike Harris who is to blame.

Mr Steve Gilchrist (Scarborough East): I am indeed pleased to add some final comments, but first I would be remiss in not indicating to my colleagues that we are joined today in the gallery by my father, the former MP for Scarborough East, Gord Gilchrist, and my sister, Patti. I'm glad they are here because, as taxpaying Ontarians, they too are very affected by the bill we are dealing with and that is the subject of the time allocation motion here today.

I think my colleagues and I would have a lot more sympathy for some of the words that are spoken by the opposition members when we debate time allocation motions if, during the three days that had been committed to debate the first time, one single solitary concrete suggestion had been made on how to improve the act. But again with this bill, such was not the case. Neither from the Liberals nor from the NDP did we hear one specific way in which the bill we have tabled could be made better.

We heard a lot of rhetoric. We heard a lot of anecdotes, most recently from the member for St Paul's, reading a lovely little article from a newspaper clipping. The fact of the matter, though, is that the purpose of debate is presumably to highlight flaws in the legislation that's before this House, to recognize those flaws and to offer suggestions, and then presumably the government—if they were constructive and productive suggestions—would incorporate them into the final version of the bill that comes back for third reading. Unfortunately, the opposition members proved again that they are not up to the job, and they did not do that.

In the few minutes remaining to me, it is important to make sure that anybody watching, and anyone reading Hansard subsequently, understands what really is the subject of the debate here today, and that is the continued overhaul of a property tax system which has been the

bane of businesses and individuals across this province for decades. It is no secret that downtown Toronto, for example, had not updated their assessments since 1940. Small wonder the member opposite could find an example of someone whose property taxes would go up, now that a fair taxation system is incorporated and applied to every property in this province. But the real story is that for the last 60 years, that property, if it was in downtown Toronto, has been getting a free ride, certainly relative to all the other parts of the city of Toronto. I am sure many of my colleagues could give similar examples of how, in their home communities, a single-family homeowner was paying a lot more than the multi-million dollar mansions in Rosedale or Forest Hill, or even the more modest properties in the city of Toronto.

The fact of the matter is that as long as you have a property tax system that is based on the value of the property itself—and no one opposite has offered an alternative to that—then obviously, if you're going to play by those rules, the same rules have to apply to every single solitary person in this province. But that equity was never there, and no government before us had the courage to deal with that inequity.

I am proud that we have made massive strides in improving the property tax system, and this bill simply goes one step further. It gives the long-term guarantee to businesses in particular that they never have to fear assessment-based rate increases, particularly if their municipality is already at or above the provincial average for the commercial, the industrial or any of the other classifications.

Similarly, if you are a tenant in the province of Ontario, you probably didn't know, at least before the first time we debated property tax bills, the dirty little secret of how municipal governments get their money. If you build a building and you call it a condo, for the sake of a mathematical argument, let's say you pay \$1 per square foot in taxes. But that same building, if you call it an apartment, pays over \$5.20 per square foot, five times the tax load from the people in the province who are presumably the least able to afford it. Why? Because tenants don't vote at the same rate as single-family homeowners. What callous disregard for what should be one of the most fundamental principles of any taxation system, and that's equity.

We have brought a spotlight on this. Quite frankly, we are going to keep turning up the intensity of that spotlight until every municipality in this province recognizes that there has to be equity in the way they treat their taxpayers. The fact of the matter is, if a municipality like Toronto is already outside the provincial average for tax rates applicable, in this case to apartments, they will not be allowed to increase that gouging by one cent. Others may talk a good line about how they care about affordable housing, but they won't tell you that moving back to equity would, in the city of Toronto, drop the average rent over \$225 a month, almost a \$3,000 reduction in the cost of rent for the average of all the apartments in the city of Toronto.

Do you want to deal with affordability? Let's have a city government that recognizes that if you don't pick their pockets in the first place, you don't need any number of support programs after the fact to help them back out of the financial mess they find themselves in. That's the hallmark of what we are trying to do in this bill, what we've tried to do in the previous property tax bills, to guarantee that no tenant in the future is ever vexed, is ever abused the way that tenants have been abused by fortunately not all but too many municipalities in the past.

Similarly, if you own a business and your tax rate in your municipality is at or above the provincial average, you cannot have any further property tax increases related to the municipality's own needs. Any assessment-related increases will be capped at 5% and, if the city of Toronto takes up the opportunity, at 2.5% here in the city of Toronto.

