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of Debates
(Hansard)**

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des débats
(Hansard)**

Monday 11 December 2000

Lundi 11 décembre 2000

Speaker
Honourable Gary Carr

Président
L'honorable Gary Carr

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO

Monday 11 December 2000

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO

Lundi 11 décembre 2000

The House met at 1845.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

SOCIAL HOUSING REFORM ACT, 2000

LOI DE 2000 SUR LA RÉFORME
DU LOGEMENT SOCIAL

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

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

Mr David Caplan (Don Valley East): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: Could you tell me if we have a quorum present, please.

The Acting Speaker (Mr Bert Johnson): No, I can't, but I'll ask the table.

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

The Acting Speaker ordered the bells rung.

Clerk Assistant: A quorum is now present, Speaker.

Mr Wayne Wettlaufer (Kitchener Centre): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: I wonder if it's a point of order to point out that there are only two Liberals in the House, and no NDP members.

The Acting Speaker: That is not a point of order.

Mr Brian Coburn (Ottawa-Orléans): I believe we have unanimous consent to divide this evening's debate time equally between all three caucuses, that we forgo questions and comments and that at the end of the evening the question shall be put.

The Acting Speaker: Is it agreed? It is agreed.

I recognize the member for Ottawa-Orléans for debate.

1850

Mr Coburn: Today I move third reading of Bill 128, the Social Housing Reform Act. This act, if passed, would fulfill the government's commitment to transfer social housing administration to the local level in order to build better communities in Ontario.

In 1997, we committed to restructuring provincial and municipal responsibilities to put services into the hands of the most appropriate level of government. We said then, as we say now and continue to believe, that social housing is a service that belongs at the local level.

Local governments are best positioned to respond to the local housing needs of their communities. They are the level of government that should be dealing with the

bricks and mortar of programs such as social housing. In fact, municipalities have been paying for this program since 1998, and during that time the province has continued to administer the social housing program on their behalf. This bill proposes to give municipalities the say to go along with the pay. What's more, the Social Housing Reform Act would allow municipalities to integrate the administration of social housing with Ontario Works, child care and other social services which they deliver. By integrating these services, municipalities would serve their clients more effectively and more efficiently.

I want to emphasize that the province has taken every precaution to make sure tenants are protected throughout the entire transfer and beyond. Provincial standards would ensure that service levels, eligibility and benefits would continue much the same as they are today. I specifically want to emphasize that rents geared to income will continue to be set at 30% of income. All households in need would continue to be eligible to apply for social housing regardless of where they live in the province. There would be no decline in the number of households assisted or the number of units modified for people with physical disabilities.

If this legislation is passed, municipalities would manage and operate their own social housing portfolios, so that they would be able to provide better service to those in need more efficiently. The province would be out of the business of administering social housing but would maintain a role in setting and monitoring province-wide standards. These standards would ensure, as I've already stated, that there are province-wide rules on eligibility and benefit levels and that the number of households receiving assistance, as well as the supply of units modified for the physically disabled, are maintained.

Standards further ensure there is compliance with the terms of the federal-provincial social housing agreement and that appropriate reporting procedures are in place. The province would also maintain responsibility for mortgage renewals in the non-profit and co-op portfolio, manage the default risk and transfer federal funds to the local level.

I'd like to take a moment to describe how the legislation proposes to transfer these programs to the municipalities. We propose a two-stage transfer. The province would devolve the public housing stock, as well as commercial rent supplement units, as a complete business on January 1, 2001. Responsibility for administering non-profit and co-operative programs would follow over an 18-month period. Our goal is to have the public housing

transfer take place at the start of the new year, and we propose to give municipalities control of both the property management business and the properties. Municipalities would immediately have the say for pay for which they have been asking. Their experience with the public housing business will help them as they plan to take over the remaining non-profit portfolio. The employees working for the existing local housing authorities would be transferred to newly created local housing corporations. This would give them the necessary expertise to operate the housing units and to minimize disruption to the tenants throughout the entire transfer.

The transfer of administrative responsibility for co-ops and non-profit housing would be completed within 18 months of proclamation. The proposed legislation would simplify the administration of non-profit and co-op housing by replacing a number of different operating agreements for provincially led programs with one consistent accountability framework. Under the new funding model set out in the proposed legislation, non-profit and co-op housing providers would be given a fixed level of subsidy within which they'd be required to operate. Providers would gain more autonomy, funding predictability and streamlined accountability. The roles and the responsibilities of non-profit and co-operative housing providers as landlords would remain essentially the same, and communities could continue to rely on the talents and the dedication of volunteer boards to oversee these projects. Roles and responsibilities and operating agreements of federal providers would not change. That is a provision, of course, through the province's agreement with the federal government.

Since this government announced its intention to realign local services in 1997, we have worked diligently in two particularly key areas. First, we have sought and found efficiencies in the current programs so that we can assure municipalities that we're handing over the most cost-effective program possible. Over the past few years, the government has also achieved tremendous savings in social housing costs, in fact more than \$100 million worth, which have been passed on to municipalities. These savings were found through efficiencies and lower mortgage rates.

Secondly, we have had extensive productive discussions with stakeholders and looked at all possible options around how to bring in a better social housing system. Two government-appointed advisory bodies heard from tenants, municipalities, providers and other stakeholders across the entire province. What they told us is reflected in the proposed legislation that is before the House today. That was an extensive consultation that not only assures us that we have designed a system that will work for the future but also makes us confident that we will manage the transition to municipal administration smoothly.

Our consultations with stakeholders continued during the period following the introduction of Bill 128, including the committee hearings in late November and early December. Stakeholders have brought a number of good points to our attention and we have made some amend-

ments to the bill to ensure that it is clear and consistent with our policy intent. Members opposite participated in that process—enthusiastically, I might add.

In particular, the stakeholders told us that Bill 128 would have resulted in the termination of current arrangements for access to supportive housing without providing assurance that a better system would be in place. We heard this concern and we've responded with amendments to allow existing systems to continue until a better, more coordinated system has been fully developed. We've also added some additional amendments that would streamline the process for social housing transfers, give service managers more flexibility to restructure local housing corporations, improve the subsidy model for non-profit and co-op housing providers and clarify the overall intent of the bill.

Much has been said about the cost of social housing and the municipal ability to manage these costs. This legislation would give the municipalities the resources and the flexibility to manage the future risks through the flowing of federal funding and the transfer of public housing stock and the administrative flexibility. If this legislation is passed, each of the 47 service managers would get a share of the funds slated for that purpose in Ontario's social housing agreement with the federal government. By transferring the ownership of public housing, the province is providing municipalities with a substantial asset with a value in the billions of dollars.

I want to say very clearly—very clearly—that the public housing stock is well maintained and is kept in a good state of repair. That's not just the government's opinion. That's the opinion of two separate independent studies. Time, of course, doesn't permit me to address them here in detail, but they are available on our ministry's Web site, www.mah.gov.on.ca. I invite members opposite to check out that Web site.

As I said, the cost of these programs has been reduced substantially since local services realignment was announced. In addition, the province has developed mechanisms to take advantage of economies of scale for province-wide mortgage renewals and group insurance, and has been working with the housing stakeholders on a plan for pooling of the capital reserves. These and other cost-saving measures, and the reform of social housing programs, should ensure that municipalities do have the ability to cover the costs of social housing.

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

We also recognize that there are transition costs associated with taking on the administration of social housing. We propose to provide significant transition funding, in fact more than \$13 million, to help municipalities with these one-time costs.

In closing, the bill before the Legislature puts a vital service in the hands of those best positioned to deliver it.

We are confident that municipal governments will rise to the challenge and become effective and efficient administrators of Ontario's social housing portfolio. In fact, it does build upon the innovative cost-effectiveness and superb management of the municipal sector.

Mr Caplan: On behalf of the people of Don Valley East, I rise to participate in the debate on Bill 128. It's not with any joy or happiness, because I've got to tell you, Speaker, and all members of the Legislature, that this is bad policy. It's bad legislation. It will have incredibly serious effects for municipal taxpayers, for housing residents, for people on waiting lists. It is the wrong direction that we should be going for housing in the province of Ontario.

It's very clear that outside, third-party commentators have taken a look at the Harris government housing policies. I cite you the example of Mr Ibbitson, columnist in the *Globe and Mail*—certainly not a supporter of the Liberals or New Democratic Party—when he says that the Harris government housing policies have been a clear and utter failure. This is an example of what's gone wrong.

I would bring to the attention of the parliamentary assistant, and all members of this Legislative Assembly, a recent market survey which came out from Canada Mortgage and Housing Corp. In their survey they were talking about rental housing, and that would include social housing, talking about vacancy rates, what's available out there for people across Ontario.

The member from Ottawa-Orléans, the parliamentary assistant, I know, would want to take a moment and talk to this House about the deplorable state of housing vacancy in the city of Ottawa itself, a 0.2% vacancy rate. Just so that everybody understands, for every 1,000 housing units that are available out there, two are vacant. To give you some indication, to have a competitive housing market, you would need 30 vacant units; there are two.

It is as a direct result of the Harris government housing policies that we find ourselves in this state of crisis, and the offloading, the downloading of housing responsibility from the province government on to municipal governments, and I would add that I am not aware of any other place in the world which has taken this extraordinary step of transferring housing authority from a state level on to a municipal level.

In fact, I have not found one—not one—outside party who will validate what this government is doing for their housing policies, not one person to say that this is the right direction. Their own advisers—David Crombie, head of their *Who Does What* panel, their disentanglement exercise; municipal leaders; housing providers; members of the Legislature—have all consistently said, “This is bad policy, it is the wrong direction, it is a huge mistake,” and for some very significant and important reasons. It makes the creation of new housing supply, something that we are in dire need of in Ontario, virtually impossible. It will do nothing to alleviate the enormous waiting lists that are out there. In the city of Toronto alone, we have 60,000 people on waiting lists to get into

assisted housing. In fact, this bill, Bill 128, will have a significant impact on housing providers.

Dalton McGuinty and the Ontario Liberal party oppose this bill. It's a mistake; it's wrong. We often have discussions here in this chamber, in this Legislature, about significant matters of public policy. There's always a matter of disagreement, but on this one there's unanimity. Everyone, every commentator, says it is a significant error, it is a mistake, it is the wrong thing to do to place the financial burden for housing on the municipal level. I'm shocked, with so many former municipal politicians, that people don't or won't stand up and do the right thing and vote against this bill.

This bill is simply a piece of “trust me” legislation. It is about 130 pages, but most of the bill is contained in the back, just slipped in there. It's all in regulation. In fact, you heard the parliamentary assistant say, “We'll do this,” and, “We'll protect that,” and, “The tenants will be protected and the rent-geared-to-income levels will be protected.” Nothing could be further from the truth. We have his say-so. I would say the parliamentary assistant is an honourable man. But it's not contained in Bill 128.

What is contained in Bill 128 are sections which say that the minister may make a decision; he may do something. He's giving himself the power and authority. But there is no guarantee; there isn't anything ironclad in legislation. In fact, this is a bizarre piece of legislation, because while the provincial government is saying they want to get out of housing, their tentacles are so wrapped around various areas of housing policy as to make it difficult to understand where the provincial government's role begins and where it ends. You see, what they've done is they've taken all authority and they've said, “We're going to put it in the hands of municipalities to finance. We're going to have some standards and some other things that we want to apply,” but they also have areas where they've said that municipalities are going to have the ability to override provincial standards.

I don't know if you're aware of any other piece of legislation, any other law, where a municipal standard can override a provincial standard. I defy any member of this government to show me one, because I haven't found it yet. That is shocking and it is wrong and it's the wrong direction.

Over five hours of public hearings, we heard 18 groups, individuals and organizations which came forward and said they had significant problems with Bill 128. There were over 800 who were turned away, not given an opportunity to speak, not heard by this government. They have no interest in consulting, in talking, especially in listening.

Yes, I will acknowledge there were over 200 amendments presented at committee. I presented over 80 myself. Over 100 were adopted by the committee, and I would say that any effort to make a bad piece of legislation better should be supported. But Bill 128 is a disaster waiting to happen.

