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Monday 11 June 2001

Journal des débats (Hansard)

Lundi 11 juin 2001

**Standing committee on
finance and economic affairs**

**Comité permanent des finances
et des affaires économiques**

Responsible Choices for Growth
and Accountability Act
(2001 Budget), 2001

Loi de 2001
sur des choix réfléchis
favorisant la croissance
et la responsabilisation
(budget de 2001)

Chair: Marcel Beaubien
Clerk: Susan Sourial

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ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON
FINANCE AND ECONOMIC AFFAIRS**

**COMITÉ PERMANENT DES FINANCES
ET DES AFFAIRES ÉCONOMIQUES**

Monday 11 June 2001

Lundi 11 juin 2001

The committee met at 0901 in room 151.

**RESPONSIBLE CHOICES FOR GROWTH
AND ACCOUNTABILITY ACT
(2001 BUDGET), 2001**

**LOI DE 2001
SUR DES CHOIX RÉFLÉCHIS
FAVORISANT LA CROISSANCE
ET LA RESPONSABILISATION
(BUDGET DE 2001)**

Consideration of Bill 45, An Act to implement measures contained in the 2001 Budget and to amend various statutes / Projet de loi 45, Loi mettant en oeuvre des mesures mentionnées dans le budget de 2001 et modifiant diverses lois.

The Chair (Mr Marcel Beaubien): If I can get everyone's attention, please, it's 9 o'clock and I would like to bring the committee to order. This is the second day of hearings of the standing committee on finance and economic affairs dealing with Bill 45.

I see that the Minister of Finance is on time this morning. We appreciate that, Minister, and on behalf of the committee, welcome. You have 30 minutes for your presentation this morning.

**STATEMENT BY THE MINISTRY
AND RESPONSES**

Hon Jim Flaherty (Deputy Premier, Minister of Finance): Good morning, Chair and members. Thank you for the opportunity to speak to the budget bill, Bill 45, this morning.

On May 9, I had the great pleasure to introduce my first provincial budget in the Legislature. Today I would like to review some of the responsible choices we made in that budget, choices that will enable Ontario to grow and prosper and, in some cases, make history.

Historically, our budget marked the first time in nearly 100 years that an Ontario government had presented three balanced budgets in a row. Historically, it recorded the largest debt payment in the history of the province: \$3 billion.

It set out a plan of fiscal responsibility, accountability and growth. If passed, Bill 45, the Responsible Choices for Growth and Accountability Act, 2001, will help set

that plan in motion. It's an important plan for the future of the province, a plan crafted for the benefit of the people of Ontario, today and into the future.

On May 9, our three children sat in the Legislature's gallery to watch me deliver my first budget. Their presence reminded me that our children are our future, that the responsible choices and decisions we make today will benefit them. I want to ensure that all of our children inherit a province with its financial house in order. It's the responsible thing to do. Responsible choices—that's what Bill 45 is all about.

If I may, I'd like to address the matter of the equity in education tax credit. In the weeks following the budget, there has been substantial coverage and discussion about the equity in education tax credit. The 2001 budget promises parents flexibility and choice in the education of their children. Many parents have told us they want their children educated in their own culture and religion. The tax credit would help provide them with that choice.

It will also bring Ontario in line with other provinces that support parental choice. Those provinces include British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba and Quebec. Funding for independent schools in other provinces has not caused an exodus of students from the public system. Both British Columbia and Manitoba introduced their grant programs in 1989, more than 10 years ago, and have not experienced a significant change in the proportion of children enrolled in the public system. We expect the experience in Ontario to be much the same.

Choice in the education system is something parents have been asking for. It's an issue I've heard about as an MPP for years. I would suggest that virtually all MPPs have heard about the need for greater choice in education from their own constituents. Since May 9, our office has received numerous letters and e-mails in support of the tax credit and educational choice. These letters tell us about the financial sacrifices made by ordinary, hard-working parents in order to send their children to independent schools. They offer thanks from honest, hard-working and middle-class families who feel the government has finally recognized the importance of educational choice. Also, these parents want to know which schools will be eligible. They want to know what the criteria will be. Consultations will identify the appropriate framework for establishing eligibility for the tax credit.

Let me be perfectly clear: public education continues to be a main priority for this government. Public education in Ontario includes public, Catholic and francophone schools. We have demonstrated that commitment clearly. Public education in Ontario is fully funded. In fact, we're providing more than \$360 million in additional funding for the public education system in the fiscal year 2001-02. Since 1995, we've increased funding from \$12.9 billion to \$13.8 billion per annum.

I address briefly the issue of tax cuts, tax reductions, in this year's budget. This government firmly believes that tax dollars belong to the people of Ontario, not the government. We realize that government can't give you anything that government hasn't taken away from you in the first place.

The 2001 budget proposes further personal income tax cuts. This budget completes the 20% personal income tax cut which we promised in 1999. Some 95% of taxpayers, virtually everyone earning less than \$100,000 a year, would see at least a 20% personal income tax cut.

Tax cuts help lower-income families. The tax cuts proposed in the budget would bring to 735,000 the number of low-income earners who would no longer pay taxes to the government of Ontario. These same 735,000 people, regrettably, would continue to pay taxes to the federal government.

A few words about the surtax: the Ontario surtax hits taxpayers with incomes that start at \$54,000. People at this income level are by no means rich. These are middle-class individuals and families. Raising the surtax threshold in 2003, as proposed in the budget this year, means the surtax would no longer be payable on earnings below \$70,000. Personal income tax cuts are part of our pro-growth plan to promote economic growth and financial security. Even the federal government is starting to realize the benefits of cutting taxes. Paul Martin, the federal finance minister, stated that "Tax reduction is essential to secure strong and sustained economic growth." That was in the *Globe and Mail* on February 7, 2000.

In addition, just last week, the new Premier of British Columbia, Gordon Campbell, announced that he will be implementing a provincial personal tax cut of 25%. That tax cut in British Columbia will put approximately \$1.5 billion back into the pockets of most taxpayers in that province.

Ontario paved the way for tax cuts in Canada. I'm proud to say that every province is following our lead. Tax cuts help boost the entire Canadian economy. I remember a time, as others here will, in the early 1990s when one would be mocked for saying, "If you reduce taxes, you will increase economic activity and increase government revenue." Premier Harris showed leadership. He was opposed then and is opposed now by the opposition here with respect to reducing personal income taxes in Ontario. History has proven that Premier Harris was not only correct but also demonstrated leadership, not only for Ontario but for our entire country.

0910

Since we started cutting taxes, our tax revenues have increased by more than \$15 billion. Since we started cutting taxes in 1995, our businesses have created 853,000 net new jobs. That's the entire population of the city of Mississauga. Since we started cutting taxes, business investment in this province has increased by 66%. Private sector economists expect continued growth in Ontario of approximately 2.3% in 2001. They expect economic growth to pick up to 3.6% in 2002.

Virtually all forecasters cite tax cuts as a key reason that Ontario will continue to have a growing economy in 2001. They say tax cuts will help us weather the economic uncertainty in the United States. Ontario today, in 2001, is much better positioned than it was in 1994-95 to withstand economic challenges. We have a diversified economy now and we have a vibrant economy, as opposed to the stagnant economy we inherited when elected in 1995. It is vital to keep that economy going, to keep the momentum going.

To keep the momentum going, our government sent a powerful message to Ontario businesses with the announcement of Ontario's Edge in the budget this year. Ontario's Edge is a package of initiatives aimed at keeping the businesses of this province strong and encouraging new businesses to set up shop here. Enhancing our quality of life is central to the plan's success.

There are four components of Ontario's Edge, and let me speak to two of them today.

The first component is tax cuts for corporations. There was a time in Ontario—I think most people are well beyond that now—when some politicians tried to say, "Corporations over here and individuals over here, and one has nothing to do with the other." Most people now realize that healthy corporations, reducing taxes for corporations, creates investment, creates growth, creates plant expansions, creates new jobs in this province and is good for everyone—all individuals, all families—in Ontario.

The first component is tax cuts for corporations. We are proposing to legislate, if passed, the full schedule for our corporate income tax cuts each year between now and 2005. When completed, these tax cuts would give Ontario a lower combined corporate income tax rate than any of the 50 American states, and no Canadian province would have a lower combined general corporate tax rate than Ontario.

Lower corporate tax rates will encourage businesses to invest more in new facilities and hire more people. Legislating those tax cuts will give businesses more certainty. As members of the Legislature know, given the provisions of the Taxpayer Protection Act, legislating them would require a referendum subsequently in order to increase those taxes in Ontario.

The second component of Ontario's Edge is to start taking steps to eliminate the job-killing capital tax. This was recommended to us by the business tax review panel. They told us that a tax on capital discourages investment of capital. They noted that internationally we're out of

step here. Canada is almost alone in taxing capital. They said the capital tax is a deterrent to attracting international investment.

As a first step, then, toward eliminating the job-killing capital tax, this legislation, if passed, would remove it on the first \$5 million of taxable capital. This would eliminate the tax for more than 11,000 small and medium-sized Ontario businesses.

We've set a goal in this province that within 10 years, Ontario will enjoy the best-performing economy and the highest quality of life in North America. Ontario's Edge and the passage of Bill 45 will help us to achieve that goal.

Since 1995, the province's economy has grown by almost 25% and created a record 853,000 net new jobs. Ontario's recent fiscal performance has been outstanding—the envy of the G7 industrialized world. These economic statistics clearly indicate that our government's economic agenda is on the right track. Our government has laid down a solid foundation of sound economic and fiscal policies that positions us to ride out any slowdown in the United States and indeed to even outpace the United States in terms of growth.

Through personal and business tax cuts that support strong economic growth, through sound fiscal responsibility, through balanced budgets, through government-wide accountability, our government is committed to building on the province's prosperity.

Some would ask, why economic growth, why the emphasis on a vibrant economy instead of a stagnant economy, as we inherited? Economic growth gives us the wherewithal to increase funding on health care, which was done; to increase funding on education, which was done; to have in the budget the provisions with respect to vulnerable persons, the further funding in the future for support workers who care for vulnerable persons, the important funding for residential places. Parents told us—they told all MPPs—how they worry, as their developmentally disabled children grow into adults, about who's going to take care of them when they're gone. We've heard about that for years; that's addressed in this year's budget, at a cost of \$67 million.

What about post-secondary education? We heard repeatedly during the pre-budget consultations, from parents, from educators, from university and college presidents, "Please address the issue of the coming double cohort, of the demographic change with the baby boom echo, of the positive news that more and more young people are choosing to go on into post-secondary education." We did that in the budget this year—a commitment of hundreds of millions of dollars. We were able to do it because of the economic growth spurred by balanced budgets and low, competitive taxes in the province of Ontario.

We will continue to make responsible choices. We will continue to focus on our pledge to make Ontario the best place to live, work and raise a family in the 21st century.

Bill 45 represents the continuation of our plan to build a stronger, more prosperous Ontario.

I look forward to reviewing the ideas and input of the organizations and individuals who have made, are making and will make presentations to this standing committee of the Ontario Legislature.

I thank you and the members, Chair, for the opportunity to make a presentation this morning.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Minister. We have approximately four minutes per caucus. I started with the official opposition on Friday, so I'll start with Mr Marchese today.

Mr Rosario Marchese (Trinity-Spadina): Minister, you're obviously well aware that we've been calling for you to separate the bill so that we could discuss the issue of tax credits to private schools and discuss the financial stuff quite separately. You may know that in St Catharines the majority of people, except one or possibly two, wanted to discuss the issue of tax credits. Is there a reason why there was no interest on your part to separate the bill?

Hon Mr Flaherty: Bill 45 contains numerous provisions, including provisions with respect to post-secondary education, important funding for persons with developmental disabilities, education funding. There are a number of tax credit issues in the bill, dealing with the capital tax, dealing with corporate tax reductions, dealing with personal income tax reductions. The bill covers all of those items; it's not proposed to sever any individual item from the bill.

Mr Marchese: I understood that very clearly. What we were saying to you is that the majority of people really wanted to debate the issue of tax credits, public dollars for private schools, and we were urging you to separate them. But you have no interest in doing that—separate it from the rest.

Hon Mr Flaherty: It's not a question of having no interest; it's a question of a budget bill containing very many items. To start separating out each and every item would prolong matters rather dramatically. We do have to have a budget in the province of Ontario; we do need to move forward with the budget bill. It's important that we have public consultations with respect to the equity in education tax credit. It's excellent that these hearings are taking place right now, and there will of course be further discussions with respect to the regulations that will be necessary, assuming Bill 45 is passed.

0920

Mr Marchese: You're also aware that quite a while ago your Minister of Education and your Premier said, much to this effect, "We've been very clear that our goal is good, quality public education, and the estimates of \$300 million needed to fund religious schools would be \$300 million that would come out of the public school system." She was very clear about the implications of funding religious schools. She said, "If you do this, it will take \$300 million out of the public system." She said that; the Premier said that. What do you think happened that would have changed the course of that direction?

Hon Mr Flaherty: We're not funding independent schools. That's what happened. If you take a pool of

money, let's say \$100 million, and you start dividing it up among independent schools, public schools, Catholic schools and so on, then what you're suggesting would indeed be so. But that's not what's happening, and I'm sure you realize that. We're saying that the pool of, as an example, \$100 million for public education, which includes public, Catholic and francophone education, remains intact and will be paid in full and will continue to be paid in full. In addition, there will be an additional financial burden on the treasury of the province of Ontario by reason of the tax credit. Of course, we've budgeted for that in preparation for the budget.

Mr Marchese: So when the Minister of Education—

The Chair: Mr Marchese, we've run out of time.

Mr Marchese: That's four minutes already?

The Chair: Sorry. Mr O'Toole.

Mr John O'Toole (Durham): There may be another question from a member of the panel.

Thank you very much, Minister and Deputy, for appearing this morning to give voice to the importance of having a strong economy. Certainly I've been hearing that in my riding of Durham. The whole equation starts with the economy argument. Without the strong economy, of course, you can't have a strong public education or health care system and all the rest of the important things for all the people of Ontario.

We've heard—primarily in St Catharines—I would say a reasoned argument with respect to support for the independent school issue. Minister, because it's an important issue certainly not just to my constituents but the people of Ontario and those who have fought for years to have equity as they would see it, perhaps you could comment. The other provinces in Canada have tried to address this, and I think Ontario has taken an initiative here that addresses a long-standing issue. Even from the time when I was a school trustee back in the early 1980s, the debate was then certainly on the record. Our government and other governments have tried to wrestle with it, and I commend you for taking the very strong initiative to try to come to terms with this issue of access to independent schools. Many make the argument that they're paying twice already; they're paying once through the regular tax system and then they're paying as tuition and other expenses to send their children to independent schools. Perhaps you could comment on what some of the other provinces in Canada are doing to address this important issue.