Let me just make a brief point about that. In the 10 years before we were elected, from 1985 to 1995, businesses in the city of Toronto saw their property taxes go up 80%. That's right. Inflation was only 40%, but property taxes went up 80%—an average of 8% a year. Despite all of the mewling and puking from the other side, as Bill Shakespeare would say, when we first brought in our property tax bills, the reality is that the 2.5% cap per year in the city of Toronto means that after three years all of the businesses have seen less of an increase than they saw every single solitary year in the decade that the Conservatives were not in government. It's a three-for-one deal.

Mr Raminder Gill (Bramalea-Gore-Malton-Springdale): It was a lost decade.

Mr Gilchrist: It was a lost decade, and quite frankly it was millions of dollars lost to those overtaxed businesses in this city. And this city was not alone. But that has now been fixed. We certainly believe that the city of Toronto will take up the option of a 2.5% cap for one very simple reason, and this point has to be made very strongly: assessment changes themselves are revenue-neutral. For every property that goes up, there is a corresponding property that goes down. In and of itself the assessment of your property does not increase your taxes and an assessment change within the municipality, or to your property specifically, does not change your taxes.

Recognizing that fact, it will be revenue-neutral for the city of Toronto whether they put a 2.5% cap or they opt to leave it at the 5%. Surely if they care about their small businesses, as they say they do, the mayor and his 44 councillors will avail themselves of the option we've built into this bill and make sure that no business in the city of Toronto increases by more than 2.5%. It bears repeating that if there is a business that goes up 2.5%, there's going to be a business somewhere that goes down 2.5%.

1740

I know that out in Scarborough, in my riding and even the ridings of the opposition members who represent Scarborough north of the 401, over 88% of the homes

have seen a dramatic reduction in property taxes thanks to the innovations we've incorporated in previous bills and are carrying on with this bill. In my own riding some outrageous tax bills were being assessed on, quite frankly, relatively modest properties. I can think of four properties on Guildwood Parkway that were paying \$10,000 a year. Their taxes have been reduced by \$6,000. True, the city is phasing it in, but they see the light at the end of the tunnel only two years from now, the final years of the five-year phase-in that the city chose to take. Just think of the significance of a \$6,000-a-year property tax decrease to those homeowners. Those are after-tax dollars. That's like getting a \$12,000 pay increase year after year.

The fact of the matter is, the municipalities now control OPAC, the Ontario Property Assessment Corp, the entity that pursues a very rigorous, very detailed and very thorough appraisal of properties from one end of this province to another. They have made incredible strides in updating their database. They are getting very close to a system that each year will build on the sales data from properties that sold in the previous year, so that we'll have a real-time update of the value of your property and the relative value of your property compared to all other properties within your community. What a remarkable change from the system we inherited just five short years ago.

The municipalities have any number of tools that we've given them in this bill on how they can manage the change. I've talked about the caps. I want to emphasize another point. If there are any assessment-related increases for seniors or people who are disabled, earning less than \$35,000, municipalities are required to have a bylaw that will allow relief. It can be deferral, but we've expanded on those tools and are encouraging municipalities to look at outright refunds for any increase to people in those two categories.

There is no doubt that the city of Toronto and all the other municipalities around the province have seen a dramatic increase in their revenues, not by taking more money off each taxpayer, but because there are so many more homes—so many new homes have been built, so many new factories, so many new plazas. Their total intake, their total revenue has gone up by millions and indeed tens of millions of dollars across the province. They don't like to share that information, because it makes it a little tougher at budget time to apply the kind of discipline, to apply the kind of rigor to the budget process that we do here at Queen's Park and that I'd like to think all governments would take as an obligation to their taxpayers.

But the fact remains that the city of Toronto and all other municipalities already have millions of dollars more coming in every year. They don't need the money off the backs of seniors or anyone who is disabled. Here too the tools are provided. If the mayor and his councillors are prepared to put actions behind the words they uttered during the recent campaign, then I'm very confident that seniors and those who are disabled will

have protection the likes of which they have never had in this province before.

One final point has to be mentioned. When we were elected, the school boards had set business education taxes at extraordinary levels in some communities. We could not fix the problem overnight because, quite frankly, it would have taken far more money than we had at our disposal. But what we did was say that any municipality whose business education tax was above the provincial average would have that sum reduced. We have committed a total of \$325 million by next year. The province has taken that off the business education taxes in those municipalities that were above the provincial average. The lion's share has gone to businesses here in Toronto.

So the good news is that even if assessments have gone up, the peaks have been chopped off any possible increases. The peaks are coming down while the caps are keeping you from going up. The protection is really in both directions. The protections are absolute. We have given municipalities the ability to create graduated tax rates, to create optional property classes to further refine the mix and to make sure every business within the municipality is paying a fair tax.

This bill is very progressive. It builds on our past acts with a commitment to making sure everyone is paying taxes fairly and equitably. It is a better bill. It's a shame the opposition didn't offer any suggestions. I take from that they're happy with the content of the bill and eager for third reading.