I want to talk about a few items in the very limited amount of time that I have. We heard the parliamentary

assistant talk about the condition of the social housing stock. The member is being very creative when he wants to suggest that everything is in good shape, there's no need to worry. "Trust me," says Minister Clement, says the parliamentary assistant. Frankly, the only true measure that exists out there, the only technical audits that have been done, have been done in the region of Peel. Their conclusions are startling: \$57 million is required for long-term capital replacement and costs associated with fixing up the social housing stock in Peel alone. If you extrapolate that across the province, and we heard this in committee, it's a grand total of \$1 billion being forced from provincial responsibility on to municipal responsibility.

I want to read you a section of the act, and I would like all members to understand what's happening. Subsection 46(1): "Despite any other act, a transferor does not make any covenant, representation or warranty, and no covenant, representation or warranty on the part of the transferor"—that's the province—"shall be implied or deemed to have been made in respect of any asset, liability, right, obligation or employee transferred from the transferor by a transfer order."

In subsection 2 it goes further: "A transferor is not liable to any person for the state of repair of an asset transferred by a transfer order and is not liable to any person to fix such an asset, despite a requirement otherwise imposed by another act or a rule of law."

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So if things are in such great shape, as Minister Clement and Parliamentary Assistant Coburn say, why is there a need for this section? Why does section 46 exist? Because they know full well that the social housing stock that they are transferring on to the backs of municipal taxpayers, on to the backs of businesses in the province of Ontario through the municipal tax system, is going to be a burden that is going to be very hard to bear, and they're getting out. They're getting out big time.

I've got to say I was really heartened by the words of Mayor Mel Lastman. He's a very courageous man, Mayor Lastman. He has stood up to Mike Harris, he has stood up to this government time and again, and he's called it like it is. A headline from the Toronto Sun: "Mayor Threatens Download Rebellion." From the National Post: "Mayor Threatens to Break Law over Housing Costs." "Won't Run Public Housing, City Council Tells Ontario." In Mayor Lastman's speech, he said that "the city cannot even inspect the housing stock that it is going to acquire." He says, "I find this insulting. I find this ridiculous. And I find the province completely obnoxious on this particular item." He says, and I have no reason not to believe him, that there's \$170 million in costs to the city of Toronto alone. I think he's probably low, because there's pooling in the GTA, and if you factor it across the entire GTA, it is considerably more.

The parliamentary assistant said, "Look at our Web site." What he didn't tell you was that he's referring to a 10% sampling of the public housing stock—10%—and even in the consultant's report it says that extreme

caution should be used in extrapolating this analysis to the entire public housing stock because there could be hidden liabilities and risks. He didn't want to tell you that. Instead, for the sake of having a message, having some kind of assurance and having section 46 of the act, the parliamentary assistant and the minister say, "Don't worry. Be happy. Everything is fine." I can tell you that it's not, and every member of this House who has ever been to any of the housing projects that exist in any riding of the province will tell you that's simply not the case. I've been in contact with those housing authorities. I've been to visit many of the housing projects. There is a real lack of dollars that the province needs to make available.

I was very interested in the comments of the Association of Municipalities of Ontario that the province should maintain a financial role in social housing to protect municipal taxpayers, safeguard the future of social housing and meet the demand of affordable housing.

The city of Toronto, region of York: "There is no provision for housing repair costs in the bill." It goes on, "In the absence of further due diligence and inspections, the province should retain liability for capital repairs needed."

From Peel, Grey county, the association of chief administrative officers, the Association of Municipalities of Ontario, the region of York: there is a need for an offset of the financial risks to municipalities with the devolution of social housing. It's just a further scathing indictment of the downloading exercise, of the wrong-headed moves this government is making when it comes to housing.

You see, it doesn't stop there. I think that one of two things should happen. Either the province should do a complete assessment of the conditions of the housing stock at provincial expense—be honest for once with municipalities about the state of repair or disrepair, as the case may be—and commit the dollars past this year to correct any major issues that arise, or, second, the province can say, "OK, city of Toronto, the GTA region, Sudbury, Windsor, London," everywhere there's housing, and there's no corner of this province untouched, "do your own audits. Report your findings to us. If there are problems, we will set up a specific fund to address that." But they didn't do that.

I want to talk about the fact, as I mentioned earlier, that we have a crisis. We need to build more housing. Canada Mortgage and Housing Corp says we need to build 20,000 units of rental housing per year in the province of Ontario alone. Since 1995, we've had about 8,000 units of housing—8,000 units since 1995. Consider that in that almost six-year period we required 120,000 units of housing, and the member for London-Fanshawe is quite correct: his constituents are not being served by the housing policies of the Harris government. I wish he would stand up to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing and say, "We've got it wrong, guys. We've got to get back in the housing game. We have to put our

money where our mouth is," because they haven't done that. It's absolutely shocking.

I was really disappointed by the fact that this provincial government has skimmed money off the top from the federal-provincial agreement. It's sunk into the black hole of provincial finances, and that's very disappointing.

There are other problems, other issues. It's a massive bill. This is a massive undertaking and a lot to go through.

The Information and Privacy Commissioner says, "The bill contains provisions that open the door to the widespread, and inappropriate, sharing of sensitive personal information for purposes unrelated to the original reasons for collection, and without adequate notice and consent of the affected individual." Where have we heard that before? Didn't the Minister of Health just recently introduce legislation about people's medical records which could be shared? Hasn't the Attorney General also made similar provisions in one of his ridiculous pieces of legislation? This kind of stuff is important. People's rights are not something that should be trampled on this easily. There have to be firm protections.

"A potential result of the bill is the creation of a common database containing personal information collected by diverse program areas. This represents a step toward a centralized government database that may be used to profile individual citizens and their interactions with their government. The Information and Privacy Commissioner has consistently opposed the creation of such a database as a serious privacy breach."

In the United States we've seen this kind of profiling of the citizenry and the unequal treatment, the unequal access to justice, the unfair and abominable abuses that can occur. The Harris government is intent to walk down that road, intent to imbed these kinds of practices, foreign to Canadian values, foreign to Ontario's values, into law and into administration. Shameful, I say.

There is much more in the legislation. It would take me literally hours to go over it.

Interjection: So do it.

Mr Caplan: I would certainly love to, but I wanted to point out another few areas.

The legislation is going to set up, and it makes a serious mistake when it sets up, 47 super bureaucracies, with another bureaucracy called the Social Housing Services Corp. The best housing that's out there is community-based. The co-op and non-profit housing is some of the best run, best maintained, and finest housing that you will find anywhere in this province.

Interjection.

Mr Caplan: The member for London-Fanshawe is quite incorrect. If you look, the province has now taken it over. They can appoint the directors of the board. It will not be volunteers, as the parliamentary assistant said. It's bizarre. It is a throwback to an era when housing was run at a provincial level, when you created the kinds of massive housing projects out there. The community-based programs are the ones that have worked and have worked well. Bill 128, I fear, will be the death of these

kinds of housing projects which have worked well for all citizens of Ontario.

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I will wrap up at this point, reluctantly, just to say that this bill will result in a massive property tax increase for hard-working families in Ontario, for the business community in Ontario. This bill is only a framework. It's another Mike Harris Tory "trust me" bill and it will hinder the creation of new housing in Ontario. It will do nothing to alleviate the exploding waiting lists and will have a serious impact on housing providers. Dalton McGuinty and the Ontario Liberal Party will be voting against this.

Mr Rosario Marchese (Trinity-Spadina): It's a real pleasure to have a couple of minutes to speak on this bill.

Interjection.

Mr Marchese: Well, maybe a little more than a couple of minutes, because you need the time to be able to speak to these important bills. This is Bill 128, the download of housing not just to the municipality but to the property taxpayer. The property owner, that's whom we're downloading it to. Frank Mazzilli, you know that, but you're going to get an opportunity after to speak as to why that isn't so. But that's what Mike Harris, the Premier, is doing. He is downloading this responsibility to the municipality and then the municipality is going to have to download it to—guess whom? The property owner; he's going to have to pay for this. The property owner is saying, "I'm sick and tired of the load. I can't carry the load any more."

You remember when your Premier and others used to say, "There's only one taxpayer in the city of Toronto, in the province of Ontario, in this great Canada of ours. Only one"? Well, this property owner is saying, "Holy cow, I don't want to be the only one shouldering this one. I'm tired of the load. I don't want, as a property owner, to take on the responsibility of housing, take on the responsibility of transit." You know, the so-called Minister of Transportation doesn't have transit any more. All he's got is asphalt and a couple of highways. This guy just got out of the business of transit and transportation. He's just got highways and asphalt. That's all he's got. The rest he's given to Mel Lastman. The poor guy is off to Switzerland saying, "Holy cow, what am I going to do with this problem?"

He's going to Switzerland for a good reason: trying to get us the Olympics here, he said. Before he went, he said, "I've got a message for Mike Harris: You can keep the housing and you can keep the transit and you can have it all, because I don't want it." He doesn't want it, for a good reason.

Mr Frank Mazzilli (London-Fanshawe): He wants education back?

Mr Marchese: No. Education was a good thing. You took half of the education portion out—

Interjection.

Mr Marchese: Frank, listen to me. Just listen for a couple of minutes. Education should not be on the property tax. It should not be. You were good, Frank. You

and Mike took half of it out of the property tax burden and that was good, and Mike Harris said, "Now we're helping the old ladies." But he didn't quite tell the old ladies and the old guys that what he did was to take half of the education portion out of the property tax base, but he then downloaded other things to the municipality so that poor old guy and the poor old woman still have a heavy load to carry. Here you take education out, but you now give them transportation and you give them more public health and you give them housing and you give them ambulances. You have given them so much to bear that by taking education out but downloading all these other responsibilities you, Mike, didn't help the old ladies and the old guys out there. You didn't.

That's what you said in the beginning. Remember? "We're helping the senior citizens because we're taking education out of property tax." But you burdened them with other social responsibilities and other social services, so how did you help them? Come on, something isn't right here. Someone's got to tell it the way it is. They, M. Taxpayer and M^{me} Taxpayer, did not do you any favours, did they? You didn't do them any favours, minister of Comsoc, did you? Because now they've got more of welfare, more of child care, all of transportation; they're getting all of housing, they're getting ambulances, they're getting the whole thing.

Mr Gilles Bisson (Timmins-James Bay): What does the province do now?

Mr Marchese: I don't know what the province is doing. They're about to abdicate their entire responsibility because they're going to give it away to the city to manage. Pretty soon the city will manage the province. What is there left for the province if you're giving it all away to the cities? Mr Taxpayer, Madam Taxpayer, you've got it all on your shoulders. They're taking it all away. This non-government government is saying, "We don't want to manage any more and we're going to let Mel Lastman manage every one of the important services that pertain to the province." You're giving it all away.

These guys don't want to manage anything any more, except where they do want to manage it, like education, where they've centralized it, and they've centralized it for a reason. Mike Harris, the Premier, knows why he centralized it. He says at the Tuesday caucus meetings, "We've got a whole heap of money here that we can control. We'll take it out of the hands of the trustees. All of a sudden, we've got all these billions of dollars to play with. What we're going to do is this. Here's our game plan."

Here is the Premier. "We've got a good plan here. We're going to take education away from the trustees." Right, Mike? Tell me when I'm off base. "We're going to take education out of the hands of the trustees and we're going to control it. If we control it, all those dollars that board is going to spend will be in our hands. Then we'll chop away a couple of billion. But we can't tell the public that. We'll be able to chop away at least a billion, maybe a billion and a half."

Interjection.

Mr Marchese: No, you're not giving it to Mel. You're going to pretend you're going to give it away to the boards of education so that they have more money.

"Here's the game plan. We're going to say to the boards, 'You've got more money than you ever did before,' but in taking it over and centralizing it, we've got billions of dollars that we can play with. So we can give tax cuts to our working class, because they like it. The working class likes tax cuts. Even if they don't see much of it, they like it, so we can rope them in. As we take from the educational sector, as we take from the health sector, as we take from the social services sector, all of that, we can boost the economy a whole heap by giving it to those who are going to spend it: the working class and especially the very wealthy. When they get that money and invest it, oh, good God knows how many jobs will be rolling in like manna from heaven, rolling in like water from the mountains."