Hon Mr Flaherty: The member for Durham, as is his wont, raises a very important question.

Ms Marilyn Mushinski (Scarborough Centre): A very long one, too.

Hon Mr Flaherty: A very long question, as well, yes.

Mr Marchese: The four minutes is up.

Hon Mr Flaherty: It is important to note that even if the Legislature, in its wisdom, chooses to pass Bill 45, including the equity in education tax credit, parents who choose to send their children to independent schools will still pay their full taxes to the education system, through the property tax and otherwise. What they will then do is

pay their tuition to the private school or the independent school if they choose to send their child, and they'll get a maximum of 50% tax relief for that, phased in over time. It's a modest proposal to provide some relief to parents who do that. It takes not one cent away from the public education system in Ontario, which includes Catholic and francophone education. It's very important for people to realize that and not to misunderstand what is taking place.

It's also not a voucher system, because in a voucher system you take money away from other sectors; you take that \$100-million pool and you start divvying it up through parents among the sectors. That's not what we're proposing to do in Ontario. We're proposing to continue to fund public education fully, and then there will be an additional cost for the tax credit for parents.

We don't need to rely on theoretical studies; we have the experience in all of our neighbouring provinces. The large province of Quebec next door to us and all of the western provinces, including Alberta and British Columbia, have created funding mechanisms for independent schools and have more than 10 years' experience in a couple of cases, and there has not been any sort of mass exodus from the public school system. There has been some relief for parents who choose to exercise parental choice and, quite frankly, I'm loath to substitute my opinion or the opinion of politicians generally for the choices that parents make for their own children.

The Chair: The official opposition.

Mr Gerry Phillips (Scarborough-Agincourt): I'll move quickly, and we will focus on the tax credit just because of the lack of time. This is a major move as far as we're concerned, a huge move that will impact education. I'm very interested in the background research that you've done.

I know in your brief to the United Nations you argued that if you were required to fund private religious schools it "would have a detrimental impact on public schools, and hence the fostering of a tolerant, multicultural, non-discriminatory society in the province." You went on in that brief, I gather as a result of research, that if you were required to fund, it "would have an adverse effect on the viability of the public system which would become the system serving students not found admissible by any other system."

I gather that was the result of background research that the ministry did. Two things: will you table that background research that allows you to reach that conclusion, and how did you reach that conclusion about what sounded like quite a dramatic negative impact on the public system by funding?

Hon Mr Flaherty: Your question makes the assumption that money would be removed from the public education system in order to fund the tax credit. That's wrong.

Mr Phillips: No, that wasn't my question.

Hon Mr Flaherty: That's totally wrong. There's no proposal to do that; in fact, our commitment is to con-

tinue, as we have done, to fully fund the public education system in the province of Ontario.

Because of economic growth, because the Mike Harris government has turned the ship of Ontario around, because we've had substantial growth since 1995, right up to the present and including this year in Ontario, we've had that growth in government in revenues, as a result of tax cuts and other initiatives in reducing red tape and good government and balanced budgets—which we didn't see under Liberal governments and we didn't see under NDP governments from 1985 to 1995. Because of that good government, we have the revenues that we need in order to take this one small step for parents who choose to send their children to independent schools which, as you know, are mainly for religious and cultural reasons.

I understand you're against that. I understand you don't want the government to make that one small step in favour of parental choice.

Mr Gerard Kennedy (Parkdale-High Park): Minister, I wonder if I can ask about the backward step you're taking. You're the minister responsible for the money flowing from the government and you're claiming here \$360 million in new dollars. Will you table documents to show that's the case? Because your own student focus funding, available on the ministry Web site, shows a reduction of \$10 million.

Rather than get into anything that takes away from this discussion, would you table numbers to show that there's \$360 million in new dollars that you, the Premier and the Minister of Education said was coming in, because we're not alleging anything but the facts. This is where the money is coming from. There's \$10 million less in operating dollars available to schools, less per student than there was last year. Will you table documents to show otherwise—and I want to reiterate what my colleague had said—show us the research that you have done to show this is a safe, good, beneficial measure that will not harm public education and, included in that, show us some accurate documentation of how much funding is going to public schools this year?

Hon Mr Flaherty: Here's the best research for the member: Quebec, Manitoba, Saskatchewan—

Mr Kennedy: I don't want—

Hon Mr Flaherty: —Alberta and British Columbia.

The Chair: One conversation at a time.

Hon Mr Flaherty: All of those provinces, all of our sister provinces with the majority of population in Canada, if you include Ontario, have chosen to provide some sort of relief for independent schools.

Mr Kennedy: Don't expect—

The Chair: Mr Kennedy. There was no interruption when you posed a question; I think you should let the minister answer the question.

Mr Kennedy: I've asked a question, and it's a simple yes or no answer, Mr Chair.

The Chair: No. I don't conduct the way people answer. The minister has the floor, and I think you should give him the opportunity to answer the question.

Hon Mr Flaherty: With respect to the budget, to direct my answer to your question, there's your on-the-ground, real research from 1999 to the present, and even more than that, in our sister provinces in this great country.

Having left that, let's move to the issue of budgeting for education. As I mentioned in my remarks, we've increased budgeting for education dramatically from 1995 until now. In the budgeting this year, we allowed an additional \$360 million for public education, which includes Catholic and francophone education in Ontario. That's important, because that's even going beyond the funding formula for public education in the province.

Mr Kennedy: Minister, I appreciate you're running out the clock and not answering the question, but that will stand for the public record. You're afraid to put documents on the table to back up what you're saying here today.

I want to use your own report to the House. You said, "We'll have the same increase as in Manitoba." You just said, "Let's rely on the other provinces." You said there would be a 32% increase in Manitoba.

Now, Minister, because you don't have respect for this committee or for the people of Ontario and you won't put the documents on the table, I want to ask you, how can you justify things will only cost \$300 million when there's a 32% increase in one of the provinces that you cited. That 32% increase is another \$220 million lost to the public education system, a cost to the treasury of at least \$110 million, maybe \$120 million.

Minister, will you reconcile those statements and preferably will you do it on paper? Would you provide us with some factual backup for the allegations you're making that this is beneficial to the province? Will you show us the studies you've done and will you show us how this protects the funding and the well-being of students in the public system?

0930

Hon Mr Flaherty: I'll avoid the sort of personal remarks that you make.

Mr Kennedy: That's not personal.

Hon Mr Flaherty: I'll say two things. You're wrong about the experience of our sister provinces in Canada. I said in my opening remarks that there would be no exodus likely from the public education system, because that has been the experience of the other Canadian provinces to which I have made reference. Those aren't theoretical, professorial ideas, that's the actual experience of other Canadian provinces.

Secondly, not one penny—you're wrong about this again—gets removed from public education, because we do not take the pot and start splitting it up between independent schools and public schools. We commit to fully funding public education. We continue that commitment.

Mr Kennedy: Show us.

Hon Mr Flaherty: That commitment is firm and will persist as reflected in the budget this year, if you choose to have a look at the budget.

The Chair: With that, Minister, I must bring the discussion to an end because we've run out of time. On behalf of the committee, thank you very much for your presentation this morning.

Hon Mr Flaherty: Thank you, Chair.

MINISTRY BRIEFING

The Chair: Our next presentation is from the Ministry of Finance. I would ask the individuals making the presentation to come forward and state your name for the record, please. On behalf of the committee, welcome, and you have 30 minutes for the presentation.

Dr Robert Christie: Good morning, Chair. My name is Bob Christie, I'm the Deputy Minister of Finance, and to my right is—

The Chair: Could we have a bit of order, please? Thank you. Go ahead, Dr Christie.

Dr Christie: To my right is Tom Sweeting, who is the assistant deputy minister for taxation and intergovernmental finance. To my left is Gabe Sékaly, who is the assistant deputy minister of the fiscal and financial policy division.

My purpose here today is to provide members of the standing committee on finance and economic affairs with a technical overview of some of the key elements of Bill 45. As the minister noted in his discussion, there are a number of tax measures announced in the budget that Bill 45 proposes to implement.

We begin with corporation tax, particularly with respect to corporation income tax rates. The 2000 Ontario budget announced the government's intention to reduce the general corporate income tax rate and the tax rate on income from manufacturing and processing, from mining, from logging, from farming and fishing to 8% by 2005. That budget presented the first two stages of the tax cuts which were enacted in June 2000 in Bill 72.

Effective May 2, 2000, the general rate was cut from 15.5% to 14.5% and the M and P rate—manufacturing and processing rate—was reduced from 13.5% to 12.5%. Then, effective January 1, 2001, the general rate and the M and P rate were further reduced to 14% and 12% respectively. Provisions in this bill would give effect to the 2001 budget proposal to implement the remaining steps to achieve the 8% rates in the year 2005.

In particular and specifically, on January 1, 2002, the general tax rate will go to 12.5% and the M and P rate would go to 11%. January 1, 2003, the general tax rate would go to 11% and the M and P rate to 10%. A year later, on January 1, 2004, 9.5% for the general rate, 9% for the M and P rate; and on January 1, 2005, both rates would have arrived at the 8% level.

There are a number of consequential amendments to the capital gains refund provision for mutual fund corporations to reflect the reductions in the general corporate income tax rate and the reductions in the capital gains inclusion rate that were announced in 2000. In 2000, the capital gains inclusion rate was reduced from 75% to

66 $\frac{2}{3}$ % effective February 28, 2000, and was further reduced to 50% effective October 18, 2000.

There are also consequential amendments to a number of provisions, including the small business deduction, to reflect the reductions in the general tax rate.

As the minister noted, corporate income tax reductions have as their purpose the provision of stimulus to the economy and stimulus to investment in Ontario that, by benefiting the economy, would benefit all Ontarians. In the long run, most of the benefit from the corporate tax cuts is spread reasonably broadly through the economy, as opposed to being restricted solely to shareholders. This is a point, I think, on which economists and tax people are in reasonably good agreement, and it reflects in part the fact that capital investment is quite mobile internationally. Investors look to place their funds in the locale and in opportunities where the after-tax return they can get on those investments is the best that they can achieve. If one jurisdiction offers a lower after-tax return as a result of high corporate income tax rates, that jurisdiction will not benefit from some of the investment opportunities that will in fact go elsewhere because there are better returns on investment elsewhere.

I think it's also true—at least a number of people have noted—that some of the most rapidly growing economies over the last 10 years or so have been ones that have either low or significantly reduced corporate tax rates. When the CIT rate is higher in Ontario, obviously, it has to be offset by a higher pre-tax rate of return. Only the very best and most profitable investment opportunities are implemented, while many other good opportunities that would be taken up in a competitive tax environment in fact are not taken up if corporate taxes are too high. As a result, expansions don't occur, people aren't hired, incomes don't grow and productivity does not grow. When our corporate tax rates are relatively low, those opportunities are taken up and, in fact, new opportunities are created.

Historically, in Canada the corporate tax rates have been high compared to other countries. This is generally believed to have contributed to a relatively low rate of investment and to a lower rate of growth in productivity and the standard of living in Canada. Even after federal and provincial corporate income tax cuts that have already been made, the top corporate income tax rate in Ontario is still about 42% compared to an average of 34% among leading industrial countries. As I noted earlier, some of the highest growth among industrialized countries has been in those jurisdictions that have significantly lower corporate income tax rates. These include Ireland, Norway, Denmark and the Netherlands, which have all outperformed Canada's growth by a significant margin.

In this latest budget, the government has announced a firm schedule for corporate tax rate cuts and has proposed that those be legislated. This will give potential investors a firm, reliable basis for making their future investment plans and will boost confidence in Ontario as a locale for investment. Once these rate reductions are

completed in 2005, the combined federal and provincial corporate tax rate in Ontario will be significantly lower than the rates in any US state and there will be no Canadian province, as the minister noted, that will have lower rates. This is expected to provide significant incentive for companies to invest in Ontario, not just in the future but even in the short run. As people evaluate the life cycle of their investments, they will certainly see that the scheduled reduction of corporate income tax rates will have a significant impact on returns over the life cycle of that investment.

The bill proposes to implement as well the capital tax reduction. The proposal is to exempt from capital tax the first \$5 million of taxable capital starting January 1, 2002. This exemption would apply to both regular corporations and to financial institutions. Currently, regular corporations with \$2 million or less of taxable capital are exempt from capital tax, while corporations with between \$2 million and \$3.2 million of taxable capital are subject to a reduced tax rate. Financial institutions are exempt from tax on the first \$2 million of taxable capital.

0940

A related amendment increases the total asset and gross revenue thresholds for using the short-form corporate tax return from \$1.5 million to \$3 million for tax years commencing after December 31, 2001. I note that corporations eligible to use this short form are exempt from capital tax, although financial institutions cannot use that form.

The capital tax reduction and move to ultimately eliminate the tax were, as the minister noted, proposed by the business tax review panel. The capital tax is a particularly challenging form of tax because it's a fixed charge on the value of capital invested; it's not related to profits, it's not related to a corporation's ability to pay or its profitability or cash flow. It directly increases the cost of investing in Ontario, and so it discourages investment. It's a form of tax not found in most other countries and, as a result, puts Ontario and Canada at a special disadvantage. It is a fixed cost on business. In periods of economic slowdown when businesses are forced to cut costs and are looking for every opportunity to conserve cash, capital tax forces them to cut more deeply in areas where they have flexibility, and that tends to be primarily on the wage front. As a result, capital tax tends to have a negative impact on job creation.

One mitigating factor regarding the capital tax is that it's considered a deductible expense against federal corporate income tax, so when Ontario cuts its capital tax, it raises issues of distribution of the benefit and the federal government's role in that. Certainly, I think the government has been consistent in encouraging the federal government to reduce their tax rates of all kinds, including corporate income tax.

On the personal income tax front, the bill includes provisions to remove the first tier of Ontario's two-tier personal income tax surtax, effective January 1, 2003. Effective as of that date, the current first-tier rate of 20%—and I should note this is not a rate that's levied on

income, it's a rate that's levied on tax paid, so it's not directly comparable to some of the other tax rates that we talk about—would be added to the second-tier rate of 36% for a single tax rate of 56% on the gross tax of the individual that exceeds \$4,491, which in effect would eliminate the first tier of the current two-tier surtax.

Personal tax rates as well would be reduced for the 2002 and 2003 taxation years. The new rates would be—and I'll start with the lowest rate of the three personal income tax rates that are part of our schedule. In 2001, the lowest tax rate is 6.2%, then we go to 6.05% for 2002 and 5.65% for 2003. The middle rate, at 9.24% for 2001 is proposed to go to 9.15% for 2002 and 8.85% for 2003. The highest rate under the proposal in the bill would be unchanged.