The Deputy Speaker: This concludes the time allocated for debate. Mr Klees has moved government notice of motion number 76.

Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All in favour will say "aye."

All opposes with say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

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

The division bells rang from 1746 to 1756.

The Deputy Speaker: Would those in favour please stand one at a time.

Ayes

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

The Deputy Speaker: All those opposed will please rise one at a time until recognized by the Clerk.

Nays

Agostino, Dominic	Conway, Sean G.	Lankin, Frances
Bountrogianni, Marie	Crozier, Bruce	Levac, David
Boyer, Claudette	Di Cocco, Caroline	Marchese, Rosario
Bradley, James J.	Duncan, Dwight	McLeod, Lyn
Bryant, Michael	Gerretsen, John	McMeekin, Ted
Caplan, David	Gravelle, Michael	Phillips, Gerry
Christopherson, David	Kennedy, Gerard	Pupatello, Sandra
Churley, Marilyn	Kormos, Peter	Ramsay, David
Cleary, John C.	Lalonde, Jean-Marc	Smitherman, George

Clerk of the House (Mr Claude L. DesRosiers): The ayes are 48; the nays are 27.

The Deputy Speaker: I declare this motion carried.

ADJOURNMENT DEBATE

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Michael A. Brown): Pursuant to standing order 37, the question that this House do now adjourn is deemed to have been made. The member for Hamilton East has given notice of his dissatisfaction with the answer to his question given by the Minister of Labour concerning workplace health and safety. The member for Hamilton East has up to five minutes to make his presentation.

OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH AND SAFETY

Mr Dominic Agostino (Hamilton East): I'm pleased to use a few minutes to go a little further on the question I asked today in regard to injury and death rates in sites, particularly in the construction field, as you compare unionized and non-unionized. When you look at the statistics—I was surprised when I saw the minister stand up in the House today and claim that was inaccurate, that there are no such statistics available in Ontario that show the injury rates in construction fields and in the building trades area compared to non-unionized sites. Clearly, that information is available.

I'm surprised because part of that was compiled from statistics of the WSIB, by both the Construction Safety Association of Ontario and the Ontario Construction Secretariat. One of them is actually funded in part by the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board. I'm surprised the minister would not have had that information today. This is an opportunity for us to bring that forward and, I'm sure, for the minister to acknowledge he made an error in stating there was no difference or that information was not available at all.

When you look at the statistics in the electrical construction industry, the lost-time injuries per thousand workers is the way the statistics were compiled. I'll use 1998, which is the last year available. In unionized sites there was approximately 5% of work time lost in regard to injuries in the electrical field, compared to 15% in non-unionized, and that's for the province of Ontario. When you look at the mechanical contracting industry, the numbers were even more dramatic in 1998, roughly 5%, which was steady for unionized sites, compared to almost 20% for non-unionized sites in Ontario. The

numbers were compiled from information from the WSIB, the agency of the government of course that runs the compensation system for injured workers in Ontario.

The closest sense we have is the province of Alberta which a number of years ago went through many of these changes they're proposing today in the construction industry. When you compare the rates of injury in the construction field in Alberta to Ontario previous to the changes made by this government, again we're talking a substantial difference of approximately 2% in Ontario compared to five times that in Alberta.

When you look at those numbers overall, as I said today, across the industry you are two and a half times more likely to be injured on a construction site or working in the building trades if you work in a non-unionized site, not because people who operate non-unionized companies are bad people—the minister tried to put that off today—or because workers who basically work for non-unionized companies are bad people. The reality is, if you have the pressure and the rules and the regulations that workers are protected by on unionized sites, you're more likely to be able to refuse a job, more likely to be able to refuse a dangerous situation. People sit here and look shocked. To me, injuries in the workplace—

Interjection.

Mr Agostino: The member is heckling. Somehow he finds it interesting to heckle when we're talking about injury and death on a work site. I wish this government—

Mr Bill Murdoch (Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound): Where are you from?

Mr Agostino: I come from a riding where men and women, sir, every day get hurt and lose their lives working on sites. I don't need to take any lessons from you about injured workers where I come from.

Interjections.

Mr Agostino: This government doesn't take it seriously. I take the fact that men and women get up, go to work in the morning and want to come home at the end of the day in one piece—I think it's a serious obligation we all have in here to provide for people in Ontario. This government is not willing to do that. You play in different leagues from the rest of us. We owe that to people. I don't think it's humorous. I don't think it's time to heckle on it.

I can tell you, we have a responsibility in this House to do everything we can in legislation to protect the health and safety of workers in Ontario every single day of the week. All of us, on all sides of the House, have that responsibility.