You guys are good. At least you know how to protect your buddies.

Interjection.

Mr Marchese: No, I'm going to get into—

Interjection.

Mr Marchese: All right, Mike. I'm going to get back on topic. Mike Harris says he's given us a whole lot of money for research and I'm wasting it.

Interjection.

Mr Marchese: What happened, Bert?

The Acting Speaker: Order. I'd like you to address your comments through the Chair, and it's usual to refer to other members by their ridings.

Mr Marchese: I do. I always say Mike Harris, Premier, sir. I do say that.

Hon Michael D. Harris (Premier): They sent you in here with no material.

Mr Marchese: Oh, come on, Mikey. Mike Harris, the Premier, you've got to give me some credit here for having some research capability. Please.

OK, Bill 128: you'll recall a couple of years ago I said there is not one jurisdiction in the world that I know at the municipal level that is funding housing by itself. Do you remember me saying that? I've asked you guys, with all the research money you've got—because we don't have a lot. You're right, we've got some, but not a lot. Help me out. Tell me what other jurisdiction in the world—forget about North America—

Hon Mr Harris: Venezuela.

Mr Marchese: Come on, Mike. You're pulling that out of a hat. OK, I'm checking out Venezuela. I don't think so, though. No, no. I think the Premier is joking with me here a little bit. But we've got it on the record: Venezuela is funding housing at the municipal level. OK.

Premier, I was going to talk to you about the bill. All right, I'll have to do that without him.

What did I say? Very few jurisdictions in the world at the municipal level are running housing by themselves. Is that correct, Minister?

Interjection.

Mr Marchese: I know that, but is that correct? I don't know any, but I have to admit that I heard there might be one or two jurisdictions in the world—there might be. I think there was. I can't lie, but I don't know where they are.

Interjections.

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Mr Marchese: It certainly isn't one in the industrialized world; otherwise I would have known it.

Interjection.

Mr Marchese: Cairo? I'm told Cairo. OK, God bless. There is one jurisdiction, Cairo, but I can bet my boots it's not Venezuela. All right, Mike Harris, the Premier, it is not Venezuela.

Once we've got Cairo out of the way, what do we have? I say to the Minister of Housing, who are you relying on? What kind of experiences are you relying on as a way of showing that other jurisdictions have done it—effectively, presumably, because you never know. So you're modelling it on, presumably, Cairo. Is that the case, Mr Tony Clement, the Minister of Housing? Is that what you're doing? Oh, now minister of something, because it's not housing. The other day I was asking him a question about housing and I said to him, "You might as well abdicate your responsibility for housing because you're not doing anything. Why do you still have the title of housing in that title of yours if you're not building?"

There are few jurisdictions in the world doing it and you are downloading—not downloading, because it's a nice word. It's a euphemism. You're dumping your housing responsibility to those poor city councillors out there, who are saying, "We're desperate. We're poor. We're broke." Mel Lastman is saying, "We're broke," and he's saying, "Nobody can do it in Canada." If Mel can't do it, he's telling you, nobody else can.

But maybe Ashley Haugh, one of the policy assistants, can help me. Ashley, are you there? She left. Ashley, are you watching this program? Ashley Haugh, are you watching? Maybe you know and maybe you can help me, because I know you're one of the best policy assistants Tony Clement has. Maybe you know, but I need you to help me because I don't know. Ashley, if you know and we don't know, something is wrong. There is a problem here. We are not connecting very well. If you've told Tony Clement, the minister of something or other, about the dumping of housing and that that is a good thing, you've got to tell me, because if I know, maybe I can help. Ashley, yes, come back into the Legislature here. I know you were here. Come back in. Ashley, I don't see those doors opening. You better come back in here because I need your help. Send me a note. Do anything to tell me that you have the answers so that I know how to proceed.

I've got to tell you, Mr Taxpayer and Madam Taxpayer, we're on a roll here. Nobody helps us and nobody helps you. You're on your own, desperately on your own, trying to figure out what the heck is going on in this place. They're going to dump this \$1.2-billion responsibility down to the city and the city's saying, "Oh, my

God, \$1.2 billion for the next 20 years for repairs, for maintenance, for capital, and we don't have the money. Who's going to fix those buildings? Who's going to do it? There's no money. We need one point two billion bucks for capital repairs and for general maintenance, and we don't have a cent. We're left to our own devices."

Ash, you've got to help me out. It's \$1.2 billion in capital repairs for the next 20 years, and all Mike Harris, the Premier, has given is a couple of million; I think \$50 million. You know, Ashley, that's not going to do it. It's not enough. Poor Mel Lastman, I don't know what he's going to do. He's going to dump on you from now until kingdom come. He's going to dump on Mike Harris—oh, there she is. Ash, send me a little note. Give me the answers. I desperately need answers, because you know Mel Lastman. He's going to go crazy while he's in Switzerland. If he doesn't find some answers from now till he comes back, he's going to go after your Premier big time. He's going to say to Mike Harris, "You take it over because I can't. I don't have the money."

Mel is going to say to Mike—Mel and Mike—"Mike, we haven't been spending more than what we had in 1992. Our expenditures have been frozen since 1992." He's going to say, "Mike, we need your help. Inflation has been going up and we have no money from you. You have been dumping so many responsibilities, but we have no money. We're stale. We've been frozen since 1992. You keep on dumping these things on us. What are we going to do, Mike? I've got to attack you. You know that."

He's going to say, "Mike Harris, I've got to attack you. You know that I'm a good Tory, but I've got to defend my city. I can't do this alone. If I go down, you come down with me. If the city of Toronto goes down, Mike Harris, you're coming with me." That is what Mel pretty well told him before he left for Switzerland. That's what I would say if I was in charge. Mel Lastman is saying, who wants this responsibility of housing? Who wants it?

Interjection.

Mr Marchese: Now, John, that's not true. Johnny, you were not in committee; you know that. Ashley would know because she was in the committee. There were a whole lot of people who came and not one of them that I know—correct me if I'm wrong, send me a note—not one of them said, "We love the download. We love, Mike Harris, that you're dumping this responsibility on us. Mike, we love the fact that we have no money, but you're giving this to us because we like it, because we're the only ones who could do it."

Ashley, am I right? She's saying I'm right.

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker: Member for Etobicoke North, come to order.

Mr Marchese: One of the questions we were asking in committee was, "Where are the supporters of this bill? Where are they?" Deputant after deputant came there saying, "We've got a whole heap of problems."

Speaker, I've got a couple of more minutes left still and I want to read something for the record. I've got to get my glasses. It's getting harder here as I get older. I recommend these glasses to you, John. They're sexy.

Interjections.

Mr Marchese: There are some words that are acceptable in this place.

Interjection.

Mr Marchese: Speaker, here it is. Councillor Brad Duguid, city of Toronto, submission to the standing committee on justice and social policy. Here's what they have to say on behalf of the city of Toronto, not speaking for himself, but on behalf of all those right-wing councillors, Liberal councillors and New Democrats, the whole shebang, the whole group. Here's what they said—

Interjection.

Mr Marchese: John, will you listen, please?

He said, "Many financial risks are associated with the transfer of social housing to the city," are either "unknown or hard to predict ... factors" which could mean rising costs to the city including the following—I'm going to list them for their benefit, Speaker, through you.

"Interest rates: we are starting from a point of historically low rates.... We face the risk of rising mortgage interest rates at renewal and resulting subsidy increases." Stop me when you think it's too fast. "Will the province be there to help us out when that happens or will those costs fall on the backs of the Toronto property taxpayers?" Good question, right, Speaker? This is my friend here, Brad Duguid, saying this.

There are many questions here. There's a whole paper here. I can't read the whole thing because I don't have enough time.

"The loss of the federal subsidy and expiry of the agreements: the prescribed multi-year phase-out of federal subsidy, especially related to the prescribed service level standards, will no doubt put pressure on us to make up the difference.... Will the province be there to assist us when this happens or will those costs" fall on the backs of Toronto property taxpayers? You notice how the questions always go back to the burden of the property taxpayer? You noticed that, right? I'm not asking this question. It's the city of Toronto.

Interjection.

Mr Marchese: It's not funny, John. I mean, it's serious stuff, right? Come on.

"Capital repairs."

Interjection.

Mr Marchese: John, please, we're talking about something else. "Capital repairs: potential costs for capital repair costs not covered by existing reserve funds or by capital budget levels in the subsidy envelope we inherit."

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Interjection.

Mr Marchese: Look at these questions, John:

"Will the province be there to help us out when these capital repairs come back to haunt us or will those costs

fall on the backs of," guess who, "Toronto property taxpayers?"

Mr Mazzilli: There were no capital repairs when you were in government. Everything was falling apart.

Mr Marchese: Come on, Frank, please. Frank is not—I'm going to refer to him by his title—Frank Mazzilli, from London-Fanshawe. Listen to me, Frank: when we were in government—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker: Order.

Mr Marchese: —we were in a recession. Even most conservative observers will say that indeed we were in a deep recession, and some of those conservative-minded folks would say that even in that recession New Democrats put in a whole lot of millions of dollars to maintain our stock.

The Acting Speaker: Order. There's too much talking back and forth. If you find it necessary to say something and if you need to laugh—and I'll not warn the member for Etobicoke North again.

The Chair recognizes the member for Trinity-Spadina.

Mr Marchese: Thank you, Speaker, for your many kindnesses.

The city of Toronto goes on—there's much. It says: "Default: the risk of mortgage default, and more importantly any unusual costs to prevent default." Here's the question, John, from Etobicoke North: "Will the province be there to help us out when mortgages default or will those costs fall on to the backs of," guess who, "Toronto property taxpayers?"

You get the sense of the problem here, right, John? I know, you failed to realize the problems the city is going to have to absorb as a result of the dumping of this responsibility on to the municipality.

Here is somebody else from the region of York, and I think this fellow from the region of York was rather supportive of the Mike Harris government. I've got the strange suspicion that there was some like-mindedness there. But in spite of that, this is what he had to say: "Issues include"—this is one of your buddies, I suspect, although I could be unfair to him, I don't know, but I got that strange sensation. He says, "Economic risk associated with the potential for rising mortgage rates, and other market conditions such as rising fuel costs, or economic downturn" could hurt the city if they have to be the recipients of this dumping.

He goes on to say, "Underfunded capital reserves and the adequacy of funding for capital repairs in the public housing system" is an issue that needs to be addressed by Mr Santa Claus—that would be the Premier—before he dumps this responsibility on to the municipalities. "The need for a provincial commitment to a meaningful due diligence process including reviews of the condition of housing stock, as well as the organizational and financial health of housing providers."

That was one of your questions, Cliff. Do you remember? You were talking about due diligence. Here's one of the people—there are a couple here—who was most concerned about the dumping of housing on to the municipi-

palities. One of these delegates said when he came to the committee hearings, "We need a due diligence report."

What does that really mean, Mr or Madam Taxpayer? It means that people like Cliff Martin here were asking for a serious report that studies our capital needs, the extent of all the capital that we the province are the owners of, giving a fair assessment of the problems of the stock in terms of capital repairs, the costs, giving a fair assessment of what is 30, 40 and 50 years old and what needs to be in many ways fundamentally restored if not torn down, because some of them are not fit to stand.

People like Cliff Martin were saying we need to have that due diligence report. We need to know what we've got before you dump it on us, because unless we have that due diligence report, we don't know what the city is going to be stuck with. But it's not a city in the abstract; it's the property taxpayers who would be left holding the bag, the property tax load bag. People like him and others, people like Vance, want to know what the effects of that are going to be on them as tenants. Because when the city discovers it doesn't have the money to help them out, they're on their own. Mike Harris is not there any longer. The city hasn't had an increase in its own funding since 1992, and they know they're on their own.