Economic studies have almost universally found substantial short-run and long-run benefits from personal income tax cuts. They are believed to create a more dynamic economy with higher productivity growth and, as a result, higher standards of living for the economy and the citizens as a whole. Lower personal income tax rates give everybody the incentive to work harder and remove disincentives to extra work to increase their incomes, knowing that they'll be able to keep more of any increase that they earn. Business owners have a greater incentive to expand their business and hire more people. Lower personal income tax rates also make Ontario's export industries more competitive, since it's easier for employers to attract and keep the skilled workers that are critical in a modern knowledge-based economy. As I noted earlier, capital is highly mobile, and competitive tax rates are critical there. It's becoming increasingly the case that highly skilled labour is also internationally mobile, and competitive tax rates in the ranges of income earned by these skilled workers also need to be competitive to continue to attract and retain those skills.

When these changes are fully implemented, the personal income tax measures proposed in the 2001 budget, together with the measures implemented in the 1999 and 2000 budgets, complete the government's 20%, \$4-billion personal income tax cut. With the approval of this legislation, 95% of Ontario taxpayers would see a 20% or greater tax cut, and virtually all taxpayers reporting less than \$100,000 of income would see at least a 20% tax cut. In addition, the measures proposed in this legislation would remove an additional 75,000 Ontario taxpayers from the tax rolls.

The budget also proposes the equity in education tax credit. Effective for 2002 and subsequent taxation years, a refundable Ontario tax credit would be provided for a parent who pays tuition fees for a child enrolled in an independent school at the elementary or secondary level. Independent schools, both religious and secular, would be eligible, and criteria would be elaborated in consultation, as the minister discussed earlier.

The proposal is to phase in the credit over five years, beginning at 10% in 2002, rising to 20% in 2003 and eventually reaching 50%. Bill 45 includes provisions to

implement the first two steps of the plan. The maximum amount eligible for the credit would be \$700 per month and \$7,000 annually for each child enrolled in an independent school. Consultations will identify the appropriate framework for establishing future criteria for eligibility for this credit.

Other tax credits are proposed to be modified in the bill as well. Effective for the 2001 and subsequent taxation years, the \$200 monthly amount for full-time students and \$60 monthly amount for part-time students—the education tax credit, primarily for post-secondary—would be increased to \$400 and \$120, respectively.

Ontario's basic disability tax credit and the disability amount that may be transferred from a dependant other than a spouse would be increased from \$4,293 to \$6,000. The supplement to the disability tax credit in respect of disabled children under 18 years of age would also be increased to \$3,500 from the current level of \$2,941, and the infirm dependant credit and the caregiver credit would be increased from \$2,386 to \$3,500 as well.

To prevent erosion of the value of these credit amounts by inflation, all other non-refundable tax amounts will be increased for 2001 as a result of indexing, and the new education, disability, and infirm dependant caregiver credit amounts will be indexed for inflation for 2002 and subsequent taxation years.

Mr Phillips: Mr Chair, just a question: will we have some time for questions, or is this going to run the full half-hour?

Dr Christie: Actually, Mr Phillips, I haven't timed it, but I'm not quite halfway through.

Mr Phillips: Well, you've run out the clock completely and more. I wouldn't mind a question or two.

The Chair: It's up to you, sir. It's your call. It's your presentation. If you wish to take some questions, I'm willing to entertain anything you desire.

Dr Christie: I'd prefer—it may be that if I can cover them—

The Chair: You have approximately 10 minutes left for your presentation.

Dr Christie: I'll do my best to move quickly through the presentation.

Mr Phillips: No, no. I don't care how fast you go; we want to question. I would like ask a question.

0950

The Chair: Mr Phillips, it's up to the presenter. I don't think we can dictate how the presentation is made; we haven't done that previously. So just continue with your presentation. If you wish to take some questions—

Dr Christie: There's also a provision in the bill for calculation of an individual's Ontario alternative minimum tax, which is clarified in the bill so that the amount of that AMT is that which exceeds the individual's special foreign tax credit.

On the retail sales tax side, there are changes to the taxation of multi-jurisdictional vehicles. The international registration plan is the focus of these changes. It's a commercial vehicle registration agreement pro-

viding for the collection of registration fees and other taxes and fees from interjurisdictional carriers based on the proportion of travel in a given jurisdiction. The home jurisdiction collects the appropriate registration fees and any annual, pro-rateable taxes on the basis of fleet miles operated to other jurisdictions and the applicable rates in those jurisdictions. The amounts collected are forwarded to those appropriate jurisdictions. Joining the international registration plan allows Ontario-based truckers continued access to the US market with minimal red tape.

The former agreement here was the interprovincial sales tax agreement, which allowed for provincial sales taxes to be collected and distributed among those provinces in which a commercial vehicle travelled. However, this agreement has been terminated as of April 1, 2001, and this international registration plan takes its place, as well as dealing with the US. Taxes and fees under this must be pro-rateable and annual. As a result, Ontario's retail sales tax on affected vehicles and on repairs to those vehicles has to be spread out over the life of the vehicle and charged on an annual basis rather than now being charged as incurred. To do this requires modifying the collection mechanism of the retail sales tax for these vehicles. BC, Saskatchewan, Manitoba and some US states have already implemented such a tax, and it is proposed that Ontario would follow suit in this budget and in this budget bill.

There's also a retail sales tax rebate for electric hybrid cars. There's currently a rebate for vehicles powered by alternative fuels to encourage the use of environmentally friendly fuels and reduce reliance on conventional fossil fuels. This budget proposes to extend the provision to electric hybrid vehicles as well, to encourage environmentally friendly technologies.

The budget also proposes, effective May 9, 2001, that no succession duty falling due will be payable. The Succession Duty Act was repealed in 1979, and no duty has been collected in respect of deaths in Ontario since then. But legislation has remained in effect to ensure that duty in respect of deaths prior to that time would still be paid. Most of that has now been paid, and the proposal is now to eliminate the act.

Other measures in the bill deal, among other things, with the Ontario Property Assessment Corp. The Ontario Property Assessment Corp, commonly known as OPAC, was created to deliver property assessment services when responsibility for assessment service delivery was transferred to the municipal sector in 1998. Upon this transfer, OPAC became responsible for administration of the assessment process, which includes determining assessed values and preparing assessment rolls. The province maintains a role in that process, as it governs assessment policies and property tax policies through legislation and regulation.

The role and function of OPAC has been reviewed. The review looked at the structure and operation to confirm that the needs of Ontario property owners and municipalities are being met. It was felt this was an appropriate time to conduct the review, as the 2001 re-

assessment was the first province-wide assessment conducted by OPAC as a stand-alone corporation.

As a result of input received during that review, the province is proposing to make changes to the governance and operational structure of OPAC with the aim of improving accountability, enhancing customer service and ensuring consistent provision of high-quality assessment services. In particular, the proposal would restructure the board of directors to include taxpayer representatives, along with municipal and provincial representatives, to ensure that all stakeholders have representation. It proposes to appoint a quality service commissioner to ensure that a consistent level of customer service standards is met. It proposes to eliminate the potential for municipalities to opt out of OPAC, to ensure that consistent assessment practices continue to be followed province-wide, and it proposes to change the name to the Municipal Property Assessment Corp to better reflect the organization's status as a municipal corporation.

The budget also proposes that changes be made to facilitate the financing of Ontario student loans. The committee, I'm sure, will recall the exit of banks from the provision of student loans and initiatives by both the federal government and the province to assure that student loans can continue to be made available even in the absence of the banks. The provisions in this bill, if enacted, would permit the establishment of an entity to facilitate the financing of those loans. Beginning in August of this year, we need to have in place a process to do that, and so that provision is being brought forward now.

The amendments proposed in the bill would permit the Minister of Finance to act as trustee, or appoint a person or entity to act as a trustee, of a trust created for the purpose of making loans to students and borrowing money to fund such loans. In effect, this trust would replace the function the banks were playing before they exited the field. The proposed amendments also state that where a member of the executive council or a public servant acts as a trustee, the assets of the trust don't constitute public money for the purposes of the Financial Administration Act.

There are also a number of changes proposed to financial services legislation, the intent of which is to eliminate barriers to competitiveness, reduce costs of compliance for businesses and increase administrative efficiency and effectiveness. The intent is to remove obsolete legislation which is no longer necessary and, in the current business climate, may be detrimental to the competitiveness of the sectors regulated. A number of acts are being amended in the bill, as proposed. They include the Co-operative Corporations Act, Credit Unions and Caisses Populaires Act, Insurance Act, Loan and Trust Corporations Act, Mortgage Brokers Act and Registered Insurance Brokers Act.

Amendments to the Co-operative Corporations Act address a commitment made in the 2000 budget to streamline regulatory requirements. The Loan and Trust Corporations Act proposals deliver on commitments

made in the 1996 budget and an October 1996 discussion paper to eliminate regulatory overlap and duplication of this industry.

Almost all the loan and trust companies operating in Ontario are already federally incorporated and federally regulated. Deposit insurance is provided by a single federal crown corporation, and consumers aren't generally aware of the province's role in this area in any case. There are only three small Ontario-incorporated loan and trust companies in operation, and they account for less than half a per cent of the industry's total assets.

Similarly, provincially incorporated trust companies across Canada represent a small percentage of the industry and very few operate outside their provincial borders. Of the 51 loan and trust companies that operate in the province, most are federally regulated and the largest, in fact, are owned by banks, which also fall under federal jurisdiction.

The maximum disentanglement and removal of overlap and duplication forthcoming from having a uniform regulatory regime will be applied to this industry in Ontario.

The Chair: You have one minute to wrap up.

Dr Christie: As I noted, this will occur in two phases: phase 1 at the time of royal assent and phase 2 on July 1, 2004, by which time all of these will have to be federally regulated. When there are no longer any Ontario-incorporated companies, the provisions that are no longer necessary would be repealed.

There are also proposed amendments of the Insurance Act to update the list of permissible investments, and of the Insurance Act and the Registered Insurance Brokers Act to eliminate current restrictions on ownership of those entities.

1000

There are also a number of technical amendments. In light of the time, I will simply describe the areas in which they occur. There are a number of technical elements to a number of acts dealing with professional corporations, having to do with liability of those who form and join professional corporations, and there is an amendment to permit the Minister of Finance to clarify that delegations of authority from the Minister of Finance to the Ontario Financing Authority have the force of the Minister of Finance, that they have the same force as if they were signed by the minister to permit clearer contracts.

The Chair: Thank you very much. We've used all the time.

Mr Phillips: Mr Chair, I realize they have to hotfoot it out of here now that they've done their job, but could I request that they provide us in writing the basis on which they reached the \$300-million cost estimate, the basis on which they reached the number of students, the average cost per tax credit and any background paper they've done, too, on if it went to \$4,000, what would happen, and if it went to \$4,500, what can happen?

The Chair: You can direct research to do this?

Mr Larry Johnston: Yes, sir.

Mr Phillips: Is that available, Mr Deputy?

The Chair: We'll request it through the research department.

Mr Phillips: Mission accomplished; no questions.

ONTARIO CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

The Chair: Our next presentation is from the Ontario Chamber of Commerce. On behalf of the committee, I would like to welcome the presenters and I would ask the presenters to state your names for the record. You have 20 minutes for your presentation this morning.

Mr Doug Robson: Good morning, everyone. My name is Doug Robson. I'm the president and chief operating officer of the Ontario Chamber of Commerce. To my left is our volunteer chair of the chamber's finance and tax committee, Mary Webb, who is also the senior economist for the Bank of Nova Scotia, and to my right is Atul Sharma, whose title has changed since the last time he was here; he is now vice-president of policy development and chief economist.

Mr Phillips: That's better than a salary increase.

Mr Atul Sharma: I'm working on that.

Mr Robson: In any event, normally we bring something with us, but we only learned Friday that we would be speaking now and not on Thursday, so we'll commit to give you something by the end of the week.

As the members know, the Ontario Chamber of Commerce represents 57,000 businesses throughout its federation of 156 chambers of commerce and boards of trade. It's the largest provincial business organization, and it has been the voice of business in Ontario since 1911.

The recent provincial budget was one that we believe keeps Ontario on the right track for future prosperity and competitiveness. Many of the recommendations made by the OCC during the pre-budget submissions are contained within the budget. The Ontario Chamber of Commerce is generally pleased with the government's emphasis on prudent fiscal management, maintaining strong economic growth, accountability and maintaining a balanced budget.

With regard to debt reduction, the government has followed the path laid out in our recommendation to reduce the debt-to-GDP ratio to 20% within five years. The Ontario Chamber of Commerce recommended in its pre-budget submission that the government reduce its debt-to-GDP ratio from approximately 30% to 25% within five years and that it further set its sights to reducing the debt-to-GDP ratio from 25% to 15% within a decade. We are pleased to note the government's payment of \$3 billion in the previous fiscal year, 80% of the promised \$5-billion reduction. The 2001-02 \$1-billion contribution, will lower the debt-to-GDP ratio to 24.8%.

With the current debt at just over \$110 billion, we urge the government to, whenever possible, put the maximum amount available to debt reduction. Debt reduction is an important part of Ontario's future prosperity and competitiveness. The more debt that can be retired, the more money there will be available for spend-

ing on the real priorities. As the members of this committee know, debt servicing is the third-largest government expenditure after health and education.

With regard to capital tax, the government took the first step to eliminate capital taxes, as recommended by its business tax panel chaired by our former chair and CEO, D'Arcy Delamere. In our pre-budget submission, we recommended the elimination of capital taxes for financial institutions and for all corporations. We are pleased to see the government take the first step on this issue.

However, more needs to be done. Not only should the government accelerate its capital tax elimination; it should begin examining the possibility of eliminating all profit-insensitive taxes. This is a recommendation that members of the finance and tax committee will be looking at more seriously for presentation at next year's pre-budget hearings.

In terms of reviewing taxes, the commitment to reviewing taxes to see if they fulfill their original objective, such as the tax for fuel conservation and the corporate minimum tax, is important. The Ontario chamber believes there are many taxes that should be reviewed to see if they are fulfilling their original purposes. We are pleased to see the government's commitment to reviewing these taxes.

The tax for fuel conservation, TFFC, is an example of a tax that was well-intentioned when it was introduced. Its purpose was to provide some incentive for people to purchase more fuel-efficient vehicles. However, our understanding from the industry is that it is having the opposite effect. As a result of the tax, people are delaying their purchases of vehicles because of the tax. What this means is that they are not replacing the inefficient vehicles that they currently have for new vehicles that are more environmentally friendly. We have also been told that the average age of the fleet is approximately eight to nine years old, which is the oldest in living memory.

Taxes such as the corporate minimum tax need to be reviewed because of their impact on our competitiveness. While this tax does not generate a great deal of revenue for the government, it does make Ontario seem less competitive than it actually is. Our recommendation is to simply remove the tax.