The statistics are clear; the numbers are clear; the information is there. There is no doubt whatsoever in Ontario that if you work on a construction site that is non-unionized, you're 2.5% or 250 times, any way you want to put it, more likely to be injured or killed than if you are on a unionized site.

Let me tell you one more sobering statistic for the members who think it's humorous. There were 20 deaths last year. Twenty men died in construction sites in

Ontario last year. Eighteen of those men died in non-unionized construction sites. That's a pretty sobering number for all of us to remember tonight as we think this is a humorous debate.

Hon Chris Stockwell (Minister of Labour): What's humorous about this debate is your statistics. Frankly, it's embarrassing. I'd love to have a debate with you, but you have to get actual statistics, my friend from Hamilton East. Everything your question had in it as far as statistics are concerned—I went back to the Ministry of Labour and I said to them, "Can you look this up? I want to make sure we have"—nothing you said was right. Nothing. You told me in this House it's 2.5 times higher. Let me read into the record Mr Agostino's quote: "Unfortunately, the minister doesn't know his stats because, when you take the sheer numbers aside and you look at the percentage of accidents, there is a 2.5 times greater chance of death or injury on a non-unionized construction site."

I saw the little paper you're floating around. You said that those numbers were mine. Here it is. Those numbers came from the construction association, the unions; they produced the numbers. I say to the member for Hamilton East, do you know what I did? I phoned them. I phoned them between when you asked the question and tonight and I said, "Mr Agostino claims, setting the raw numbers aside, that you've weighted this to the union construction sites and non-union construction sites, because there are a lot more non-union construction sites." You fixed your roof? You got shingles replaced? A non-union construction site. You built a porch on your house? A non-union construction site. You put an addition on your house? A non-union construction site.

So I phoned the folks who gave you these numbers and I said, "Folks, Mr Agostino is saying this is a weighted statistic, that you actually took into consideration union and non-union construction sites." "Oh, Mr Stockwell, no, that's not true. We didn't."

The member for Hamilton East, the first point you made has no relationship to the facts.

Mr Agostino: You're wrong.

Hon Mr Stockwell: Oh, well, I'm wrong. Now the building trades council is wrong; the builders are wrong; the union is wrong; I'm wrong. The only one right is Dominic Agostino. All alone, you're an island, my friend.

So I checked that. Then I went to the next line. This is just scary; it's humorous. Here he said, "Your ministry has slashed the health and safety operations division by \$8.2 million." No, not a nickel was cut from health and safety. But he said \$8.2 million. Wrong again.

Mr Agostino: You're wrong.

Here we are, wrong again. The Ministry of Labour is wrong; Mr Stockwell's wrong; the union's wrong; Dominic's right. Gosh, no, Dominic's right. The whole world's wrong, but Dominic's right.

Then he said "a staff reduction by 20%." I said, "Mr Agostino said to me that we've reduced the number of inspectors by 20%." They said "No, no." In 1995, when

we took office, 278 inspectors; in 2001, 278 inspectors. Not an inspector was removed. Wrong again.

So then we looked further. He went on and told me about the fact that unionized workplaces were safer, period, case closed. I said yesterday in this House that, yes, they—

Mr Agostino: Talk about the 18 out of 20 who died.

Hon Mr Stockwell: Let's talk about that, then, Mr Agostino. You quoted from a study and tried to claim you had a weighted study here. The people who produced the study, the union, said it's not weighted. So yes, there were more deaths on non-unionized construction sites than unionized construction sites. But accept the fact that this isn't a stretch; this is pretty simple. There are a lot more non-union construction sites than union construction sites, and if you created a percentage of number of workers on non-union sites and union sites, they would be very comparable. That's what the Ontario labour council is saying; that's what the Ministry of Labour is

saying; that's what I'm saying. But apparently everybody's wrong except the member for Hamilton East.

I'm prepared to have a debate with you on this. It's a good place to debate. It's a Legislature; we should debate. But when you keep coming up with goofy questions that have no basis in reality, make up some number and shout out in scattergun heckle rhetoric about unsafe and safe, it's hard to have a debate. All I ask is one thing, to the member for Hamilton East, just one thing.

Interjection.

Hon Mr Stockwell: Here I've got the member from Parkdale, the bastion of truth, with him.

Just get your facts straight.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Michael A. Brown): There being no further matters to debate, I deem the motion to adjourn to be carried. This House stands adjourned until 6:45 of the clock.

The House adjourned at 1810.

Evening meeting reported in volume B.

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		York South-Weston / York-Sud-Weston	Cordiano, Joseph (L)
		York West / -Ouest	Sergio, Mario (L)

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

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