That's why they don't want the dumping. That's why people like Vance and people like Cliff here are saying, "We're not asking for this download." The cities are not asking for this download. AMO, the organization of all municipalities across Ontario, which I will quote very shortly, is saying, "We don't want it." City councillors individually and collectively are saying, "We don't want it." Property taxpayers are saying, "Good God, we don't want it." Most of the providers are saying we should not be passing the responsibility of housing, which should properly be paid for by the provincial government, on to the taxpayers of Toronto or of any other municipality. Nobody wants it.

So I ask you, Ashley, who wants it? I don't know that. Maybe you do. You haven't helped me one bit to tell me who wants this badly, except Mike Harris. The Premier of this province wants to dump it on to the city because he knows a good deal when he sees one. He's a businessman. He knows a good deal. He's saying, "Look, if we can dump this on to the city, we don't have to worry about it. We don't have to worry about the expenses. We don't have to worry about capital repairs. The city will be blamed." People will go to the city and say, "My God, what are we going to do? We have a capital stock in complete disrepair. There's no money. What are we going to do?" Mike says, "Go to Mel. That's his responsibility. It's nothing to do with us. Good God, we just passed a bill saying they're in charge."

Mel is a good businessman. Mike Harris is a good businessman. He's shoving it to Mel and Mel is saying, "No way, José. I sold fridges in my past life. I know when I'm getting a bad fridge over a good fridge, and I don't want this one." That's what Mel said about three or four days ago. He's saying, "No, Mike, you keep it. I don't want it. It's a bad deal for Toronto." Thank God

Mel was a good businessman in his past. I suspect that if he wasn't we'd be stuck with this problem. We'd be stuck with it where a mayor of a city would take it deferentially, subserviently, in deference to the Premier and say, "Thank you, Mike, for all the blessings you give us. Don't you worry, we'll take care of it, even if we don't have the money. Don't you worry." Not Mel.

Thank God he's a good businessman and thank God that Mel is there saying, "OK, Mike, if you want to play Mr Christmas and Mr Santa Claus, maybe you can do it with welfare recipients, but you can't do it with us. Maybe you can fool a whole lot of people out there, saying you've got a gift for everyone, but you can't fool me. This is no gift for me. I'm not taking it." The Lord is merciful in many ways. We are blessed with a Mel Lastman who is a good businessman and who is saying, "I'm not taking this."

1950

Speaker, do you know what? In committee—I forgot to bring them—I think there were over 250 amendments, or at least over 200 amendments, 200 and something. Speaker, you're not listening to me. He's not listening to me. John Baird, you're listening. The amendments were this thick. I call that incremental incompetence by the government, which never can quite figure out how to do it right.

They brought in a bill without properly consulting the stakeholders, and because they didn't do it, in spite of the secret stakeholder meetings they had where people had to sign documents—Ashley, you would know this, right?—saying "We didn't see anything, we didn't hear anything, we didn't smell anything," whatever involves the senses. They had to sign on the bottom line.

Interjection.

Mr Marchese: Didn't I say, "didn't hear"? Didn't hear, didn't see. What else, John?

Hon John R. Baird (Minister of Community and Social Services, minister responsible for francophone affairs): Speak.

Mr Marchese: Didn't speak anything. See, John is my good buddy. He listens to me and supports me every time I'm here.

So these poor people had to sign on the dotted line, like a secret document of sorts, saying you were at this meeting but you really weren't at this meeting. The fear of God was put into all these participants, saying, "If you should say anything that comes out of these meetings, we will deny it." That's probably what they said. On the pain of who knows how many lashings, but that's another story. But people were so frightened and intimidated that of course they signed on the dotted line and of course most of them didn't say anything.

That's one problem. The other problem is they introduced Bill 128, and each and every one of the deputants that came said, "We have a problem with one aspect of the bill, if not the bill in its entirety." There wasn't one deputant that said, "We love this bill." So of course, at the end of it, John, 200 amendments. There's another John. You guys have been around here for a while. Have

you ever had over 200 amendments on a bill? Something is wrong. That's why I call it incremental incompetence, because it's an ever-growing problem.

Surely if you had consulted the stakeholders you would not have had to introduce so many of your government amendments. I'm serious. I think you guys passed over 100 amendments that you introduced yourselves and we New Democrats and Liberals had another 100, more or less. You didn't accept ours, of course, because you didn't like them.

Hon Mr Baird: How many of ours did you accept?

Mr Marchese: Yours? We've got no choice. You guys have the limousines. If you drive the big limousines there, we can't get in. We're not even asked to get in. We don't even know how that car glides. We don't know how that limousine drives because you guys don't let us in. Almost each and every one of our amendments were defeated, except some, to be fair. Some of them were accepted, so that you could appear magnanimous, so that you could be generous and—

Interjection.

Mr Marchese: Marie, over 200 amendments.

Interjection.

Mr Marchese: All right. Well, OK. But what about the amendments?

Mrs Marie Bountrogianni (Hamilton Mountain): You're right.

Mr Marchese: I was talking about the amendments.

What did AMO say, the Association of Municipalities of Ontario? "AMO, since the original decision was made to transfer social housing, has consistently expressed concerns about" this. AMO has expressed concerns about this since the very beginning. Here's what they say. "Income redistribution programs funded through the property tax base" is a problem, as is "the financial capacity of municipalities to increase the supply of affordable housing." By the way, everybody talked about this. Everybody talked about the inability of cities to create housing. "Protecting municipalities from significant future financial risks related to housing programs; maintaining the condition of existing social housing; ensuring a smooth social housing devolution from the provincial to the municipal order of governments; and providing maximum flexibility for the administration and accountability related to the transferred social housing." It goes on and on. There is so much by way of concern here, one has a hard time knowing where to begin.

They dumped on this bill from the very beginning when they came to those hearings to the very end. We couldn't find one that supported this government. We couldn't find one. Member for Etobicoke North, what they really, really were angry about was the fact that we have such a desperate shortage of housing and no one seems to care, not the Conservative government provincially—to be fair to the federal Liberals, they did, in the federal election, make an announcement of money, I know. They did make that announcement. Some of us said, "Better late than never."

They could have talked about this before the election with the provincial governments. They could have had some agreement with them, saying, "What do we need to do?" Because they admit that there is a problem; they do admit at the federal level that there is a problem. Let me read to you what they said: "Canada's urban regions are experiencing a severe shortage of affordable rental housing. New construction of rental housing is at a near standstill." See, they got it right. "These shortfalls, combined with massive population increases, have brought vacancy rates to an all-time low and pushed costs beyond the reach of many Canadians." The federal Liberals understand and acknowledge that we've got a housing crisis—not just a shortage, but a crisis.

Although they only made the announcement of \$170 million in the last week or week and a half of the federal election, it was better than nothing. It barely addresses the profundity of the need, but at least they made an announcement. It's a bit phony, I have to admit, because they knew M. Harris doesn't support it, doesn't want to build, so it was like making a promise that nobody would pick up. Nobody in Ontario, at least, would say with open arms, "I'm in. That's what we've been looking for." So M. Chrétien could happily say, "No, we are in. What can we do if Mike Harris doesn't want to jump in with us? But we made the promise." I know it sounds a bit phony, but I urge M. Chrétien to go on his own if he has to. If Mr Harris, the Premier, doesn't want to play Santa Claus with housing, then you, M. Chrétien, should do it on your own.

Because while I know each and every one of these Tories here—each and every one of them—does not support housing for the most vulnerable, for the working man and woman of this province who don't make enough money to have a home, opposes the construction of decent housing, you, M. Chrétien, you who have a heart, should do it on your own. We need you, M. Chrétien, because we have nobody here. I urge you, M. Chrétien, if you are watching—you or the types like Ashley who sit there listening in to the discussions of the proceedings of Parliament in the Legislature, that you would pass it on. Pass it on to Jean. Say, "Jean, we need you. We need housing. We desperately need housing for the homeless." We desperately need housing for those who have so little, not enough to afford a one-bedroom apartment, which in the city of Toronto costs anywhere from seven hundred to nine hundred bucks—if you can find it. That's at the low end. A two-bedroom would be anywhere from \$900 to \$1,300 or \$1,400. Decent, if you can find it.

2000

We're talking about people who work modestly for modest incomes, who don't have enough to buy the houses that we're building in the wonderful 905 area, where so many Tories get elected provincially and so many Liberals get elected federally. They can't afford those homes. They're looking for a modest apartment, but the private sector—you remember the private sector that the former Minister of Housing, M. Leach—do you remember him when he used to say, "We're going to

build housing. We're going to have 60,000 units"—10,000. Sorry, M. Leach, I don't want to misspeak you. Do you remember you used to say, "We're going to build 10,000 units a year. Once we bring in this decontrolling of rents"—the elimination of rent control, effectively—"the private sector's going to come in and start building and houses will flow like water from the mountain?" Well, M. Leach, you were wrong. Not only were you wrong, but you knew you were wrong and you sold the taxpayers a pipe dream. You were good, M. Leach, when you used to tell people, "Building co-operatives and non-profit is a boondoggle. We're going to end it all. We're not going to build any more, so nobody will have housing and all of you 905ers can be so very happy that we're not spending any more. So what if people are poor and they can't afford a decent home? Let them worry for themselves."

Darwin was right. Survival of the fittest is what we're all about. The 905 understands it, and if people in other parts of the province don't have the money, let them worry about it, because Mr Harris says it's not our job to worry about those who are not so lucky as he is to have that wonderful pension he gave himself when he got rid of the—

Interjection.

Mr Marchese: Yes, he did, Frank. He got rid of that wonderful pension some of us had. He did well with it. He got close to \$1 million as a result of the deal. He did OK. Some people are not so lucky, eh, Ted? People like you and me, we're not so lucky. Mike did OK.

So some people in this Darwinian society do well. Let them eat cake. Let them do whatever they want. Mike Harris is the non-government government and people are on their own. You work hard, and if you work hard you can get to the 905. If you don't work hard enough, that's too bad, because we're not building any housing for you. "It's not our job," Mike Harris says, "to worry for you. If you work hard at two jobs, maybe you can do it." And did you notice that Mike Harris, the Premier, is about to change the laws that permit you, Mr Taxpayer, to work longer than ever before so maybe you can afford a house in the 905, the right-to-work legislation where he's going to extend the workweek so people who can't afford a home in the 905 maybe now will be able to do it? If they work 12 hours a day, Monday through Saturday, maybe they'll be able to afford a house in the 905. How about that, Mr Taxpayer? Wouldn't that be grand? They might get tired along the way working 12 hours a day and they might fall asleep as they work and they might get injured, but the right to work is such a precious thing really. If people want to work, they can, and if they get injured, that's life in the fast lane and it's OK with the merchants of mercantilism, those in the back scenes working for Mike Harris. It's OK for them; they probably are well paid.

It's sad. It is so sad to see that the US is investing in housing and we're not. We're talking the US here. They're investing in housing. Did you notice? They actually are investing in housing and in transit in the US,

no less. In that land of Erewhon, "nowhere" in reverse, where nothing really happens, things are happening now. They're spending on housing and transit, on the infrastructure, so they can build their cities, so that cities that are the vibrant centre of provinces, in this case, or the states in that case, get the money and the support they need from the state level and from the federal level in the US.

We're not doing it here. We used to do it in the 1960s. We used to spend money on transit. We used to spend money on housing in the 1960s and 1970s and we stopped doing that. The Americans, learning from us 20 years later, are spending, and the Canadians, with the Harris regime, decide to go the other way around. We're behind the Americans. Can you believe that? Can you believe it? We're behind the Americans. These people know that the cities are the centre of community, public and economic life, and they're investing. If you people go down there and pick up some ideas on welfare, which hasn't worked there but you bring it here anyway—why can't you guys travel a little bit? Take a little walk down south, pick up some of the good ideas and bring them back.

Mr Mazzilli: We're trying to save money.

Mr Marchese: You're trying to save money? No, I'm telling you, you're doing the wrong thing, Frank Mazzilli, from London-Fanshawe.

I don't know what to say. I really don't know how to reach these Tories. That's why, Mr Taxpayer, Madam Taxpayer, I always appeal to you, because in the chamber we don't communicate very well, as you've gathered. I am communicating, as always, directly to you, never through these people, never.