With regard to investment in infrastructure, we were pleased to see the government's commitment in the budget to studying Ontario's transportation corridors to help prepare Ontario's future transportation network and their recognition for a coordinated approach to transit and transportation. The Ontario Chamber of Commerce has put forward a proposal, as most of you know, for the establishment of an Ontario transportation authority. Under our proposal, the development of trade corridors, border crossings, rail and intermunicipal public transit would become the responsibility of an Ontario transportation authority.

The authority is needed, in our view, for five fundamental reasons: We need to deal with gridlock and planning on a coordinated basis. We're choking off trade

at our border points with our largest trading partner. Roads and public transportation systems need to be improved and expanded quickly. Innovative solutions are needed for transportation and land development in Ontario. Innovative financing solutions, in particular, are needed from the private and public sectors.

Our hope is that the government will seriously look at the establishment of an OTA. We believe that the transportation authority can contribute to Ontario's future prosperity and competitiveness.

With regard to government restructuring, we also applaud the government's commitment to establish a private sector panel to review the role of government in the 21st century. The government should begin the process of reviewing what its core business should be. Should the government be in the business of both establishing the policy direction and assuming responsibility for policy implementation, or should it just be in the policy direction establishment business? It is important for the government to look at allowing the service delivery of government policies being implemented by the private sector. The government is operating a 1950s style bureaucracy in the 21st century and should begin to look seriously at how it can restructure itself.

With regard to legislating corporate tax reductions, we applaud the government's commitment to legislating the remaining corporate tax reductions. This provides some certainty that the reductions will be implemented. Our hope was that the government would have announced that the phase-in period for the corporate tax reductions would be reduced. We urge the government to reduce the phase-in periods wherever possible.

In conclusion, we look positively on the budget, because the government has listened to the concerns regarding Ontario's competitiveness that have been raised by our members, which, I would remind you, are primarily small and medium-sized businesses. The Ontario Chamber of Commerce believes that the recent provincial budget continues the commitment to maintain a positive business climate and continues the commitment to Ontario's future prosperity and competitiveness.

That's the end of my comments, but I'd ask Mary Webb if she has additional comments to make.

Ms Mary Webb: I think the flavour of the OCC was that this budget had coped with the downturn, that Ontario is one of the provinces hardest hit by the US slowdown, and this poses a real fiscal dilemma for the province, because revenue growth is less assured. Yet the importance of maintaining a competitive environment, of Ontario continuing to be attractive for new investments—high-tech and other industries—has never been greater.

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So at the OCC we welcome the budget's commitment to lower the tax burden and to continue on that path as aggressively as possible. The challenge is that Ontario's interest costs are above the average for the other provinces, and therefore paying down the debt by \$4 billion over the past two years does create a very needed increase in fiscal flexibility. But it also makes even more

important the challenge for Ontario to maintain control of its program spending in order to keep moving on these tax cuts.

Therefore we applaud the government's trying to deliver its spending in smarter ways, with greater value per dollar spent, and we urge that initiatives that can facilitate new investment, such as removing the corporate minimum tax, as Doug mentioned, and removing the clawback on the small business tax, be considered. Their revenue impact is relatively small and yet their negative impact on investment is significant.

The Chair: That completes your presentation?

Mr Robson: It does.

The Chair: Thank you very much. We have approximately two minutes per caucus, and I'll start with the government side.

Mr Ernie Hardeman (Oxford): Thank you for the presentation. There were a couple of items in it that I was rather interested in. There is what is commonly referred to as the "gas guzzler" tax in the real world, and your comment about it, that it doesn't do what it originally was intended to do—obviously, we all know that it was put in place to encourage people to buy more fuel-efficient cars and, in turn, have fewer emissions. There now seems to be some evidence that that's not what's happening, that the cars they're not purchasing are the ones that are more fuel-efficient and cleaner burning than some of the ones that we're still driving. It really takes us to the part of the budget that refers to reviewing all taxes that government imposes, to make sure they are doing what they said they were supposed to do. Is it the chamber's position that they would work with us to point those out? Today you've pointed out the gas guzzler one, but there are, I expect, many others that would fall in the same category, and we're committed to looking at all those. Is the chamber, with your committees, looking at some of these to point out where we can find taxes that should be removed?

Mr Robson: I'd ask Mary, as the chair of the committee, to respond to that.

Ms Webb: Yes, we are. We have not done it on a comprehensive basis; we have done it as issues have arisen and as our members have brought concerns forward. I think we would certainly be willing to do it on a more comprehensive basis with our membership and report back.

The Chair: You've still got about 30 seconds.

Mr Hardeman: OK. I think it's very important. In reviewing the budget, and having spoken to a lot of the people who manufacture and sell cars, I was personally surprised to find out what this tax actually had done. And that points out the need to do much more, so we collectively need to find the solutions for ineffective taxes and to put that money to better use.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr Hardeman. Mr Kwinter.

Mr Monte Kwinter (York Centre): As always, I welcome the presentation of the chamber. I'd like to address this really to Mary Webb. I was interested in one of the comments that you made, to the effect that Ontario

is one of the hardest hit of the provinces due to the US slowdown. In our pre-budget hearings, we kept hearing that yes, there is a slowdown, there is in fact recession in the manufacturing sector, but that the second half is going to be much better, that it was going to improve and everything was going to turn out fine and the projections made by the Treasurer are reasonable, and whether the number is 2%, 2.2% or somewhere in there, those are achievable numbers. Do you feel that is true? Because what I've seen, and the indication that I get, is that things aren't getting much better, that in fact they may be getting a little bit worse, projected in the second half. Do you have any comments on that?

Ms Webb: Yes. I think the budget's estimated growth of 2.2% is within the reasonable range. We would be closer to 2%. It nevertheless is a debatable point. The key from here, though, is that that is far from a recession. But I totally agree with your comment that in fact the quick snap-back re-recovery is not snapping back and that we will likely remember this downturn for its longevity, that it could well persist into 2002 with some signs of a recovery, but not a substantive recovery, a really strong rebound. Therefore, where does that put Ontario? Well, there's still a lot of sectors in Ontario that are firing, and one of them is actually high-tech. The difference is that it will have single-digit growth, not double-digit growth. In other sectors, such as motor vehicle, I think the recovery over the next year will be a bit disappointing. So the concern is that, yes, the Ontario economy will be moving back up toward 3% next year but will probably be hard pressed to move through 3%.

Mr Peter Kormos (Niagara Centre): It's interesting reading, Ms Webb. I was here with you when you were making that submission as well. So, what do you say? People who bought Nortel at \$50 should hold?

Ms Webb: No comment.

Mr Kormos: I really am interested, because in neither the throne speech nor in the budget—although it's not primarily a budget issue—was there any suggestion of increasing the minimum wage here in Ontario, which has remained at \$6.85 an hour for a considerable number of years now. Some American jurisdictions, some municipalities that have the power to pass minimum wage legislation are up to, in Pennsylvania I believe, approximately US\$9 an hour.

Do you share our concern that it's time for an increase in minimum wage so that those very-lowest-income workers have a little more money in their pockets too?

Ms Webb: I understand the logic that if we provide more for lower-income then that is in fact an economic stimulus. The government has already worked on that with taxation, but I would emphasize how competitive this has gotten, with many of the other provinces also providing much more lenient tax treatment for the low-income.

I understand what you're saying. My only caution is that right now profit margins are being squeezed in Ontario. How much more can we squeeze them? We're looking for a decline. We will see a decline in Ontario's

profits in the order of 2% to 5% this year, and we will probably see only a 2% to 5% increase next year.

Mr Kormos: So you don't agree that minimum wages should be raised. You're advocating to maintain minimum wages at their low level. That's what I wanted to know.

Ms Webb: I would look for some offset. If you increase the minimum wage, can you provide some offset for corporations? Their profit position is very fragile now.

Mr Kormos: Federal MPs got a \$20,000 raise in one fell swoop. The poorest workers get zip. That's not fair, is it?

Ms Webb: Again, that's not in our realm.

Mr Kormos: Thank you, folks.

The Chair: With that, we've run out of time. Thank you, Mr Kormos.

On behalf of the committee, thank you very much for your presentation this morning.

GREEK ORTHODOX EDUCATION IN ONTARIO

The Chair: Our next presentation is from Greek Orthodox Education in Ontario. I would ask the presenter or presenters to come forward. On behalf of the committee, welcome. You have 20 minutes for your presentation this morning.

Dr Dimitrios Oreopoulos: Mr Chairman, honourable members of the committee, my name is Dr Dimitrios Oreopoulos. I'm a professor of medicine at the University of Toronto and president of Greek Orthodox Education in Ontario.

I am standing in front of you today as the representative of the leader of our church, Archbishop Sotirios, who unfortunately had to travel to Greece yesterday on an urgent matter and sends his apologies for being unable to present his views personally. He asked me, and I agreed, to present to you the brief that he has prepared. Then, because I agree with and believe every statement made in the brief, I will be happy to address any of your questions.

1020

For those who may have some difficulty in understanding my accent as I read, I have asked the clerk to kindly circulate copies of the brief so you can read it instead. The brief is as follows:

"Dear Committee Members:

"On behalf of the 200,000 Greek Orthodox people residing in Ontario, I congratulate and thank the government of Ontario for presenting Bill 45 which will provide a tax credit for those parents paying tuition for their children who are attending religious schools.

"The British North America Act of 1867 provides for the operation of a separate school system—the Roman Catholic school system.

"The pertinent article in the act referring to education gives one the understanding that the spirit of the law is to protect all religious schools. This is the Constitution.

This is the law of the country. We all must respect it and abide by it.

"It is a fact that in Ontario there is in operation a Roman Catholic school system fully funded by the government of Ontario.

"We respect and accept that.

"I understand that in 1867 the government school system in Ontario was in reality a Protestant school system and the rights of the Protestant denominations were thus protected."

So the system was protecting both the Protestant and Roman Catholic school system.

"Since 1867", however, "to the present time, there has been mass immigration to Canada resulting in other religions and Christian denominations establishing themselves in this country.

"The British North America Act may not exclusively provide for the protection of their rights, however, the Charter of Human Rights does, for it provides for equal rights for all persons.

"Therefore, it is imperative that all religious schools be accorded equal funding as granted to the Roman Catholic schools.

"Some say, 'This amounts to a theft of money from public education.' I disagree with them. Up until now, the tax dollars of parents who send their children to religious schools are used for the public and Catholic school systems while they are paying extra money for the education of their own children.

"As stated before, the Charter of Human Rights must be applied to education, that is to say that all parents must have the same right as Catholic parents to send their children to a religious school of their choice that teaches the values and morals of their faith which is an essential part of raising their children. Otherwise, they will be second-class citizens in comparison to the Roman Catholic parents.

"We thank the Harris government wholeheartedly for the decision to partially fund the religious and private schools, which, though dictated by the Constitution and Charter of Human Rights, at the same time, I must say, is a brave decision politically considering the climate that presently exists in the province.

"All Greek Orthodox people are grateful for this assistance, however, we request that this assistance be equal to the Roman Catholic schools.

"Yours very truly,

"Metropolitan Archbishop Sotirios

"Metropolitan Archbishop of Toronto (Canada)"

The Chair: Thank you very much. We have approximately five minutes per caucus, and I'll start with the official opposition.

Mr Phillips: Thank you, Doctor. We've known each other for a long while.

Your goal, obviously, is full funding, and I gather from His Eminence that you regard this as a good first step but that in your opinion the only way for parents is with full funding to the various schools?

Dr Oreopoulos: Mr Phillips, we are very grateful for starting this thing. I think that's the important thing and we're very happy with that. But, I think in the long run, if it's a mark of human rights, you cannot address human rights half way; and either you address it as human rights and satisfy, or it's not. Down the road I suppose some day some other government may see fit that they should respect the human rights of all individuals. Right now we're very happy with what we have.

Mr Kennedy: Can you tell me how the tuition of the schools that fall under the diocese breaks down between the education component and the religious component currently?

Dr Oreopoulos: We have one tuition that covers the education, the salaries of the teachers, the books, the food etc. So the whole thing is covered by these fees.

Mr Kennedy: Perhaps you can help me. There is one portion that is eligible for a charitable deduction, and that is usually the part referred to as the religious portion.

Dr Oreopoulos: That's 18%.

Mr Phillips: In terms of where you see the future with the community, would you see any expansion of enrolment with a grant program or are they all already in the schools?

Dr Oreopoulos: Even before the program, there was a lot of demand for parents to bring their children. Because we did not have the facility, we could not accommodate everybody. But now we have expanded, and we hope we will get more parents. I suspect this may make it easier for some parents, but of course the burden will be theirs. It does not cover the financial burden that these parents have to undertake.

I have to emphasize, Mr Phillips, that these are average-income parents—middle or below middle—who see that as a commitment to their children's education. Both parents will work. They will try to do everything they can in order to send their children. So this is a relief, but definitely it does not cover the whole need.

Mr Kennedy: In your search for full funding and the parity you're seeking with the Roman Catholic funding that's arisen from a constitutional obligation, what conditions has the diocese looked at as being willing to meet? Similar conditions? Exactly the same conditions as the Roman Catholic schools?

Dr Oreopoulos: If it's grant discrimination, it has to be the same eventually, down the road.

The Chair: You still have approximately a minute and a half.

Mr Phillips: Great. My concern—and you know the area I represent—is that we'll have quite a diversity of religious schools. You may say that's great. I worry that we divide it. What would you expect in terms of the Greek students with this proposal and, then, if, as you say, you can't have halfway human rights, you move to full funding, would you expect that a majority of the Greek students would end up in the Greek schools?

Dr Oreopoulos: If I take the example of Montreal, that is not the case. Not all parents are taking advantage of that. It's a matter of free choice. Some people want;

some people don't want. The characteristic thing of our faith is free choice and freedom, whoever wants it, but I think it's very important that parents who want it have the opportunity to satisfy their desire on that.

The Chair: I must go to Mr Marchese.

Mr Marchese: Dr Oreopoulos, I have just a couple of questions. You may have heard the minister here this morning.

Dr Oreopoulos: Barely. I just came halfway.

Mr Marchese: One of the concerns I have is that the Minister of Education and the Premier said a while ago that if we were to fund other religious schools it would take \$300 million out of our public system. Do you think she was just mistaken at the time, that she was just not thinking, possibly?

Dr Oreopoulos: Thank you for making this point. I feel very strongly that this is not money that is being taken out of the public system. For the last 30 or 40 years, these parents have been paying their taxes. If tomorrow all these children go to the public schools—say 100,000 children—the government has to find \$750 million to support these children, these students. Every year the government is saving \$750 million on the backs of the parents who are sending their children to their schools. So I don't agree that really we're taking money out. I think the government is taking our money and using it and at the same time we have to pay for our children.