We lost a civil society when these people got in, in 1995. Civil society has disappeared. These people are so authoritarian, I have never seen anything like it. These people are so incompetent, I have never seen anything like it. Yet some of you taxpayers still vote for them. How do you do it? Send me a little note to tell me why you still like them. Tell me, because I don't know.

Civil society is gone. Democratic society has disappeared. We don't consult you taxpayers any more. We don't bring bills out to the public any more. We either have one day of hearings or maybe two days if you are lucky, by the generosity of this government, and that's it. We have one day of hearings here in the city of Toronto in this chamber downstairs—one day—where most of you don't have a clue what is going on. Most of the members don't have a clue what's going on; imagine you. If they're in the dark, imagine how much in the dark you are.

You are completely left in the dark, and that's what erodes civil society, because in order to know, you need to be helped by the government that says to you, "We've got a bill out here. It's downloading of housing. We want to know what you feel." Do you know that? Of course you wouldn't. How could you? They don't tell you. They don't bring out the bills any more for debate. They don't debate any more.

Mike Harris and M. Stockwell the other day said—he and Janet Ecker, the Minister of Education—“Oh yes, we have debated this bill,” the one that extends the hours to 60 hours a week.” She says, “We’ve been debating if for three years,” Speaker. You were here, I think. Three years, and I say to myself, hmm, three years. Where have we done this? Perhaps I was absent for a while. Was the minister consulting with somebody for three years? If so, who was it?

Mr Caplan: Frank Sheehan.

Mr Marchese: Frank Sheehan is in the in; he knows. Who else knows? How could you have a three-year debate on something and we on the opposition side know so little about those meetings? We don’t know who came to those meetings, we don’t know who got invited, we don’t hear anything, there are no public minutes. There is no public display of the, “Hey, hey, let me tell you what we discussed today,” nothing.

So you’ve got the Minister of Education saying, “We have been debating this bill for three years; it’s time to go.” Go where? They’re about to extend the workweek to 60 hours, work-till-you-drop legislation, and they think it’s good. They don’t have the guts to take it out and say to the public, “We’ve got something for you. We want to hear from you.”

This is work-till-you-drop legislation, and you don’t know about it? Mr Taxpayer, Madam Taxpayer, where are you? What are you doing? You’ve got to get up from that chair that you’re sitting in and consult with Mr Stockwell as it relates to the extension of the workday. Consult with the so-called Minister of Housing—who doesn’t have housing any more. I don’t know why the poor guy still calls himself the Minister of Housing when he’s not building anything.

You’ve got to call these people and hold them to account. You’ve got to ask them some questions, “What the hell are you doing? You’re about to download, dump housing down to the municipality, which means the taxpayers, and I don’t know about it? I want to know what I’m in here for. I want to know how much I’ve got to pay for this.”

2010

There’s another piece of legislation that says, “We will cap taxes for the business sector and we will cap taxes for rental buildings, but we will not cap taxes for the property owner.” Did you know that, Mr Taxpayer, watching? Mel Lastman says, “We’ve got to increase property taxes because we haven’t increased rates since 1992, and you, provincial government, have not helped us since 1992. We’ve got to increase our taxes in order to give you the services you desperately want.” And, by the way, do you know who’s going to pay for that? It’s you, Mr and Madam Homeowner, because it can only be passed to you, the homeowner. The business sector is scot-free. Rental building owners are scot-free. It’s only you, property owner. You are going to be stuck with half of education; social services, which includes welfare and child care; ambulances; housing; transit. These are social services that should not be on the property tax base.

With the passing of this bill tonight, we are about to pick up all of housing, from now until eternity, until we have a new government that’s going to have the courage to take it right back and do what Mrs Mulvale from AMO says, that we will have to upload, not download, services. We’ve got to upload the services to where they belong. Until we have a government that has the courage to upload social services to the provincial income tax base, we will not be safe in our cities. Our cities are bankrupt and they don’t have the money any longer to provide the services that you continue to complain about. Some of you complain about the garbage on our streets. Some of you complain about—

Mr Ernie Parsons (Prince Edward-Hastings): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: Could I ask if there is a quorum in the House?

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Michael A. Brown): Is there a quorum present?

Clerk at the Table (Ms Lisa Freedman): A quorum is present, Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The member for Trinity-Spadina.

Mr Marchese: He’s right; there was no quorum here at the time.

What are we looking for here? We’re looking for taxpayers to become a little more engaged and a little more politicized. If you don’t know what is going on in this place, malevolent governments will do what they can to squeeze you a little bit, while at the same time paradoxically saying they are giving you money. They squeeze you and then they say, “We’re giving you money.” It’s a paradox, it is a contradiction, but this government revels in it. Only you can unravel it. Only you can unmask that smelly onion that is in this government. I appeal to you to object to Bill 128 and to fight against it with all the strength you’ve got.

Mr Mazzilli: It’s entertaining watching the member from Trinity-Spadina. If only there were credibility on some of these issues. The credibility was from the time he was in government.

Let’s go to what Bill 128 is all about. It’s something that has been negotiated over many years. It’s part of Who Does What. In Who Does What, the province took on education because, as homeowners in my riding knew at the time and continue to know, there were 10% increases on that portion of their property taxes year after year, double digit, at a time when incomes had been going down and there were fewer jobs. This was certainly not sustainable.

When the member for Trinity-Spadina said that Premier Harris said he is the friend of taxpayers, he’s right. The Premier needed to take control of a system that was being overtaxed at the local level.

Why was it done? Out of good management. Housing and other things can be managed at the local level far more effectively than they can be managed out of Toronto. Why was it done? In our country, many services are provided by three levels of government: federal, provincial and municipal. What is the dilemma in that?

When someone needs to make a decision, they need to get two different governments involved to make that decision. It never occurs, and unfortunately things are left unattended.

The member for Trinity-Spadina talked about social housing and that somehow capital improvements were done while he was in government. I can tell you that capital improvements were not done to any social housing in this province while he was in government. In fact, what I saw at most places was units that had deteriorated and fences that were falling down. Today those have all been fixed and brought up to standard.

What is the other dilemma? Most social housing under the NDP government didn't even meet the standard provincial codes. So here's this legislation that has to be abided by and it doesn't even meet provincial codes.

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker: Order. This can't go on. Member for Kingston and the Islands, come to order. This is a solo, not a chorus.

The member for London-Fanshawe.

Mr Mazzilli: I'll stand by what I say: while you were in government, units had deteriorated to the point where they did not meet any of the provincial standards as far as housing goes, and they were left to continue to deteriorate.

Of course, what we hear continually is, "Well, there was a recession." One night I was debating the member for Niagara Centre. It had to do with justice issues, and he was complaining that there were not enough justices of the peace in Ontario. I had to remind the member for Niagara Centre that while they were in government, we had the Askov decision. Do you remember that, Mr Speaker? That's where serious trials were not heard in time and serious offenders who had committed rapes, murders and so on were set free. That was at a time right after the Liberal government. The court system had been allowed to deteriorate to the point that trials could not be heard on time. Of course, what was the comeback? "We were in a recession."

The way you were spending money, that was not only a recession, it was a depression. The taxpayers in my riding talk about a surplus. Well, that surplus would become a deficit in five minutes if that side of the House were allowed to govern. That is why Premier Harris has to listen every day to this spending from the Liberals. They want to spend on just about everything. I don't know the last time Dalton McGuinty got up to ask a question to protect taxpayers.

I have to collect my thoughts for a moment—I'll find it very quickly here. I want to talk about what governing is all about. Governing is about making this province more prosperous for everyone. If we go back to how that's been done, it's been done by cutting taxes. If we cut taxes, certainly more jobs have been created. We've heard that almost 800,000 net new jobs have been created in this province since 1995. I might add that Premier Harris was here tonight listening to the member for Trinity-Spadina. When it comes to protecting taxpayers,

he is willing to sit in this House late at night fighting for taxpayers and ensuring the opposition doesn't spend taxpayers' money unwisely. He sits here as late as he needs to at night to fight for taxpayers. I thought it was important to advise viewers at home that our Premier is dedicated and willing to do that.

What do these 800,000 jobs do? Of course, they create housing. That's what this bill is all about. Some people purchase their own homes and some people choose to rent. It's a choice. But the NDP and the Liberals continually talk about how social housing can only be provided by governments. Well, the private sector does build, and let me tell you something: the private sector was not building while they were in government. Do you know why? The banks had repossessed everything. The only private sector owners of rental housing while you were in government were the banks, by repossessing everything.

2020

Mr Caplan: What are you talking about?

Mr Mazzilli: The housing critic from across the floor talked about CMHC, and he should talk about CMHC, because that has a lot to do with building new rental housing in our province. Presently the rule is that you need CMHC protection if you're going to finance your buildings beyond 75% of the mortgaged value, and they add 2% on to the value of that mortgage. So is it profitable for the private sector? It's very difficult when you have CMHC fees at what they are. I urge that member to speak to his mother and perhaps, through the federal government, make changes to CMHC financing rules to allow the private sector to become more involved and make it easier for them to get financing while they're building new housing.

CMHC is not only for rental housing but for people buying normal houses. When someone purchases a home and chooses to finance it at a certain level, they need CMHC protection. Again, I ask the member—I don't know what riding he is from—to pass on to his mother that we expect the federal government to make some changes and bring down financing through the CMHC rules for all people, whether they're homeowners or apartment owners.

We continually hear in this debate that somehow there has been some downloading here. Let's go back to Who Does What. When the province of Ontario took on education taxes, there was a certain agreement made with municipalities, and in fact there has been an uploading of funds to municipalities. Let me tell you how. There was a shared responsibility when it came to social services in this province, and by cutting taxes, creating more jobs, over 500,000 people in this province are now working again and not collecting social assistance. That benefits municipalities. We continue to strive to reduce that role.

Dalton McGuinty and the Liberals continually fight any changes to social services. When we came out with work for welfare, Dalton McGuinty got up and opposed that. When we came up with getting people training in order to get them back into the workforce, to be contributing members of our communities, Dalton McGuinty

opposed that. We certainly understand that the NDP would oppose that, but I would suspect that at some point Dalton McGuinty and the Liberals would have to decide what they stand for.

Through the election, I can remember them going around with their 20/20 Plan—20 NDP ideas, 20 Conservative ideas. They threw them together and somehow this was supposed to work in running our province. It won't and it never will.

In order to have a successful and vibrant province, you need leadership, and that leadership is Premier Mike Harris, because he had the courage to make the difficult but necessary decisions to cut taxes. And when we talk about cutting taxes, that should be across the board for everyone. Not only are we reducing taxes for homeowners in this province by 20% on the provincial portion, but also for tenants. That's to be passed on to tenants through the landlords, and we're mandating that that be done. Certainly tenants in our community have received those rebate cheques, some of the viewers who are watching, those rebate cheques that you received from landlords. That was because Premier Harris mandated that that money be returned to you by the landlord.

With opposition like this, no wonder the private sector is somehow hesitant to build housing in this province. The first thing they would want to do is tax tenants through the landlord. There's only one landlord, right? But there are many tenants. Put the tax burden on that one landlord and he'll have to spread it out to the tenants. That's what the Liberals don't tell you. Mike Harris and our government will never allow you to download on tenants like you did in the past.

The issue of crime in our province is something that really needs to be addressed. I hear continued complaints in our community about the Young Offenders Act. It's an act that came out many years ago, and the intent was that if a young person did something wrong, perhaps that young person should be given a second chance. We on this side agree with that. We agree that a young person should be given a second chance, perhaps a third chance; and most people with children who are watching, or grandparents, would agree with that. The problem is when you've stolen your 10th car and you've been involved in your fifth police pursuit. At what point is enough enough? The federal Liberals had better start listening. This is not just some people saying that a young person made a mistake and ought to be forgiven, ought to be given a second chance. We on this side very much believe that a young person who's made a mistake, either through peer pressure or a conscious decision, ought to be given a second chance, perhaps a third chance. But at some point, when one commits a violent crime, when one is involved in a suspect apprehension pursuit for the fourth or fifth time, we had better start addressing that. Why should we address these situations? Because the public and the police and the young person to put their lives in jeopardy. I certainly urge all members of this Legislature to continue to press the federal government to make meaningful changes to the Young

Offenders Act so that, once and for all, violent young people are dealt with.

The other day the Attorney General brought forward a bill that would seize the assets of criminals. It's about time someone in this country did that. As we see in Quebec, there have been rival biker gang wars. Some of those biker gangs live in social housing. That's something we have to stop. I've seen them going in and out of social housing projects, and with no standards; we had better stop that. That's why the Attorney General came up with this bill. When you have a biker who brings in illegal monies through their organizations, that are not claimed, and then they apply for social housing and the taxpayers in my riding have to pay the cost of the social housing, that is wrong and ought to be stopped.

When I hear Dalton McGuinty and the Liberals getting up and saying, "Bikers should be allowed to keep their profit. Bikers should be allowed to live in social housing without any consequences," we on this side of the House very much oppose that.

I have so much to say and, like the member for Trinity-Spadina, so little time to say it, but I know I need to leave some time for the member from Durham. So I will cut out right here and thank you for your indulgence.

2030

Mr John Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands): I'm very pleased to join this debate. I always thought that in this House one had to stick to the truth. I certainly don't want to accuse any other members of not speaking the truth, but I will now give you my version of the truth, the way I see it.

First of all, I think the public has to understand that all social and public housing initially were federal and provincial initiatives. There was a need in this country some 30 or 40 years or even longer ago where politicians at the federal and provincial levels knew there was a role for them to play to ensure that people were properly housed. That surely has got to be one of the essential criteria of living in a province as rich as Ontario.

So over the years we've had the creation of about 250,000 social housing units, which include about 84,000 in the public sector, and they're usually referred to as the housing authority housing. MTHA, for example, here in the city of Toronto, operates something like 30,000 units, and the other 50,000 units or so are spread throughout Ontario for family and senior housing. Then there's the other sector of about 160 housing units that have been created as a result of both federal and provincial programs, where the governments decided that in order to get people into adequate housing, which was primarily built by the private sector, subsidy funding was required. That's how those units got to be created.

The reason for me mentioning that is that there has always been a recognition that this is a provincial and a federal responsibility. I've been saying here for years that it's an absolute shame that both the province, in 1995 when it decided to get completely out of the public and social housing area, and the federal government as well—but at least now they're making sounds and

they're announcing programs for getting back into the stream. But during the last five years there has been absolutely no geared-to-income housing built in this country, and as a result the waiting lists of people who require this kind of housing have grown throughout the province and throughout the country.

I think we should also understand, contrary to what the other member said, that the downloading that has now taken place of these provincial and federal responsibilities is going to cost the taxpayers of each and every one of our municipalities a minimum of \$1.2 billion. With this bill in effect, the responsibility for social housing in the province both in the public sector and the not-for-profit sector is going to download to the property taxpayers in this province a total of \$1.2 billion worth of responsibilities.

The other thing that the member mentioned is this notion about what condition most of this housing is in. I can tell you that most of the housing authority housing, the publicly owned housing, unfortunately, through a succession of governments—and I'm not just talking about the current government; I'll take it back to the NDP government and the Liberal government before it, and the Davis government before that. They have never adequately spent money in capital expenditures to make sure that the housing, most of which was created back in the 1950s, 1960s and early 1970s, has been properly maintained and that the capital dollars to make sure that these houses were upgraded and that they maintained their quality, the kind of money of a capital nature that was required to do that was just never put in. So we're now left with the position whereby, according to the region of Peel, which did a study on this particular matter, \$1 billion is required just to bring the public housing stock of this province, some 84,000 units, up to date. They claim \$1 billion. In Peel county alone they estimate that it's going to cost \$57 million.

The province is somehow trying to deal with this by saying, "You know, some of the money that we got from the federal government for this, some of the \$58 million, we are passing through to the municipalities, about half of it, and that should be enough for them to upgrade and to do some of the major repairs that are necessary in the public housing stock." It is not enough.

The other thing that has to be understood is that most local municipalities, quite frankly, don't want to be involved in this business. There are some municipalities that, through the operation and setting up of municipal non-profit housing corporations, have shown an interest and a willingness to get involved in the social housing scene. But there are many municipalities that simply don't think it's their responsibility to get involved in the housing scene, other than perhaps through emergency housing during the winter, or youth shelters or things along those lines. The members opposite may disagree with this—we can all disagree with this—but that is the feeling most municipalities have.

The reason for that is that most of the agreements that have been entered into, let's say between the non-profit

groups and the other two levels of government, have been completely outside of the municipal governments' mandate. They haven't been involved. So what is happening is that all these contracts that have been signed by the other levels of government and the non-profit groups are going to be downloaded on local municipalities that had absolutely no say in formulating those agreements to start off with.

What's going to happen as time goes along is one of two things. In order to maintain the quality of the housing that I think we all want for our people—whether it's in the public sector or the social non-profit sector, we want to make sure that it's maintained—and the only way to maintain it is to take money from the property taxpayers to pay for the needed repairs. Either that is going to happen or the rents are going to have to be increased to such a level that there is enough money to effect some of these capital repairs.

Each and every one of the submissions that was made to the committee that met for two days to listen to deputations made that point: AMO, the Ontario Association of Non-Profit Homes and Services for Seniors, the Ontario Non-Profit Housing Association. These are the groups that represent the organizations that are actually dealing with those housing situations right now, the boards and organizations that represent the housing providers. They are all making the same point, that what has been downloaded by the provincial government to the local municipalities in this bill are assets that are depreciating as time goes along, and there isn't going to be any money available to make sure these houses are maintained unless there's a great injection of cash from the local taxpayers. Everybody who is involved with these organizations agrees with that.

Even the government's own Who Does What committee, which was set up and organized and chaired by David Crombie at the Premier's request, said that you cannot download social housing to the local level. It's not that these people are ill-intentioned or mean-spirited or anything like that; they simply will not have the capacity at a local level to look after the much-needed capital repairs that are required.

The other thing that every representation that was made to the committee clearly pointed out is that the act says that putting into effect a lot of the various aspects of the social housing download is going to be done by regulation. These organizations want to make sure they are going to be involved in the decision-making process as to what regulations are actually going to be passed that are going to affect them directly. Even though we totally disagree with this download, I hope the ministry will at least acknowledge the fact that these organizations that speak on behalf of the social housing providers of Ontario will be directly involved in ironing out the regulations that will be passed down to them. That is absolutely essential, because if that doesn't happen, we're going to have an even worse crisis than we have right now.

We all know that the waiting list for this kind of housing—social, non-profit, co-op and public—has been increasing over the last number of years. The last I will say on this before I turn it over to one of my colleagues is to simply once again implore this government that, OK, we don't like what you've done by this bill, we don't like the fact that you're downloading to local municipalities the social responsibility, which is going to be costly in the days to come, but at least acknowledge the fact that you have a responsibility, perhaps not in the direct building of new social housing but at least in subsidizing that housing to such an extent that people who need housing can be given affordable, rent-geared-to-income housing.

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Get reinvolved in that field. It is simply not enough to say, "Well, the economy is good. We're putting so many more people on the employment rolls etc and therefore this problem will take care of itself." We know that with the boom we've had in most of Ontario over the last three to four years, there has been no new modest-income rental accommodation built in this province, and that simply isn't going to change. It's an income problem. The people at the lower end of the economic scale aren't making enough money so that they can afford what's usually described as about 30% of their salary or wages for housing. The newer housing that's being created within the private sector simply will demand too much rent in order to pay for the cost of building that housing to allow people of modest income to get into that housing without any government support.

I urge the province and the federal government that when we leave all the political rhetoric aside, it's their responsibility to get back into the housing field. I am absolutely convinced that if there are two or three areas that governments have to be involved in, it is to provide good health care, to make sure that everyone is clothed and to make sure everyone has enough to eat. The other main component of that is to make sure that everyone has shelter. Right now, there are many people doing without and the only way we're going to turn that around is for governments at both the federal and provincial levels to once again accept their responsibility and get involved in the social housing scene.

The Deputy Speaker: Further debate?

Mr John O'Toole (Durham): Thank you very much, Mr Speaker, for allowing me to speak and participate on Bill 128, the Social Housing Reform Act. I'm just going to hold this up because it's the bill we're talking about, Bill 128. I'll try to stay on topic. I only have half an hour so I may not get through it. It's 57 pages of detail, but I'm going to labour through it. I'd turn on my VCR, if I were you.

Actually, I'm going to go through a couple of very technical things. First of all, I want to make it clear that some of the municipalities aren't happy with this, but they've asked for say for pay for some time. The difficulty with being government—the opposition, as we've just heard, can say pretty well what they want. At the end

of the day, the fingers are going to be pointed at this government. But we should all recognize where this started. The devolution—I like that term actually. It's an interesting term, "devolution." It's a devilish kind of term. But it's devolving from the federal government down. That's number one, Jim, in your normal coding of the system here.

I want to speak specifically about the protections and indeed the benefits this legislation offers to people living in social housing and those who want to live in it. The benefits of administering social housing at the local level: the government's philosophy is that the province should not be in the business of subsidizing bricks and mortar. We all know that this is clearly one of the monikers we addressed when we were elected in 1995. I want to state very clearly today why the government wants to transfer social housing to the local government and what we are doing to protect tenants, at the same time as we are protecting the taxpayers of Ontario.

I want to reiterate one of the key benefits of having municipalities fund and administer programs: they will be able to integrate social housing and other services provided at the local level. That means that if Bill 128 is passed, local governments would be able to integrate their administration for housing with that of Ontario Works and child care, a very important challenge for them. Someone who needs subsidized housing and day-care and who is receiving assistance through Ontario Works and is looking for social housing can be served in one place with one system. How unique.

Of course there are many stakeholders in this who might be disappointed that their own particular interest is not satisfied. You've heard government members say that we believe social housing is best delivered at the local level. Not only taxpayers but also tenants are better served when the government that is funding social housing has the best understanding of local needs and conditions, and that is indeed the local or upper-tier governments; in my case, the region of Durham. There is no question that municipal leaders from Rainy River or Lanark county know their own communities better than anyone here in Toronto at Queen's Park.

Provincial standards: a number of government members have said, and I will say to you, that protecting tenants is this government's number one priority and this piece of legislation underscores that. The province has taken every precaution to make sure that tenants are protected through the entire transfer and beyond. I repeat: tenants will not be disrupted. No tenant needs to feel threatened by program streamlining or devolution, as I've said before, or social programs at the municipal level. This is what it says here.

How will tenants be protected, you might ask? I will say first that this government has confidence in municipalities to make responsible decisions. However, we will also ensure certain protections as provincial standards. A provincial standard would ensure that municipalities will continue to protect or provide assistance to the same number of rent-geared-to-income households as receive

assistance at the time of devolution. There is not going to be any change, no loss, in the number of units. That is to protect the current tenants and people waiting for social housing.

A provincial standard will ensure that there are province-wide rules for benefit levels. The province intends to ensure that rent geared to income would continue to be set at at least 30% of income. To ensure that the rules would be clear and applied consistently across the province, we propose for the first time that basic rules governing rent-geared-to-income assistance would be set out very clearly in legislation, as opposed to regulations. A provincial standard for eligibility would mean that Ontarians can apply for social housing in any part of the province, regardless of where they live at any time. For example, if a senior living in Kingston wants to apply for social housing in Ottawa to be closer to their family members, it will be possible, if Bill 128 is passed, to apply for assistance without living in the municipality.

A provincial standard would ensure that there would be no decline in the number of units available for people with physical disabilities. This is worth repeating: there is no decline in the units set aside for people with disabilities.

Minimizing disruption to tenants: one step this government has taken that will minimize disruption to tenants during the transfer is our process for developing public housing. We propose to transfer public housing as a business, complete with the current employees. This would give the local housing corporation the necessary expertise to operate the housing units and minimize disruption to public housing tenants throughout the transfer.