Mr Marchese: I understand. The minister said this morning as well that what people want is an education that reflects their culture and religion.

Dr Oreopoulos: Correct.

Mr Marchese: He didn't talk about the non-denominational private schools. Do you support money going from the public purse to those other private non-denominational schools as a matter of choice?

1030

Dr Oreopoulos: This is a matter for the government. I'm standing here in front of you to support our group's interests on that.

Mr Marchese: So you have no opinion on the other?

Dr Oreopoulos: No opinion.

Mr Marchese: But presumably, if you follow the same logic, perhaps that could be a matter of choice too.

Dr Oreopoulos: Sure. I think choice is a very important thing.

Mr Marchese: If I am a disabled young man and I am openly gay, would you take me in your school?

Dr Oreopoulos: Sure. In our faith, Mr Marchese, we are not in the business of judging other people. We teach our students and ourselves that our interest should be to improve ourselves and not judge other people. So if a gay teacher is willing to respect the students, willing to respect their colleagues, willing to respect the environment and hopefully will teach our students abstinence until they are grown up, why not?

Mr Marchese: Abstinence versus being gay is a different thing. How many schools do you—

Dr Oreopoulos: Right now we operate one school, but it's growing very fast.

Mr Marchese: How many students do you have?

Dr Oreopoulos: We have 110.

Mr Marchese: How many of those students are children with disabilities?

Dr Oreopoulos: We don't have any at the moment, but in the new facility we are building we are covering the need for children with disabilities.

Mr Marchese: So you anticipate having quite a number of them?

Dr Oreopoulos: Sure.

Mr Marchese: What do they pay at the moment to get into the school?

Dr Oreopoulos: It's \$4,500 a year. That covers both the tuition, the food and the books.

Mr Marchese: As a community in religious schools, you don't perceive any problems between the different students, with different cultures, being in different silo schools? As far as you're concerned, based on the religion you have, it should be OK? People will get along, because that's what you teach?

Dr Oreopoulos: I think that's the beauty of Ontario, Mr Marchese, the diversity, having everybody have his own faith. The students have a much wider view of that. Tolerance is a very important thing in teaching our students.

Mr Marchese: That's a big issue for me. That's why I advocate for one public system, to try to accommodate all of our differences.

Dr Oreopoulos: But they just teach the religion; they don't practise the religion, or if you want, they have a religion of pantheism, of neutrality. For some parents it's very important for their children, and I think Canada and Ontario need to have citizens who have faith and morals.

Mr Marchese: I'm not even sure that we teach religion, but if we taught religion as a course, would that be something that would take care of you—

Dr Oreopoulos: No. Religion is a practice, a way of living. We want to have personnel who have the faith to be an example for the children.

The Chair: For the government side, Mr Spina.

Mr Joseph Spina (Brampton Centre): Thank you, Dr Oreopoulos, for your presentation. We appreciate the time. Please extend our thanks also to His Excellency.

You answered two parts of my question, and I'm just trying to tie it in a little more clearly for us. One of the elements that we are trying to achieve out of these hearings is to determine the criteria of the institutions to which the families would be eligible for the tax credit: whether it is religious, how much of it is, how much is not. Also, there are and have been questions regarding the testing of students and the qualifications of teachers. That will be the context of my questions.

To be more specific, you indicated the tuition is \$4,500, and I'm presuming 18% of that figure is for the religious portion.

Dr Oreopoulos: No, no.

Mr Spina: Or that's over and above that?

Dr Oreopoulos: The parents are entitled to claim 18% of the religious component as a tax deduction in their tax returns. This is the time we spend for the religious education.

Mr Spina: We're not arguing that. I'm just wondering, is that 18% out of the \$4,500?

Dr Oreopoulos: Correct. It's out of the time; 18% of the time spent by the teachers. It's not the money.

Mr Spina: OK. But still, I guess that 18% is based on the total tuition, then?

Dr Oreopoulos: Correct.

Mr Spina: So the total tuition is \$4,500?

Dr Oreopoulos: Correct.

Mr Spina: Please help us. What we're trying to say is, if therefore, the tax credit were to be applied on a principle, then it would not be applied on the full \$4,500; it would be on the net difference.

Dr Oreopoulos: I thought there was a difference between tax credits and tax deductibles. This is a claim that they are making for a tax deduction. It would depend on the tax range they are in. If it will be 50%, 40% of that, they will save that money.

Mr Spina: So you think the tax credit should be against the full amount?

Dr Oreopoulos: Yes. I would think, Mr Spina, it should be that whatever you do to the Catholics, you should have the same thing with us.

Mr Spina: We fully appreciate that comment. Thank you, Dr Oreopoulos.

Mr O'Toole: I appreciate your presentation this morning, and I just wanted to clarify. Mr Phillips and Mr Marchese both made a reference to a fear of diversity or choice. They sort of said that they feared the divisiveness of all these different—while at the same time, in cultures—they spoke in fear of that—

Mr Phillips: No, no. You've got to—

Mr O'Toole: That's what they said. Pardon me, Chair—

Mr Phillips: If he's going to quote me, he'd better quote me accurately.

Mr O'Toole: I'm summarizing—

Mr Phillips: No, you've got to quote me accurately and that's not the case.

Mr O'Toole: I've heard you say it many times.

Mr Phillips: No, stick to what you speak for.

Mr O'Toole: They speak, in some regard, of fear of the diversity question and yet they're offering the one-size-fits-all as the choice. Perhaps you could appease them. I heard your responses earlier. You said it best. You said that you think that religion and faith can be taught as a subject, just plug it in. Could you respond to that, that fear of—

Dr Oreopoulos: I understand there are some classes in the public schools, if there are some of the Jewish religion or Christian religion or Muslim religion, that the children are learning about that. You teach something, but you don't live it. We want the whole environment to be a living religion, that the teachers will be the example of our faith for each religion, so the students will have

some role models and they will have the priests being involved in that.

We have the example from other provinces where this is and there are Greek Orthodox children there and they are definitely not denied diversity, they are not ghettoized, and they are very good citizens. I think this is a big difference between the Canadian system and the American system. We're kind of distinct. We love diversity, we enjoy diversity, and we benefit from diversity.

The Chair: Ms Mushinski, you have approximately one minute.

Ms Mushinski: Thank you for coming in this morning, Dr Oreopoulos. I really just have one question. It has to do with this difference between teaching ethno-cultural diversity classes in the public system and what, let's say, the Greek Orthodox community feels is something that's much more deep-rooted, and that's a respect and an inculcation of one's cultural values and one's cultural roots.

It is my assumption that regardless of this being a Christian-based school, you would still be required to be registered with the Ontario Ministry of Education and you would still be required to teach core curriculum within your private or independent system. Is that correct?

Dr Oreopoulos: I wish you could meet with our parents. Their main goal is an excellent education. We totally agree with the government curriculum. The Ontario curriculum is outstanding. But they insist that this should be the minimum for our teaching. They want more, over and above that. So we welcome any involvement with the government to ensure it, and we're sure we're going to do it, because it's our goal. But our parents want more than that, and I think we'll do it. We have no problem with that.

The Chair: We've run out of time. On behalf of the committee, thank you very much for your presentation this morning.

1040

JEWISH PARENTS FOR EQUALITY IN EDUCATION FUNDING

The Chair: Our next presentation is from the Jewish Parents for Equality in Education Funding. I would ask the presenters to come forward and state your name for the record, please. On behalf of the committee, welcome. You have 20 minutes for your presentation this morning.

Mr Robert Samery: Good morning, Chair and committee members. I am here today as the chairman of Jewish Parents for Equality in Education Funding, a member of the umbrella organization of Ontario Parents for Equality in Education Funding. I am a parent with deep interests in equality in education funding issues. I am not a teacher, I am not a school administrator or a teachers' union representative. I am simply a parent. With me today are Aaron Blumenfeld, also a parent, and Morris Rubner.

The announcement of the refundable tax credit was widely praised by the independent school community because it shows the welcome support of the government of Ontario for parental choice in education. This credit is a constructive step toward equity in parental choice. We commend the government and Mr Flaherty.

The fact that the credit is to be refundable is a very strong signal that it's meant to benefit the supporters of our schools who are less wealthy and who sacrifice greatly to enable their children to attend. Our supporters are parents whose strong religious convictions compel them to do so. We are grateful for this recognition.

The tax credit has been characterized as a sop to the rich who send their children to elite private schools. This is an objectionable but convenient political myth. The plain fact is that most parents who send their children to independent schools are of modest means. Members of our organization make very serious financial sacrifices to do so based on their conscientious views that their religion, culture or language demand nothing less.

The policy objective is to provide some public funding to parents who in conscience cannot place their children in the secular public schools or in publicly funded Roman Catholic schools. This is an effort to reduce the reality of discrimination in the current education funding regime.

We address the issues in this debate from a faith perspective. The public debate about the equity in education tax credit is welcome. It's time to consider how our system of public education can accommodate diversity in principle and in practice.

There will always be disagreement among significant segments of our society about the nature and purpose of education and the proper role of the state. The real issue is how these different visions should be accommodated in a liberal democratic society like Ontario.

Parents wanting education for their children, other than public or Roman Catholic, are not accommodated. They must submit to the current system or set up independent schools entirely at their own expense. The purpose of this brief is to set out some important general principles that need to be considered in this debate and to consider their implications.

The state must provide reasonable accommodation for diversity: this principle rests on a basic understanding of the proper relationship between the state and individual citizens. There are four tensions in play here.

Personal autonomy is seen as a primary good: the long development of liberal thought in Western society has led us to understand that politics and civil life have to start with, relate to and be accountable to the individual human person. This understanding is based on the notion that each person has an original way of being and a unique identity. The imperative duty of each of us is to work these out for ourselves. There are implications for the way people think about the proper role of the state in many areas of life, including education.

The state is a servant: There is the growing language of rights, particularly since the advent of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms in 1982. As explained by

Canadian political scientist and philosopher Charles Taylor, "A liberal society must remain neutral on the good life, and restrict itself to ensuring that however they see things, citizens deal fairly with each other and the state equally with all." Such "a liberal society cannot accommodate publicly espoused notions of the good."

Equality has conflicting meanings: The concept of equality is elusive. It can be satisfied in two completely incompatible ways. One way is to remove all choice; the other is to grant everyone choice subject to neutral and reasonable rules.

The existing arrangement in education takes the public branch as the norm. It effectively expects that all will submit to a common school that ignores important personal distinctions that parents want their children to learn, to understand and to adopt for themselves—for example, in respect of culture and religion—without, however, compromising the ability of their children to function in society.

But this is not consistent with the contemporary meaning of equality. Tolerance requires acceptance of diversity. The debate reflects two visions of tolerance, only one of which can apply in the area of education.

Professor John Gray recently noted that liberalism has always harbored contradictory visions of tolerance. These visions are now colliding frequently, because Western societies like Ontario are increasingly diverse and are no longer homogeneous. Professor Gray observes:

"Liberalism contains two philosophies. In one, toleration is justified as a means to truth. In this view, toleration is an instrument of rational consensus, and a diversity of ways of life is endured in the faith that it is destined to disappear. In the other, toleration is valued as a condition of peace, and divergent ways of living are welcomed as marks of diversity in the good life. The first conception supports an ideal of ultimate convergence on values, the latter an ideal of *modus vivendi*. Liberalism's future lies in turning its face away from the ideal of rational consensus and looking instead to *modus vivendi*."

"The predominant liberal view of toleration sees it as a means to a universal civilization. If we give up this view, and welcome a world that contains many ways of life and regimes, we will have to think afresh about human rights and democratic government. We will refashion these inheritances to serve a different liberal philosophy."

If Professor Gray is correct in his view, and we believe he is, there are serious implications for the system of education in Ontario. A balance of these four tensions in the area of education would be achieved if the state facilitated diversity in a neutral way.

There is a right to publicly funded education. The right to education is basic to our society, so basic that references to it in our Constitution assume rather than mandate it. Publicly funded education is a social right and value, indeed a necessity on which we are agreed as a society.

In the brief, we have set out some excerpts from UN documents. There is really no dispute about the existence of this right. The state simply cannot satisfy its obligation

by offering public education in a way that does not permit meaningful diversity and real choice to all parents.

What is meant by “education”? It’s unusual to find a definition of education which is normally seen as an activity. It can be described poetically, as Yeats did: “Education is not filling a bucket, but lighting a fire.” Less inspirational but more complete is the description set out in the old Ministry of Education circular entitled Ontario Schools: Intermediate and Senior Divisions, 1989, quoted in the brief. While most parents would probably agree with most of that description, others would find it incomplete, in the absence of any reference to spiritual growth or religion as fundamental components of education.

There are two forms of religious education: religious education takes one of two forms. The first is education about religion. An example would be an academic secondary school course on world religions which complies with the relevant curriculum of the Ministry of Education. This can be characterized as education about religion, and is still permitted in public schools.

The second form of religious education is better understood as religious instruction. The ultimate aim is to persuade students of the truth of the religion being taught and to elicit a faith commitment to it. Such instruction can take the form of opening exercises, including prayers, or dedicated religion classes in public schools. This form of religious education can be characterized as the teaching of religion. In fact, a course or class of religious instruction would not satisfy most religious groups. They take the view that religious education requires the permeation of all the activities of the school including academic instruction. This is the approach taken in Catholic schools.

The reason why religious education in public schools is, and will remain, a contentious issue is that many parents want their children to be taught religion, not just to be taught about religion. Many parents believe that education without a religious dimension is not truly education. Some believe that the secular world view now espoused by the public system is itself a religious viewpoint that is not respectful of their religion but is instead fundamentally destructive of it. For others, the issue is more personal: the public system’s legal inability to recognize and support them as members of a religious faith is disrespectful of their personal identity and is discriminatory. The fact of disagreement means that some avenue must be provided that supports a reasonable degree of diversity in the forms of education. Meaningful choice for parents is necessary.

1050

Principle 3: parental choice in education should be respected and supported. A long tradition recognizes the role of parents as the first teachers of their children. As already noted, for example, the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights provides that “Parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children.” The UN Declaration of the Rights of the Child (1959) states, “The best interests of the child

shall be the guiding principle of those responsible for his education and guidance; the responsibility lies in the first place with his parents.”

The courts have recognized this central role of the parents. In the Richard B. decision, the Supreme Court of Canada noted, “That constitutional freedom [of religion] includes the right to educate and rear their child in tenets of their faith. In effect, until the child reaches an age where she can make an independent decision regarding her own religious beliefs, parents may decide on her religion for her and raise her in accordance with that religion.”