Tenants consulted: this government has consulted extensively with stakeholders about this regulation. This includes a province-wide tenants consultation in the spring of 1998 by the social housing committee. This government has also worked to keep tenants informed of our plans for devolution by communicating with them through social housing providers.

Victims of violence: this is one that's received some attention recently. For some time, the province has had a policy for all social housing providers that gives victims of family violence priority to be placed in social housing. While we will give municipalities some flexibility in their criteria for selecting applicants, there will continue to be a mandatory priority for applicants who are victims of violence. Again, that's worth repeating, but I won't.

Coordinated access: the proposed legislation sets out mandatory provincial requirements for coordinated access to social housing. I think this is absolutely important. When I look at the number of services and service agencies and the number of lists, sometimes it's beguiling how many lists there are and what the waiting lists are. To have a coordinated list is absolutely—the time has come. The government believes there should be a transparent and seamless approach to applying for and being placed on the social housing list.

Under the system proposed, service managers would coordinate access to social housing in their communities

to ensure that individuals seeking assistance can get the information they need and can place their names on the waiting list at any access site in their community. How unique.

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The proposed system would place applicants on a centralized waiting list according to their choice of provider, projects, location and needs. Service managers might choose to integrate coordinated access service with Ontario Works and child care programs, or to delegate this role to housing providers or other community organizations. I think it's important to add that this legislation would also ensure that applicants with special needs would have priority access to special-needs units, as I said before.

Supply of housing: this is the issue as it comes down; there's no question about it. I can tell you, on the record, that adequate shelter is probably the most important program we could implement. That's absolutely critical. Having permanent, adequate shelter is an absolute goal that we should all strive toward. This government is aware that waiting lists for social housing are growing. They have been growing for many years, even the last 10 years, as we often say here. We often forget about the last 10 years. It's strange how you could forget about the last 10 years by forgetting about it. Even while social housing has been developed under previous governments—very expensively, I might add as well.

Let's look at what this government is doing to encourage the development of affordable housing, because we do not believe that affordable housing must or should be built by the government. That's the starting point that we may disagree on, but nonetheless, we are the government.

We have taken a number of steps to encourage new supply and improve the climate for investing in rental housing. We replaced rent controls with the Tenant Protection Act, which encourages investment in rental housing—

Interjection.

Mr O'Toole: I wish. We amended the Ontario building code to encourage the development of single-room occupancies, a very unique idea. These are smaller units that can be built more affordably. Single-room occupancies are now being built in a number of North American cities, just not too many in Toronto.

We also created the PST rebate program, which provides a grant of \$2,000 per affordable unit to offset the impact of provincial sales tax—a good idea, actually. To date, more than 2,000 affordable housing units have received conditional approval for this program. There's been a lot of take-up on this program. That's the PST rebate program.

The government is actively working to find ways to increase new supply. We're trying to get other provinces and levels of government, particularly the federal government, the little rascals, onside to deal with the decline of private sector construction of affordable housing and to look at productive ways to encourage the industry to get back into building. One thing they could have a look at is

the GST rebate on affordable housing, but not apartments. This is the area that they could improve through the GST rebate.

We believe that stimulating the private sector to build more affordable housing is the best solution to meet the needs of low-income Ontarians. I couldn't agree more.

I would like to close—actually, I'm not going to close; I've got 13 minutes left, so I have no intention of closing. The government made protecting tenants a priority in developing this legislation. We firmly believe that an effective and efficient social housing system delivered by local governments that are closest to the people is the most effective way to respond to the needs of tenants and is the best system for all Ontarians.

I'm now going to get into the off-script message, arguably the most important message. I just know that there were some in my area, such as Mayor Diane Hamre, the former mayor of Clarington, now the past mayor—that's actually the same thing. Part VIII of the bill establishes the Social Housing Services Corp—there's some problem with this issue, as I hear it—and sets out its powers and duties. The power of the corporation includes the coordination of insurance programs for housing providers, the management of pooled capital reserves and funds of housing providers, and the establishment of schemes for the joint purchase of goods and services by housing providers. They have a problem with part VIII, that section. They say the regions, in my case Durham, or others in the case of members here from regions arguably not as important as Durham, but nonetheless important—

Interjection.

Mr O'Toole: And the single city of Hamilton. What they're saying is that they already have the joint purchasing power and they don't want the province intruding. If you took all the regions of the province, it would certainly provide better leverage for a more efficient purchase of services like insurance or pooled access to capital reserves, a strategic alliance I fully agree with.

Part V of the bill governs the provisions of rent-geared-to-income assistance and special-needs housing. In fact, part V is worth a second read. In the very limited time I have left, I'll try to get to that section. There are only 11 minutes left, in case there are other members who'd like to address this bill.

The eligibility of housing for rent-geared-to-income is important. Assistance for special needs is determined in accordance with the provisions of local rules established under part V. Part V also provides the establishment of the provincial and local occupancy standards for priority rules. I think this is the main thing that people want. We want fair access for people with needs, whether they're physical or income needs, so they are being treated fairly. I certainly want that and I'm sure the people of Ontario want it.

When you really look at Bill 120, you have to realize that the local level—in Durham, Mayor Dianne Hamre sat on Durham non-profit housing for many years and really tried to do a good job. What happened is that it was

government-driven, it was government money, so it was—to use the term of my friend from Bramalea-Gore-Malton-Springdale—a boondoggle. A billion-dollar boondoggle is the way I heard it.

Another important part is the transfer of assets. There are three parts to this housing transfer issue, and I've got to remind members that the federal government started this devolution. They transferred it down to the province and the province is kind of devolving it down to the local municipality. This was all part of the Who Does What exercise. Now, we all know there was an exercise. There was the Fair Tax Commission in the previous government; I think it was the NDP that had that commission. All of them looked at who's best able or equipped to provide these services. Our exercise was called Who Does What, under David Crombie, and we took off some of the load of the educational levy and we have given them more room to deal with the delivery of services, rationalizing services. Certainly social housing, as I said before, is one of the more important parts of that devolution.

Part VII provides for the payment of provincial housing costs and for service managers' housing costs. The costs are allocated within the service area in the manner described in the act. Special provision is made for the allocation of costs within the greater Toronto area. In the greater Toronto area, which would indeed include the region of Durham, there is some upset with the pooling of costs. I go on the record as saying I agree with those concerns that we have to pay for things we're not getting. No one likes that. But if you're pooling all these costs in the GTA, this has to be recognized as some of that.

The Greater Toronto Services Board report is due, I believe, in March 2001. That report is probably going to deal with what the responsibilities of the Greater Toronto Services Board, the GTA, should be. I can tell you, there is no more important topic in my riding than the whole issue of the GTA. It means the greater Toronto area, and it's a very important area. When we look at social housing as one component of providing community and community supports, there's no question in my mind that there are arguably more services provided in Toronto, with more of the social infrastructure. Perhaps people from Durham do migrate to Toronto and, as such, we should be the benevolent partner, as a member of the family, and pay our fair share. I think the elected members will have difficulty there. We arguably get more of a benefit from the GO Transit system. If a lot of my constituents are going to be part of the GTA, they arguably use the GO Transit system more than the people living in Toronto, who use the Metro transit system. So when it comes to social housing and the pooling argument in part VII, as I've outlined, I want to put on the record that some of the members and citizens of my riding have some problems with the pooling of supports for social housing.

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There are a couple of suspicions here. I have some notes on this. Bill 128 is a very complicated 57-page

document. There are about eight or nine sections to it, with a lot of tables. There are protections, but I have to put on the record in the very fragile few moments left what social housing in this province will look like if the legislation is passed—and the operative word is “if.” First and foremost, as you’ve heard before, social housing tenants will be secure in their tenure. So all the people who are, I might say, vulnerable should feel secure. Don’t allow the press to agitate and frustrate you. The agitators are always out there. They’re actually always here; with the exception of the NDP, there’s no one here. There would be minimal, if any, disruption of their lives. Rent geared to income will not be affected. It would continue to be set at 30% of income. I think it’s very important to put that on the record. There would be no decline in the number of households receiving assistance. The stock, the inventory, will not—I repeat, will not—decline.

Despite what you may read or hear, there will be no decline in the number of units available to people with physical disabilities. If you look at having one consolidated list within a region, one intake route that says, “There are 500 people looking for a place to call their home,” I think we’d be providing a great advantage by having one waiting list and then allocate for people dealing with family violence, people with disabilities and people with rent-geared-to-income needs.

I think it’s long overdue, and arguably a lot of the front-line people who may disagree with this government on many things realize that probably the most important part of this whole thing is local management of the social housing program. Finding new partnerships is another way of allowing affordable housing to take place in Ontario. Municipalities would manage and operate their own social housing portfolios. How unique. They’ve been paying for most of it for the last couple of years. They just don’t have the governance, and we’re passing that final baton over to them, so to speak. Some may not call it a baton, but I do.

The role of non-profit and co-op housing providers will remain essentially the same. Volunteer boards, which have been so important in the operating of these housing providers, will stay in place, so I don’t know what the worry is here, actually.

The province would set out and monitor standards to ensure a degree of consistency in service across the province. I think that’s important, to make sure the homes are well-maintained and secure and basically affordable. The key in this market is to find ways to keep housing affordable without having a bunch of people lined up who really don’t need affordable housing. We have to find ways of sorting out the people in need. That’s why the linkage with Ontario Works is absolutely critical, to find that people who are on support systems are in fact the ones we’re supporting.

How will this improved system be achieved? Let me highlight some of the details in the bill now before the members. With the proposed transfer of public housing at the start of the new year, municipalities would immedi-

ately have the say for pay they have been seeking through AMO and the rest of the organizations. The service managers, the municipalities that pay the bills, will have the say for pay, and will have direct control of both the property management business and the properties themselves.

I know that most members here realize that supportive housing and social housing—and this transfer has been talked about for some time. It was part of the local service realignment that this government undertook and it was part of the federal government’s plan to get out of the business of providing housing. At the same time, I’m very much aware that providing affordable housing is the absolute infrastructure of all the issues with respect to social need that I hear about and read about in the paper.

Municipalities have the right now to invest their money, to ask their taxpayers to pay for an additional or greater supply of social housing and let the local people provide that. I think in many cases you’ll find that local taxpayers will actually give them feedback on that.

The non-profit transfer would be completed within 18 months of proclamation of this bill. This legislation proposes to simplify the administration of non-profit housing by replacing a number of different operating agreements for provincially led programs with one stable, consistent, accountable framework.

Bill 128 is probably the first step in providing clear, accountable, local governance of social housing in Ontario, something that when everyone—the developers and everyone else—felt that the government was paying for it, there was always a higher cost administratively and for capital itself. Now that local governments and local boards have control of this, I believe we’re on the right track to make sure that people who really have the need will in fact be the people who receive the service. Whether they are people with special needs or they are people who are victims of family violence, or simply people with a social and economic need, this government is providing local governments with the power and the autonomy to make local decisions about providing social housing to their constituents and ours.

I am very pleased and I certainly will be supporting Bill 128.

Mr James J. Bradley (St Catharines): I wish initially to indicate my opposition to this bill, having looked at various aspects of it. It’s attractive when you first look at it, the way the government packages it. I guess you have to look fundamentally at whether social housing should be at the provincial level or the local level.

Having been a municipal politician many years ago on St Catharines city council and having observed the municipal scene for a number of years, I’ve come to the conclusion that social housing does not belong at the local level. This is not to say that the effort to realign, as government members would say, the responsibilities of the provincial government and the local government isn’t something that has to be done from time to time.

I thought the appointment of David Crombie, a former mayor of Toronto, a former federal cabinet minister and a person who's got a lot of credibility with people from different political backgrounds—his advice by and large was good advice on the so-called Who Does What exercise. What we found, however, was that many of the responsibilities downloaded to municipalities tend to be those which in the future will be onerous in the financial sense, and such is social housing.

We have to look at what revenues are available to the various levels of government to see whether they can best handle a specific jurisdiction. It is difficult to have a municipality, for instance, accept social costs on the property tax base. I think, as everyone in this House knows, and most people in Ontario, the property tax is considered to be a regressive tax. It's regressive because it does not take into account an individual's ability to pay.