The real issue is respect for parental choice. Should families be enabled to educate their children in schools of their choice where language, culture, religion and beliefs or commitments that are important to parents are taught before their children enter the public square, or should children be forced into the public square without the benefit of such education as the result of a coercive and homogenizing public policy?

The argument that public funding should only extend to the common schools amounts to an assertion that in matters of education it is not the function of the state to assist parents but to supplant them. We also consider and respond to the objections that have been raised to the tax credit from the common schools perspective. It is strongly asserted by some that public education aims at the integration of children. This is seen as a necessary antidote to increasing cultural and religious heterogeneity. If one accepts the principles we have referred to, then this argument has flaws on a number of levels. It effectively amounts to an abuse of state power that denies individual choice in favour of state-enforced standards. The exercise of power in this way is inappropriate because it contradicts the basic values of personal autonomy, the rights of parents to choose the education of their children, and the appropriate way to accommodate diversity in our society. It does not reflect a contemporary understanding of the concept of equality.

The state does not need to exercise its power to assure social harmony. The ordinary operation of our society is overwhelmingly assimilative and needs no assistance from the school system. The reality is that the modern world with its inescapable media presence makes it impossible for people to remain isolated to any appreciable degree.

The real challenge for parents is to raise children and educate them in a way that preserves their culture, language and religion. There is no evidence to support the idea that separate education fosters fragmentation in the operation of actual education systems in Canada and around the world.

There is irony here. People insist on freedom of choice in all the areas of life, from inconsequential consumer decisions, to choices among political candidates, to the most serious of life’s choices. This reflects our common view that the state and society exist to serve the autonomous human person. But this vision of autonomy falters for many when it comes to school choice in

Ontario that is publicly funded. No more flinching: it's time for freedom of choice for parents in education.

The role of parents: Some argue that the current scheme does not really interfere with parental choice; parents are free to provide religious instruction to their children outside of school hours. The idea that religious education is the responsibility of the home and the religion and not the school is new and recent and is not part of the Canadian tradition, as the historical appendix in your brief shows. Experience has shown that even the most faithful homes find religious and moral instruction of children difficult through a lack of knowledge, lack of skill, lack of time and lack of reinforcement. Is it more reasonable to expect parents to provide their children with religious and moral instruction than it is to expect them to teach mathematics and geography? The home can be a good source of examples of virtue but often not much more.

The myth of neutrality: it is said that the secular school system is neutral in its effect on the faith of children. This is a myth. The reality is quite different. In his ministerial report, Dr. Glenn Watson pointed out the basic conundrum: "An educational system cannot be neutral. If there is no religious education or any form of religion in the schools, then secular humanism, by default, becomes the basic belief system. Secular humanism does not represent a neutral position."

Dr. Watson explained:

"In every relationship, and especially in that between a teacher and a student, there is something that can be referred to as religious education. It is the transmission of ideas, or answers to significant life-related issues, or it is the exemplification of values by 'precept and example.' There is no way to avoid such an interaction and the learning experience associated with that relationship over a period of time."

The system of public education has, in fact, been an engine for the devitalization of religion in society. As sociologist Reginald Bibby has observed, "In present-day Canada, the core for whom religion is significant—perhaps about 15% to 20%—have faith constantly undermined by a society for which religion is marginal."

It is therefore not surprising that many parents believe that a secular school system which avoids religious references is not neutral but is hostile to faith, because it implicitly tells their children that religion is not an important part of daily life. This is not a message these parents want to have sent to their children, and they wish to have the possibility of alternatives that are hospitable to their beliefs.

Religion and the state: for others, the objection is that funding religious schools in particular is bad. The complete separation of religion and state is an American concept that has not been adopted in Canada and is not part of our tradition. It would be hypocritical to insist on it in education when many hospitals and social welfare agencies in Ontario were founded and are operated by organizations with a religious identity. They operate with federal and provincial funding in doing their good work.

Examples include Mount Sinai Hospital, Baycrest, St Joseph's Health Centre and numerous other agencies.

Parents have many reasons for sending their children to independent schools. Assisting parents in making a choice does not amount to the endorsement of any particular school or any particular religious organization by the government, since so many different religions are involved.

Many countries in the world provide assistance to parents who are looking for religiously oriented education for their children.

Principle 4: as a society, we have recognized in the Charter and in the Ontario Human Rights Code that equality is a fundamental value. This is also recognized by international documents that require education to be "on the basis of equal opportunity."

Respect for human dignity is not complete unless it is equal. Put another way, unequal treatment is, by its very nature, disrespectful of human dignity. But the existing argument, even with the tax credit, is still discriminatory. Secular humanists and others who favour secular education, and Roman Catholics, have privileges denied to others who continue to be in an inferior position. This, as the United Nations human rights committee noted in the Waldman decision, is still discriminatory. More should be done by Ontario to remedy it.

We endorse the principles in this brief, including parental choice in education, and so we do not advocate a solution that would end public funding for the Catholic system. Instead, we want to see respect for parental rights and the other principles in this brief extended to all parents. We see the tax credit as an important and welcome step toward equality of educational opportunity.

In concluding, in a liberal democratic state like Ontario, nothing should stand in the way of assisting parents to transmit their faith and values to their children. Society as a whole benefits and continues to draw strength from morally and religiously literate people who exemplify the moral virtues upon which our province has rested.

Many people believe these virtues can be successfully transmitted from one generation to the next only if they rest on religious and philosophical convictions that are made express in the educational curriculum of the schools. These are virtues on which Canadian society not only agrees but also depends, and are essential to civil society.

This is why facilitating parental choice in education contributes to society, why the approach of the government of Ontario makes sense and why we offer our full support to the equity in education tax credit.

1100

It's all about freedom: freedom for parents to direct the education of their children in their faith, culture and traditions; freedom from the threat of extinction in the face of an overwhelmingly secular society.

It's all about meaningful choice that respects the rights of parents to direct the education of their children. It's about equality of educational opportunities. It's about

opening the tent of public funding to accommodate real diversity, the kind of diversity that exists in Ontario today. Acceptance of that diversity will allow the members of these communities to gather in the public square, confident of the respect and understanding of their fellow citizens and able to make their contribution to the commonwealth.

Ontario enjoys a world-class, publicly funded education system. The doomsayers will learn it is not fragile. The existing levels of provincial support for independent schools across Canada have not undermined public systems. This initiative will not do so either.

We are grateful for the opportunity to address this committee on this important question of public policy. Thank you.

The Chair: You've used the entire time. On behalf of the committee, I would like to thank you for your presentation this morning.

KHALSA COMMUNITY SCHOOL, MALTON

The Chair: Our next presentation is from the Khalsa Community School, the Sikh community. I would ask the presenter or presenters to come forward. On behalf of the committee, welcome, and you have 20 minutes for your presentation this morning.

Mr Richard Szymczyk: Thank you, Mr Chairman, members of the committee. Before I begin my formal presentation to the committee, in view of the many suggestions of partisanship and rigging of the hearings I felt it was important to attempt to lay to rest any insinuation or accusation that I have been specially selected to support the government's initiative on tax credits for parents who send their children to independent schools. I'll have to go into my professional background somewhat in order, hopefully, to lend some degree of non-partisan credibility to my presentation. Please bear with me.

I'm a retired school superintendent and have also worked with the Ministry of Education, both in the Ottawa regional office and the Mowat Block next door in Toronto at some point in my career. As I'll point out, I've had other opportunities and experiences which will hopefully support the fact that I come before you with no partisan, political or other motives other than to present a professional opinion on this initiative.

Some 11 years ago, during the Liberal government's tenure at Queen's Park, and through the office of the Honourable Sean Conway, Minister of Education at the time, I was invited to come to Toronto, which was a secondment, to deal with the question of religion in public schools of the province. Some may recall that the Ontario Court of Appeal had indicated that Christianity was no longer to be taught as the prime religion in public schools in view of the realities of a pluralistic, multi-religious and multicultural Ontario. My task was to develop the necessary policy framework for the public schools to deal with this issue, and again I repeat, at the request of the Liberal government in power at the time—

of course, the government changed during the election of September 1990 as the New Democratic Party assumed the responsibility for governing this province—and that particular task was fulfilled.

Soon after retirement from public education, I was appointed by order in council to the Halton Police Services Board and, during my term, served as chair and chief negotiator, among other responsibilities. I have an appointment letter signed by the Honourable David Christopherson—who I see is not here this morning; I expected he would be here—again during the tenure of the NDP government. I point this out to illustrate the fact that my involvement in key issues have been non-partisan.

It would also appear that the teachers' unions, according to the media, are not supportive of this initiative, and I want to add that I have acted in my time as negotiator for teachers in collective bargaining. I've also been president of the Halton Elementary Principals' Association on two occasions. Admittedly all these responsibilities may have occurred some time ago, but commitment and loyalty to justice, equity and fairness, from my perspective at least, have not diminished in any way whatsoever. Obviously, had I any partisan motives in fulfilling these key and sensitive responsibilities during my career, I certainly had the opportunity to reject any appointments by the political party in power at the time.

I now come before you, and before our third major political party, with the hope that you, and other members of the public and media who have an interest in this issue, will accept my comments as coming from an individual who has absolutely no political, partisan or other similar motives, as has been intimated by some citizens and some members of the media. In other words, it's my hope that my presentation will be accepted with the same professional sincerity of purpose with which it is given.

First, may I take this opportunity of congratulating the government for taking this bold step forward, especially in the face of the many criticisms. Just as needs change, so must we all accept the need for change, in spite of a longing to maintain the comfort of the status quo. At the outset, to confirm my position as representative of Khalsa Community School, Malton, and of the Sikh community which the school serves, I shall speak in support of the proposal.

By way of more recent background, I've acted as supervisory principal of Khalsa Community School, a Sikh independent school, for the past three years. Incidentally, I was invited to accept this position and did not apply for it, and I shall address this subtlety in my presentation.

Approximately six years ago, members of the Sikh community in the Malton, Mississauga and Brampton areas decided that their cultural, language and religious heritage may be at risk and the only way in which to ensure that Sikhism and the Punjabi language could survive would be to open a private school under section 16 of the Ontario Education Act.

Because so many of the parents who wanted to send their children to the school were relatively recent immigrants to Canada and had not yet established themselves financially, the decision was made to offer Sikh-based programs, as well as English-language programs, at a very low cost to parents, I believe somewhere in the area of \$1,800 annually. Obviously, the fees did not cover the operating costs for the program and therefore fundraising, donations and assistance from the Malton temple and other temples in the area were required in order to cover their operating costs.

I must emphasize here that this financial burden, although apparently light in relative terms, was indeed a hardship for families attempting to establish themselves as Canadian citizens, especially when one considers that Sikh culture places a very strong, even critical, emphasis on family and, therefore, two or three children from the same family were enrolled at Khalsa school at the time. Simple arithmetic reflects the tremendous financial load on families.

As the fees have increased over the past five years, it had become increasingly more difficult for parents to continue to send their children to the school and many were forced to drop out. I can't give you hard statistics, but I can assure you that, over the past three years at least, the school has lost close to 100 students and, from the information given to us in the office, the great majority of transfers from the school were for financial reasons.

Notwithstanding that fact, the enrolment of the school now stands at 223 students—with a waiting list incidentally—an increase of approximately 30% over the past three years. Evidently, there must be some significant reasons for parents wanting to send their children to a school which sustains their culture and language. After all, they have left their homeland in India and immigrated to a country which prides itself as supporting actively the rights of minorities on an equitable basis, where laws are non-discriminatory with respect to religion and language and where there exists a fundamental philosophy of supporting the concept of a colourful mosaic of ethnoculturalism, pluralism and multiculturalism, as opposed to the concept of a melting pot theory which appears to drive the antagonists of individual, language, religious and cultural identities and rights.

How were the parents able to afford this? Our information is that many, if not most, of the parents sending their children to Khalsa school maintain two jobs and some even have three. Not only do the parents in the Khalsa school community make these kinds of sacrifices to ensure that their culture, religion and language survive but, just as important, they have demanded and continue to demand that the students receive the best possible educational opportunities over which they have some degree of parental control.

I want to address the question of teacher qualifications. With respect to the issue of teachers and other support personnel, it is the position of Khalsa school that

there is general support for the determination of "qualified" staff as opposed to the concept of "certified" staff. The government needs to address this issue carefully, since there are outstanding qualified teachers who are not certified by the Ontario College of Teachers. An important example of this lies in the provision of the Punjabi language, religious music and religion programs at Khalsa school.

1110

These teachers are qualified through their training in India, and possess Indian education degrees but do not qualify for approval through the Ontario College. It has been the policy of the school over the past three years to hire teachers registered with the college, especially those who provide the English language programs, all of which are based on the Ontario Ministry of Education curriculum guidelines. I want to repeat that: all of which are based on the Ontario Ministry of Education curriculum guidelines.

In essence, our Sikh school would have no difficulty with the determination of requirements for teacher qualifications provided that the policy did not demand registration and approval with the college for all teachers, for fairly obvious reasons.

May I add that the issue of teacher and related certification in the publicly supported schools did surface approximately a year ago when the media reported that over 500 special letters of permission were issued to non-qualified principals, vice-principals and teachers due to the shortage of certified or qualified personnel to fill the vacant positions in the publicly supported schools. A review of this practice and of the current situation should certainly form part of the discussions surrounding teacher qualifications.

What I'm actually saying there is that there would appear to be teachers teaching in the publicly supported schools who do not have the qualifications required, apart from the special letter of permission.

I must add that the issue of certified teachers and designated schools needs to be addressed also with great care. Should the requirement be for all schools to be designated, the problem of teacher shortage in this province would be accelerated, especially since a number of independent schools hire retired teachers who offer experience in an expanding so-called market, if I may use that term. The limitations on retirees, that is, teaching no more than approximately 95 days in the first three years after retirement and 20 days thereafter, would likely eliminate the cadre of highly experienced staff who could not assume teaching responsibilities in the independent schools without their pensions being affected.

Strange that at least one other area of Ontario public service does not discriminate against retired employees in this regard. This issue needs to be carefully reviewed.

Now to program accountability. Because Khalsa school has a philosophy which encompasses a balance between Sikh religion, Punjabi language and the demand of our parents for teaching programs based on the Ontario curriculum guidelines, we have no difficulty in

being held accountable for the quality of the programs taught in the English language and welcome any supervisory policy which includes inspection by—and I want to underline this—certified and qualified personnel.

We have used standardized tests to assess achievement of our students. One of the problems, however, has been the lack of consideration of the great majority of students who have the challenge of English as a second language, and further to this, the lack of opportunities to practise English language skills at home, where of course the language typically is Punjabi.

Standardized tests must take this reality into account. Otherwise we end up at the bottom of the scale. Otherwise, the tests themselves end up being discriminatory.

Should the government institute a policy of program standards, Khalsa school goes on record as wishing to participate in the policy development and welcomes any opportunity to participate in a fair and proficient assessment of its programs.

Now to tax credits. Much controversy has occurred as a result of the perception that money for independent schools would be taken out of the public schools. Should the question be addressed as publicly supported schools, to include the Roman Catholic schools in Ontario?

Observing the situation from another side of the issue, and this has been mentioned earlier today I believe, parents who have sent their children to independent schools have, in effect, saved the government, at least in the current year, approximately, using \$6,500 as the average cost times 110,000 students, a grand sum of over \$700 million. I want to repeat that: that in effect, the government has saved, and not had to put out, over \$700 million, because those 110,000 students do not benefit in any way whatsoever from any support financially.

For the last X number of years—and I don't know how far back we can go—all Ontario governments have saved hundreds of millions of dollars by not providing any form of financial assistance to independent schools or to the parents. Where is the money? In fact, some have suggested that, to make this point, it would be an interesting situation should even 50% of the independent school students register in the publicly supported schools for this September, as is their right to do. The government would be obliged to come up with over \$300 million dollars. School boards would be required to provide accommodations, teachers—already in short supply—transportation, classroom resources etc, and of course, to make the point even more dramatically, the students would return to their independent schools after approximately two weeks in September with the result that the entire educational system would be thrown into chaos. Turning this into an annual or semestered event would make for interesting reading in Ontario's history books.

The tax credits, as is understood by the parents of Khalsa school, would in a very small degree remove the financial burden which is imposed on them in the current situation.

In summary, Mr Chairman, first, from the comments offered, it is evident that the Sikh community supporting

Khalsa school is also in support of the concept of tax credits for parents who choose to send their children to their independent school.

Second, it's important that the government consider consultation and wide representation with the stakeholders if and when the initiative is approved by the House. Notwithstanding the public outcry, often fuelled and generated by some sectors in the media, this initiative is fair and equitable, supports parental choice and further recognizes the realities of a growing pluralistic and multicultural Ontario. It also offers the government the opportunity to learn why Ontario independent schools are growing in number—no one seems to have a definitive answer to that question—to learn why results in many of their standardized tests are relatively high and, most important perhaps, to underscore the government's commitment to non-discriminatory support for education of all Ontario students.

Third, in response to the questions of teaching tolerance of differences in the independent schools, the fact that the Sikh community chose to hire a non-Sikh—referring to myself—to lead their school illustrates not only tolerance but more important, acceptance of a multicultural philosophy. The school also has engaged several employees from a non-Sikh background, so I'd like to lay to rest the question of whether we teach tolerance as a subject or whether we practise tolerance and acceptance.

From the facts presented above, it's clear that this initiative does not in any way support the accusations of elitism. Most Khalsa school families would appear to come from a middle- or lower-middle-income group, with some exceptions, of course.

We request the opportunity to be directly involved in any future consultation regarding the development of policies.

That's respectfully submitted, and I want to thank you for the opportunity of addressing you, Mr Chair and members of the committee. I'll try to answer any questions.

The Chair: Thank you very much. We've basically used all the time, so there will be no time for questions. On behalf of the committee, thank you very much for your presentation this morning.

HAMILTON DISTRICT CHRISTIAN HIGH SCHOOL

The Chair: The next presentation is from the Hamilton District Christian High School. On behalf of the committee, welcome. I would ask the presenter or presenters to come forward and state your name for the record. You have 20 minutes for your presentation this morning. Good morning. Go ahead whenever you're ready.

Mr Jake Belder: Good morning, Mr Chairman and committee. My name is Jake Belder. I am a grade 12 student at the Hamilton District Christian High School. To begin today, I would like to give you some—

The Chair: Could you please introduce the other colleagues you have with you?

Mr Belder: Sure. To my right here is Sarah Postuma. To her right is Corrie Kessler and to her right is Josh VanKampen. We have one more presenter, Nate DeJonge, who will take Sarah's place after she's finished.

To begin today, I would like to give you some background information on our school. Founded in 1957, our school has graduated thousands of students who have gone on to study in many different areas at many different post-secondary schools across our country, in the United States and overseas. Currently, our population is 600 students coming from the new city of Hamilton and surrounding areas.

I would like to introduce to you our OAC economics class; some of them are sitting here and some of them are sitting behind us in the crowd. We would like to thank you for giving us the opportunity to speak here today.

1120

Recently, in relation to our studies on fiscal policy and economic equity, our class has been discussing Bill 45. In particular, we are interested in the section of Bill 45 created by the government of Ontario to provide tax credits to parents of children who attend independent schools. We are very grateful to the government for recognizing us and our needs.

Today we will address you on that issue, focusing on several points that we feel need to be concentrated on. We would like to begin by explaining to you who we are and why Christian education is so important to us. Secondly, we will focus on the present inequity of the school financing in Ontario. We will follow that by discussing the necessity that all institutions of education deserve support from our government. Finally, we will emphasize the importance of free choice as to what schools our tax money goes to. We will share some stories of personal hardship as well.

Now let me introduce to you our first speaker, Sarah Postuma, who will present to you why Christian education is so important to us.

Ms Sarah Postuma: Good morning. I, along with my classmates, would like to thank you for the opportunity to speak. We are very proud to be able to represent independent religious schools across Ontario. I have attended religious independent school for all my years of education. I have gone to Hamilton District Christian High School for five of those years, and through these years I have come to realize many things.

Students at HDCH are like young people everywhere. As high school students, we have jobs, we have homework and we have goals and aspirations for the future. Noory, who is with all these people sitting behind me, is looking for a career in teaching. Jon wants to be Minister of Finance. Corrie wants to go to Nepal and Andrew wants to go to the Arctic. Many of us have dreams of university life and eventually marriage and children in our future. However, what sets us apart from other high school students is that our parents feel strongly about

having us educated in a Christian environment and from a Christian perspective.

Our parents believe that school is an extension of the home and have exercised that belief through their choice of educational institute. For over 23 years, my parents have supported Christian education by sending five children through elementary and secondary schools. They have made significant sacrifices, largely due to tuition costs. However, they were willing to make these sacrifices because they wanted teachers and a curriculum consistent with their values.

Along with many other independent religious schools, our school, HDCH, is rooted in biblical beliefs. However, we are not limited by our faith. Many issues are presented in our classrooms, given to us from a variety of perspectives. This allows us to explore and attempt to understand many life views. We believe this is the best way to learn.

Our school community believes that our teachers are answerable to our parents. As well as having a curriculum that is consistent with our Christian values, we are directed by what the government regulates. Each year HDCH is inspected to see if it is meeting all the regulations, and each year HDCH passes with flying colours. However, even though we meet all the government regulations, we are not supported in any way by that same government.

Our school meets and exceeds required standards. The strength of our school is the quality of education we receive. Our teachers are our mentors and, in the older, senior grades, our friends. They are willing to go far beyond the call of duty, both in the classroom and in extracurricular activities, to ensure that we, the students, succeed—and succeed we have.

Just recently the boys and girls soccer teams were able to clinch the city championships in Hamilton. This was a very big deal for our school, because we opposed schools that were sometimes two or three times as big as us in enrolment. Also, I played in the OFSAA provincial championship series with the girls' soccer team; I'm very proud of that. The boys teams have also had many successes in the past years as well. Last year, the HDCH senior boys' basketball team took home the silver medal at OFSAA.

We are not an isolated school community. We interact with the public system, and in many respects, we are just as good as them. I assure you that we are not ordinary. We have many things to offer, and we are very proud of our school, as you've probably been able to tell. We, the students at HDCH, are being taught each day how to contribute to our communities. Through our exceptional education, our accomplishments in athletics and through the examples shown through the lives of our teachers, we are being taught how to be the leaders of tomorrow. Our parents know this and entrust us, their children, to them.

I would now like to introduce Josh VanKampen, who will present his group's view on equity.

Mr Josh VanKampen: I would like to thank you for the time to speak. My name is Josh VanKampen, and I

am in currently in my fifth year at Hamilton District Christian High School.

“Equity” is defined by Webster’s universal dictionary as “fairness,” “uprightness of mind,” “impartiality” and “justice in conduct.” Equity is one of Canada’s economic goals. As a multicultural nation, Canada prides itself on providing support for all Canadians, regardless of religion, age, gender, cultural and ethnic background. Until now, Ontario has fallen short of Canada’s expectations to attend to the needs of its citizens.

The United Nations sets international standards for all human beings. When these are set, countries voluntarily decide whether they will agree to be held to these standards. I am proud that Canada always agrees, because it sees itself as a world leader in the area of human rights. The UN realizes that all humans are born free and equal in dignity of rights. One of these rights is free or supported education. On November 5, 1999, the United Nations ruled that Ontario’s policy of funding Catholic schools, but not other religious schools, is discriminatory.

In article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, sections (1) and (3) state that there should be room for a choice of education. From section (1), “Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages.” This is a strong argument for support of all schools. Section (3) states “Parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children.”

Parents have the choice in Ontario today, but many families pay a penalty because of the choice they make. The United Nations has seen that Ontario is not treating the independent school students fairly, but the proposed tax credits would be a big step in the right direction for equality.

It has been a part of Canada’s history to support minorities. In the British North America Act of 1867, Canada said it would protect minority schools. In Ontario at that time, the only minority group was the Roman Catholics. The Protestant, or public, schools were the majority. This changed as public schools became secular and the need for independent schools increased. There are more minority groups in Canada today who have established schools but are receiving no support from the government of Ontario at this time. The BNA Act may have only applied to the Roman Catholic schools in 1867, but now there needs to be a greater extension of support for other minorities as well.

All children deserve the right to education and to be supported by the government. In Ontario, this basic human right is not in line with international standards. It discriminates against families who send their children to independent schools, as well as those who cannot afford the tuition. Discrimination is unjust and needs to be taken out of our education system before the goal of economic equality can be reached.

Corrie Kessler will now present her group’s thinking on efficiency.

Ms Corrie Kessler: Hi, I’m Corrie Kessler and I am in grade 12 at HDCH. Efficiency is also one of the seven

economic goals of Canada. It means employing resources in order to get the highest possible benefit. Independent schools accomplish this goal and the public can be assured that any support these schools receive will be used effectively.

The nature of this new bill, which allows a tax credit for parents who support independent schools and not the actual schools themselves, almost guarantees an effective use of the funds. As it stands, with parents controlling the spending of these dollars, it is not possible for the money to be wasted on excesses such as bulky administration costs, which may have been a problem if the school held these funds. The way our independent school is orchestrated does not leave room for these kinds of inefficiencies. Our books are audited annually and are extremely transparent and open to inquiry or improvement. We are held responsible financially to Revenue Canada, to the school’s finance committee and to more than 500 sets of parents who are watching and pay tuition. All of these people hold a firm belief that inefficiency is not a wise or stewardly manner with which to deal with our God-given resources. Our school’s finances must therefore line up to this standard.

Along with questioning independent schools’ financial accountability, many people may wonder if independent schools match up academically to Catholic and public schools. Our response would be assuredly, yes, they do.

1130

Our school, for example, is held academically accountable to parents, the board, the education committee and the Ministry of Education. Every year, an inspector reviews our courses, our curriculum and our classes, and every year, our school exceeds the minimum requirements. All of the teachers at our school hold teaching degrees, and because of their firm belief in the importance of Christian education, they are willing to work for less money and go beyond the call of duty. Our peers currently attending public schools learn the same things we do. The difference is that the students of Hamilton District Christian High School study with a biblical perspective. We learn the same things our friends do in the public system, and yet our parents pay both taxes toward education and the full price of tuition.

We have no interest in taking away public school funding. We have no interest in competition. All schools deserve funding, and we are interested in equity. We recognize the concern that this bill may provide an incentive for a migration of students from the public to the independent sector. However, this is not a competition for survival and the independent schools are not attempting a hostile takeover of the public school system’s funds or territory. Education is not a business. The vast majority of independent schools are not run for profit. The only things to be gained are equity and a high standard of education. The public school system should not be worried about losing students, for wherever there is a choice for schooling elsewhere in North America, 90% of the students still attend public schools. However, because of the choice available there is an increase in

student achievement and parental satisfaction. When parents choose a school, they place high importance on their relationship with that school and they become more involved. Volunteers reduce costs.

This is not a comparison of educational quality; it's a question of choice. Public schools cannot be everything for everyone. A public school that holds individual values to be important and at the same time tries to be value-free is a fundamental contradiction. This type of school is appreciated by many, but parents who choose independent schools choose them because they appreciate the clear underlying beliefs that shape everything these schools do.

We don't want our friends in the public and Catholic systems to lose anything from the quality of their education—no. All we want is equity and efficiency to grow hand in hand.

Nate DeJonge will share the impact of paying tuition on families next.

Mr Nate DeJonge: My name is Nate DeJonge, and I am a fifth-year student at Hamilton District Christian High School. I would like to thank you for the opportunity today to address the panel on the tax credit for independent schools.

Ontario is fortunate to have a variety of educational opportunities. It has strong public and Catholic systems, but there is also the freedom to choose independent education. Supporters of the independent system help fund the public education system through tax dollars while concurrently paying the tuition for independent schooling. We support a strong public education system; however, we also support the idea of educational choice. Our school currently receives no public support and is entirely funded by tuition dollars.

The parents and supporters of Hamilton District Christian High School believe the additional cost of education at a Christian school is justifiable so their children obtain a religious-centered education even though the high price tag often causes financial hardships.

The popular perception is that private schools consist of mostly upper-class families; however, our school population includes a wide cross-section of incomes. There are many people in our school who find it a struggle to make ends meet, let alone pay for the cost of private education.

Take, for example, the average two-income family with an approximate pretax income of \$60,000. After taxes and deductions, \$60,000 quickly turns into approximately \$40,000. Now imagine paying for the tuition of two children in the independent school system. Roughly \$14,000 of your income is spent, leaving you with \$26,000 to provide for your family of four. After the bare necessities of food, shelter and clothing, there is very little, if any, spending money left for luxuries or other things such as vacations, transportation, dining out etc. Therefore, in order to remain committed to the independent school system, certain sacrifices must be made. Over the years, a family with two children will spend nearly \$100,000 in order to send their children to an independent school.

In my family, my parents cannot afford to pay the tuition on their own. My grandparents have generously stepped forward and helped pay for my tuition and the tuition of my brother and sister over the past 17 years. Without their financial assistance, I could not have received an education based on my religious beliefs, and I thank them for that.

My friend Darrell and his family have also endured hardships because of the cost of independent religious schooling. His family has been paying for Christian education for him and his three siblings for the past 18 years. For those 18 years, Darrell's family have paid exactly \$123,565 for Christian education. This year alone, they have paid \$11,600 for Christian education. Each year, Darrell and his siblings are given the opportunity to attend a public school or to attend an independent Christian school and not go on vacation that year. Every year for the past 18 years, they have made the decision to attend a Christian school and every year they have given up a possible family vacation.