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Let me give an example of that to demonstrate why indeed it's not a preferable tax. If a person happens to fall on difficult times, be unemployed and have a significant drop in income, that person's income tax is going to diminish. That person is likely going to make fewer purchases and therefore is going to pay less in terms of consumption taxes. Those are the sales taxes and excise taxes.

However, the property tax does not change because of the personal economic circumstances of that individual. That's why we say that services which are related to property best belong at the local level and services which are social in nature, broader in nature, should be assumed by senior levels of government. In this specific case we're talking about the provincial government downloading or offloading responsibility for social housing on to municipalities.

What that does is, it militates or causes the government to bring about a situation where everyone believes it is wise to have larger municipal units. I'm not one of those individuals. I happen to believe in the integrity of individual communities, that yes, there is even at the municipal level a need for overall responsibility assumed, for instance, by county government or regional government, but that there is still a role and a responsibility for a local level of government to maintain the identity and the commonality of that community, among the people who reside in that community, at the very least. I believe it is on balance not a wise decision to force municipalities to assume social housing.

There's another overall problem with this bill and it happens with many pieces of legislation. Again, it may be something which is peculiarly interesting to people in this House as opposed to people at large. What this bill seems to be is an enabling bill. In other words, it's legislation that enables a lot of things to happen. The details are to be found in the regulations.

For those who may be watching this evening, I can say that this House debates legislation. Our committees deal with legislation. Regulations, on the other hand, are the

prerogative of the government. They're ordinarily dealt with behind closed doors by the cabinet and perhaps a few others, but certainly there's not the input from the opposition or from the public in the regulatory framework that there is in the legislative framework. This bill, I'm afraid, provides for the government, behind closed doors, in secret, to make significant changes in the field of social housing.

We should recognize as well that, as is the case with a lot of legislation—not all, but a lot of legislation—we should have had far more extensive hearings on this particular bill. People interested, for instance, in co-op housing, which has grown in this province and has been quite successful in many areas, and in non-profit housing, have an interest in the details that might be contained in this legislation or the regulations that flow from this legislation. It doesn't hurt to hear from those people.

We are stuck with a timetable dictated by the government. The government usually brings the House back somewhat late, it forces the House to sit day and evening and it crams its legislation into a parliamentary calendar, which means that it must be completed before the Christmas break.

What a lot of the public doesn't understand is that this House won't sit again till April. In other words, in January, February, March and certainly part of April we will find the situation where this House is not in session. It would be preferable to have the House sit more days and have our committees sit more days and, when the House is not sitting, for our committees to travel to various parts of the province to have input from people who have an expertise in a specific area. I think it would have been preferable were the government to proceed with hearings of a meaningful nature, as opposed to simply continuing on with this bill without that kind of valuable input.

The member for Durham made reference to a point which I think we should remember. No doubt he has seen the studies which show, for instance, that the health of a person is often affected rather significantly by the person's economic circumstances or personal circumstances. That is, a person living in poverty or adverse housing conditions often has more difficulty with personal health than those who are in a more favoured position. Something that's very basic is housing. I've read a number of studies which have indicated that housing can make a significant difference. The member for Durham made reference to that, and I think it is only too true that the housing conditions in which people live have a major impact on the family and the extended family. If we can provide a circumstance in the province where people have affordable, decent housing—we're not all going to have a mansion, we understand that, but affordable, decent housing in a neighbourhood which is livable—we'll see a major difference in how that person turns out.

I want to indicate as well that I'm very interested in hearing from my colleague from Toronto Centre-Rosedale, because we have different circumstances. We've heard from the member from Kingston, another Toronto

member, Mr Caplan, and myself from St Catharines, and I think there are some unique circumstances that face people in Toronto, where there's even more social housing and rent-g geared-to-income housing, more non-profit and co-operative housing and other areas. I'm going to relinquish the remainder of the time to the member for Toronto Centre-Rosedale so I can have his contribution to this debate. I think it will be significant.

The Deputy Speaker: The member for Toronto Centre-Rosedale.

Mr George Smitherman (Toronto Centre-Rosedale): Thank you for allowing me to make it to this point. I know that earlier I was trying your patience as I heckled members opposite, but I couldn't resist it because they just don't get it.

Before I launch into my full attack on this stupid piece of legislation, I want to introduce to members present Cliff Martin, who sits in the members' gallery, who is a distinguished tenant advocate and activist who lives in St James Town. He knows better, and I hope all members later on will take an opportunity to speak with him.

The legislation ought to be called The Bill to Make Our Public Housing Worse. I stand in opposition to this bill because it's a stupid bill. It is a bill that has been attacked upside and down at committee and here through the debate by people who know more about it and its impact than the government opposite. It is motivated by so much of the same thing that motivates almost everything from the government across the way: the desire at the end of the day to clean up their balance sheet at the expense of the municipal balance sheets across the breadth of this province.

Earlier, people laughed; they dismissed the report that was referred to by the member for Kingston and the Islands, done by the region of Peel, no hotbed of liberalism, that estimated, looking at 20% of the public housing units there, that the costs to be borne by municipalities for this download to bring these units up to standard is \$1 billion. Look inside this bill, municipal taxpayers, and see what protection is there for you on your property tax budget. You will see inadequate protection. So if you're watching at home and you're a municipal taxpayer—and particularly one somewhere like the city of Toronto, where there is a large number of units—a tax bill is coming your way courtesy of this provincial government download.

We hear about the state of public housing as if it's good, and we know that members opposite who echo those remarks have never canvassed in a public housing building. I've had the opportunity through two recent elections to spend some time in some of the public housing stock in the riding of Toronto Centre-Rosedale, and there's lots of it. In the Regent Park community, I have 57 buildings and hundreds of townhouse units, home to thousands of people. There are empty units and units that are in decay because the province of Ontario's Metropolitan Toronto Housing Authority has done an inadequate job and has been inadequately funded to bring those units up to a state of good repair. In many cases,

these units are in a state of disrepair that would be frightening to people, and yet they are expected to be adequate housing for people.

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I also represent the Moss Park community, three large buildings—275 and 295 Shuter, and 151 Sherbourne—and four buildings in St James Town, one of which is Cliff's home, among a couple of others.

I want to contrast what's going on in our public housing communities with social housing communities, which are defined by people in the sector as non-profit and co-op housing. The people opposite like to talk about co-op housing as if it is just this extraordinary cost to be borne on the backs of these taxpayers, this really expensive form of housing. But while it is true that this kind of housing costs money—good quality housing costs money, a concept lost on the government—it provides good quality housing. We ought to celebrate the kind of neighbourhoods and communities that have been made possible by good visionary housing policies. Instead of having a bill before us that is designed to make our public housing more like our social housing, so our public housing communities more like our co-op housing communities, we have a bill that will do the opposite: take the best of co-ops and undermine it so that over time we will see decline.

You may criticize me for attacking communities in my riding; members will turn that around, and I don't really care. But the sad reality of things is that in the city of Toronto and in my riding, the worst neighbourhoods from the standpoint of crime and safety, for residents in their units and for residents outside their units, regrettably, are public housing units where the province of Ontario has been the landlord. You may say that is the reason they ought to be downloaded, but I say that is the reason they ought to be invested in in an appropriate measure. We have not done an adequate job of developing community in public housing. Instead of having a bill before us which seeks to do just that, which seeks to engage the people who live in those buildings in their communities, to make them better, to make them more involved, we see a bill that will take co-ops, where the community is actively involved in managing and running them, and we see a gradual devolution of their role within those, a diminished role on the part of co-ops to be able to manage themselves.

I want to give you a contrast, and I think it's a stark one. In my riding there's a building called 200 Wellesley. It may be the building where Cliff lives; I can't remember. It's got about 800 units in it. It's a massive building; it's a village. Probably 50 different languages are spoken in that building. There's a very regrettable story about it, and that is that in the last 10 years, nine people have been murdered in that building: nine people in a public housing community, in a building owned by Mike Harris and the province of Ontario.

Just across the street, there's a building called 85 Bleeker Street. It's a co-op. It used to be an MTHA building, but it's a co-op. In that building in a day or two

there's a dog pageant. As part of a sense of community, people are going to have a pageant. They're going to dress up their pets and they're going to come and celebrate the holiday season together.

This is the kind of contrast we're dealing with in my riding. Across the street from one another you have two different forms of housing: one where the government offers a little more to pay the price for meaningful community involvement, and one where we pay the price in the form of loss of life and in the form of poor health. That is the contrast that is at play here. Instead of having a bill which is designed to make the bad one better, we have a bill that will have the net effect of making the good one worse.

Then, if that is not enough, the government of the day will force that cost upon the already burdened property taxpayer in my riding of Toronto Centre-Rosedale and in the city of Toronto. This government last week announced its \$1.4-billion surplus and the city of Toronto has announced its \$160-million shortfall. The province of Ontario talks about the extraordinary increase in its revenue; the city of Toronto has had a flatline in its revenue.

The member for London-Fanshawe went on to tell us that municipal taxpayers ought to be pleased because the province has taken all of those welfare people off their rolls. But imagine the circumstance were it to occur that an economic downturn resulted in more people needing that assistance. What will be the impact on the municipal taxpayer? So I send a message to homeowners in places like Etobicoke North, where the member is present, in the city of Toronto, that you are about to pay the cost of one more piece of Mike Harris's further download.

I want to say, at the risk of making some municipal leaders angry, that with my colleague David Caplan, the member from Don Valley East, who has done a great job in highlighting the extent to which this is a stupid piece of legislation, I sat through two days of hearings where government members also sat but I don't think they listened. If they listened, they certainly didn't hear the message or they didn't get the message, because that's not really the business they are into. If they did, they would have heard story after story of people wanting to protect their communities.

But I must say, I thought the most compelling presentation came from Brad Duguid, a young member of Toronto city council who represents a ward in Scarborough, who this week, along with Mel Lastman, my long-time ally, painted for the city of Toronto an ugly picture and began a vigorous defence for the taxpayers against this kind of download. But other municipal leaders, so loath to criticize the government, pulled punches. They were more critical in the areas outside of the committee room. I realized why after I had a chance to speak with some of them, because the fix is in. The trade-off for this download is just a little bit more of what they want to

have in the new Municipal Act bill that is in negotiation with the province of Ontario. I say to all of those out there who would hesitate to criticize this, they ought to keep in mind that at the end of the day they have a responsibility to do a better job of protecting their taxpayers from this kind of download.

There's one last thing I want talk about, because I'm hoping the members opposite begin to understand the extent to which we can, through energy and innovation and investment, create good community, that government can do that. They ought to come for a visit in the St Lawrence neighbourhood. The St Lawrence neighbourhood was created by people on Toronto city council in the 1970s and 1980s who had a vision for a place that would be high-density and mixed-income and healthy. Unlike many of the attempts that we made with respect to public investment in housing, it is a dream come true. It is not a perfect neighbourhood by any stretch, but it is a neighbourhood where people of all incomes live together and grow together and take care of one another. That's the kind of community we can create, but it is not the kind of community we can create when we pass the responsibility to a government that does not have adequate resources to do it. It is a short-sighted viewpoint, from the standpoint of this government, to abandon its responsibilities for that.

There was a guy, Michael Du Maresq, who came to the committee from a co-op called the Brewin Housing Co-op over on Charles St. I had the opportunity, when I worked for Mayor Hall, to attend the opening. He made an excellent presentation and a heartfelt offer to members of the government to come and visit his co-op community. He sent them a letter as a follow-up, and I don't think any of them went. They ought to have, because if they did, if they truly cared and if they truly wanted to learn about what was good community created by public investment, they would have seen the potential by visiting the Brewin co-op. Instead, they choose to support this stupid bill because they're told to. I will stand with pleasure and vote against this bill, because it's a terrible bill.

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

Mr Coburn has moved third reading of Bill 128, the Social Housing Reform Act, 2000. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All in favour will say "aye."

All opposed will say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

Call in the members. This will be a 30-minute bell.

I have received a letter from the chief government whip deferring this vote until tomorrow during deferred votes.

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

The House adjourned at 2130.

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		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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