Darrell's family has also had to sacrifice luxuries such as going out for dinner and driving a new car because of the cost of Christian schooling. I asked Darrell when the last time he went out for a meal with his family was and he couldn't remember. I also asked him about the cars that his family drives. His family cannot afford new vehicles. They drive vehicles that are 10 years old or older and that are constantly in need of repairs. Just last month, his parents put another \$800 into the family van to keep it on the road.

I also know families where the students help to pay for their own education. Without their own hard work, these students would not be able to attend my school. There are also instances where the cost of tuition prevents the choice to attend an independent school. These families cannot afford the cost and consequently cannot attend the school of their choice.

These stories are just some samples of the many stories I could have shared. They represent the typical situation families are in when they send their children to independent schools. Many sacrifices must be made and many hardships must be endured so that children can attend my school and other schools like it.

The government's planned tax credit would relieve some of the financial pressure associated with the cost of tuition and would also be a show of recognition to the independent school community.

I would now like to turn the mike back to Jake Belder, who has concluding comments.

Mr Belder: In conclusion, we feel that the government of Ontario has taken a big step in the right direction. The proposed tax credit for parents of children who attend independent schools is something we are very appreciative of and thankful for.

The reason we feel so strongly about attending a Christian school is because we believe we must be educated in a Christian environment and taught from a Christian perspective. Likewise, parents of children who are of the Jewish, Muslim, Hindu and related faiths believe this

too. Because of our choices, we have all been treated unfairly up until now.

The United Nations, of which Canada is a member, has shown that Ontario's policy of funding the Catholic school system and not other religious schools, is discriminatory.

The proposed tax credits are a great step toward achieving equity and universality in Ontario. In addition, the actual tax credit guarantees that the extra funds we acquire will be used effectively and not wasted on excesses.

We have no desire to take away funding from the public and Catholic schools. We all deserve support from our government. We don't want the public and Catholic school systems to lose anything from their education, either; we simply want equity.

The present situation creates large financial stress on the parents who send their children to independent schools, and therefore they miss out on many things.

However, the government of Ontario has done a good thing in proposing a tax credit for our parents.

As students, and future parents, we would like to thank the government for this act. We hope that this bill will be passed and that equity will be achieved in Ontario. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much. We have one minute per caucus for questions, and I'll start with Mr Marchese.

Mr Marchese: I thank all of you for your presentation. I respect your views. I have a couple of quick questions. Do you have any young people of colour in your school?

Ms Kessler: Yes, we do.

Mr Marchese: So there's a fairly good mix?

Ms Kessler: Yes.

Mr Belder: We'd say that the mix is probably equal to any public school. Well, of course, less because our population is less, but overall, yes.

Mr Marchese: That's good. You were able to make a presentation here today. Would you also support students from a public school system coming—if they had a slot, because we don't have much time—and making a presentation?

Mr Belder: Absolutely. Everybody is entitled to their own opinion, so I would welcome the public schools making any presentation they wished to.

Mr O'Toole: I really have no questions. I just want to compliment you. As you said in your presentation, you represent the leadership of tomorrow. You also speak quite liberally on the whole idea of accepting a multi-cultural society, as Canada has changed since the formation of the basic premise of the public education system today. I think you are to be commended for taking this as not a political issue but as an equity and fairness issue. Keep up the good work and help us all in the future to be more appreciative and tolerant of how diverse and rich Canada is as a country.

1140

Mr Kennedy: Thank you for your presentation. I wonder if you'd consider two points—and we may not have time to deal with them all here—in addition to the points you've covered in your presentation. One is, you're obviously not ashamed or afraid of having anything to hide in terms of the school you attend and the position you take. Do you not think we should have a full public discussion on this? It would promote better understanding and some appreciation of everything that's at work here. We're forced to debate this in eight days, and then the government will force a vote on the question.

Secondly, and maybe your group could get together and comment on this, the benefits of this proposal tend to benefit private secular schools three to five times as much as the typical religious school insofar as the benefit to families. For many people, that raises a concern that it's not so much a question of religious fairness but a question really of a government creating a private secular system outside the public system. Any comments on either of those issues?

Ms Kessler: What do you mean by the second question? Sorry.

Mr Kennedy: For example, Sarnia Christian School has a fee of \$8,000, of which \$1,200 is the education credit. Only the education credit is eligible, for a benefit to those families of about \$600, whereas in a private secular school, when this is fully realized, the full \$3,500 would be realized. It all depends, and it will vary from school to school. For other schools, it could be a \$900 benefit and so on. The government designed this to be broader than just religious schools. I wondered if you had a comment on why that should be the case and why the benefit should be biased toward private secular schools?

Ms Kessler: I think they are addressing a needed issue. I think they're being very fair in the way they're doing things. I'm not quite sure, to be honest, exactly what you mean by the question, but I think they're doing a wonderful job in representing us, because you might not have noticed, but the public sector has gotten a lot of media lately. Sometimes we are left in the dark or not represented, and I think we definitely have something to give to everyone. We would totally welcome other people entering our schools. I think they're being fair in what they're doing.

The Chair: With that, we've run out of time. On behalf of the committee, thank you very much for your presentation this morning.

BARBARA HALL

The Chair: Our next presentation is from Barbara Hall. I would ask the presenter to come forward. On behalf of the committee, welcome. You have 20 minutes for your presentation this morning.

Ms Barbara Hall: Good morning. I thank you for the opportunity to speak with you this morning. I just regret that all of the citizens of Ontario who wish to make their

views clear on this very important issue don't have the same opportunity.

I'm here today to express my support for the comments that Premier Harris made in 1999 when he ruled out funding for private education. I'm also here in support of Minister Ecker's comments in January 2000 when she said that funding private schools would fragment and weaken public education and that the \$300 million to \$500 million that would have to go to support private schools would be taken from public education funding.

I'm also here in support of the views of a group called People for Education, who, like me, believe that a strong, broadly based and fully funded public education system is the basis of a vital and prosperous Ontario, and I would add a civil and a healthy Ontario.

I'm here as a citizen, proud to be a taxpayer in Ontario, to contribute to public education, although I don't have children and, thus, don't have direct benefit in that way, but I believe I have a very personal benefit in strong public education. I'm a citizen of a community, and having a well-educated populace, having a system which is accessible and provides equal opportunity to all young Ontarians, is of great benefit to me today and will be of benefit to me every day of my life.

Why do I support public education? I've raised the issue of equal access. I believe that in order to have the best society, we need to have an opportunity for everyone, every child, to have equal access to success. I believe it's through quality public education that we provide that opportunity.

In previous deputations' references to diversity—I'm sure all of you, like me, often comment on the diversity of the population in our province and in our city, and politicians often talk about the strength, the great positive, of the diversity. I have often said that I believe our diversity is our greatest strength as a society, but diversity isn't always easy. It provides many challenges with it, opportunities for conflict, for misunderstanding. Unless we have places where we can come together and learn, one, about our differences and understand those differences, but learn, more so, about our enormous similarities, unless we have opportunities to come together to get to know each other, I believe we have the possibility of that conflict and misunderstanding.

When we do have places—and I believe in Ontario there are many, many examples within our public system, places where people come together and learn about each other—we have marvellous opportunities. We grow and are educated in ways that were never possible when I was a student in public school.

Recently I saw a small, independently made film called *The Red Dot*, a film made in a Scarborough school growing out of some conflict around a Hindu student appearing with the red dot, or bindi. The school came together and learned about the meaning of what was, for one member of the school community, an expression of their religion. Through that experience, and this is shown in the film, all of the children came to understand the customs of that religious faith. I didn't take comparative

religion until second-year university, but here in Ontario we have many children and youth in our public schools learning that on a daily basis.

History: we turn to organizations like the Multi-Cultural History Society of Ontario, citizens who are working to develop content for curriculum. We have the opportunity for young people to learn not just about their own roots, but also the roots of all of the other students. When they do this, this has personal benefits for them, it has community benefits for them, it has benefits for the future of our economy, and it allows us to be an example to the rest of the world on how people can come together and live peacefully together.

This morning I came here to Queen's Park on the Wellesley bus, which is one of my local buses. I often go to work on the Wellesley bus, and it's jammed with students. I came later today and I was pleased that there weren't a lot of students on it; they were already in school. But when I see the young people on the bus getting off at Jarvis Collegiate, I see what I'm sure could almost be a roll call of the members of the United Nations. Traditionally, Jarvis has been a school which has had students from Rosedale as well as St James Town, Regent Park, Cabbagetown. A diverse community and diverse students have ended up in that school. People from very different backgrounds have sent their children and have been confident that their children would receive, one, an excellent education, and two, the knowledge of the other groups who live within this society.

1150

Recently, however, I increasingly hear about people who are no longer sending their children to Jarvis. The cuts to public education over the past years have started to cause the quality of education to deteriorate. Parents are frustrated. They're angry. Frequently I speak with parents who on the one hand are strongly committed to public education, and on the other hand are fearful about jeopardizing their children's future by leaving them in a school which doesn't any more have the same benefits or programs available. So I fear that the Jarvis of the future will become a very different place unless the resources are available to continue the excellent programs of the past which have put that school on the map. Parents are angry, and they won't jeopardize their children's education and their children's future. So increasingly, parents with financial means are removing their children from the public system and putting them into private schools.

I'm sure all of you, like me, grew up at a time when we assumed we would go to public school, and probably most of us did go to public school and all our friends went to public school. For middle-income Canadians, Ontarians, Torontonians, that's starting to change, and I believe it's a result of underfunding of our education system. I believe that's very dangerous.

I lived in England in the 1950s and saw the class conflict that arose from very different school systems, very different understandings. I lived in America in the early 1970s and saw the impact there of a badly funded public education system and the fact that middle-income

people struggled to finance their children in private schools because public education was not up to the standard they expected for their children.

We all know the saying, "If it ain't broke, don't fix it." But it is broken, and I'm here today to urge you to fix it. Fix our public education system, not by continuing to pull money out, not by financially encouraging parents to withdraw their children, but rather by adequately funding our public schools in Ontario and by committing, in words and in actions, to making them truly open and accessible, truly making them of high quality, making them the meeting place for the diverse peoples who call Ontario their home. Only then will our province and our cities have the opportunity to be vital, healthy and prosperous.

For starters, please withdraw the equity in education tax credit from Bill 45.

The Chair: Thank you very much. We have approximately two minutes per caucus, and I'll start with the government side.

Mr Hardeman: Thank you very much, Ms Hall, for the presentation. Obviously, you were here for the previous presentation just before you. I was somewhat pleased to see students at the school coming to speak about their school. In the students making the presentation I didn't see what you described as your concern for what will happen when parents make a choice for their children's education. Obviously all those who are here are here under the present structure; they've been going to the schools. We heard of the hardships that families have to go through to pay the tuition for their children to receive the type of education they want for their children.

In your presentation you're implying that the tax credit is in direct relation to education spending in the public system. If that's not the case—and let's make the assumption, as I do and would suggest, that the government's commitment to education is as strong today as it's ever been. It's the same budget that we're talking about. This year it has \$360 million more going into the public education system. Assuming that there is no connection between the two, could you tell us today whether you would then see a positive to providing the type of education that those five students were receiving at the choice of their parents?

Ms Hall: I believe there is a relationship.

Mr Hardeman: Let's just make the assumption that I'm right.

The Chair: Mr Hardeman, you posed the question.

Ms Hall: I think we're a long way from having a well-funded public education system, and if we were at that point, then I think it would be useful in our society to have that kind of very broad debate. But we're not there today and there's just so much money in the provincial pot. If \$500 million or \$700 million goes to tax credits for private schools, that is \$500 million or \$700 million not available to the public system to make sure that there are music teachers in schools, to make sure that there are libraries and librarians in elementary schools, to make sure that parents don't need to be out raising money for

books, for computers, for other things, to make sure that there are extracurricular activities for youth in high schools. Clearly there is not enough money currently being spent to fund public education, and thus I see this diversion as being an undermining of the public system.

Mr Kennedy: Mrs Hall, you're known as a champion for Toronto, and I think the member opposite may be enlightened to know that at least \$1,500 has been cut per student in Toronto. I just want you to go back. You endorsed the Premier's quote and the minister's quote. Specifically in Toronto, how do you see that lack of commitment to public education, the commitment to a new private system, not just religious but a whole wide private education system? What do you think that could do to the future of Toronto?

Ms Hall: I must say there have been a lot of issues over the last few years that have had an impact on Toronto and its citizens. But I don't think anything has been as powerful or as negative as the decision to fund private schools. We saw in the weekend papers a United Way report talking about the large number of low-income people in the city of Toronto. Many of those people are newcomers who don't have the ability to remove their children from an inadequately funded public system and put them into private schools. They don't have that choice.

I'm an optimist and I like to focus on the positive things that can happen when people come together and meet each other and get to know each other and understand and develop respect. I see fewer and fewer opportunities for that to happen. I think that will have an impact on all of our lives. This isn't about the interests of a few; this is about the future civility and health of this community, as well as communities right across the province.

1200

Mr Marchese: Thank you, Ms Hall, for your presentation. I have two quick questions. One, I know there are a number of people here today who would have loved to make a presentation but won't be able to. Do you believe this issue is significant enough, in terms of the direction it is taking us, that this government ought to have had hearings that were broader, of course, that would have taken us across Ontario a little more, and would have given people an opportunity to speak?

Ms Hall: Absolutely. I said at the beginning that I'm pleased to be here, but I wish that all the other people who care about this issue had a similar opportunity. I know that there's a broad number of people who want an opportunity to speak about this thing, which is a very drastic change in the funding of education in Ontario.

Mr Marchese: The other matter is the question of choice. People present this issue as a matter of respecting choice and that if people want to have a religious education, and that is the choice they make, the state should fund it. There are many arguments that have been made, but that's the presentation they make to this issue. What do you say to the notion of choice and respecting it and funding it?

Ms Hall: I think that the first obligation of government is to fund the public system, to provide opportunity to all children to have an option of a high-quality school system so that they can achieve their best. That choice is available. Perhaps some would say we're talking about Utopia to talk about a properly funded public education system. I don't believe that's Utopia. I believe we could reach that and we need to work toward that. If we reach that point, then I think it's not inappropriate to have a broad debate, discussion, with all players having a part, as to what governments wish to do with any additional funds they have lying around.

The Chair: With that, we have run out of time. On behalf of the committee, thank you very much for your presentation.

PEOPLE FOR EDUCATION

The Chair: Our next presentation is from People for Education. I would ask the presenter to come forward and state your name for the record, please. On behalf of the committee, welcome. You have 20 minutes for your presentation.

Ms Annie Kidder: My name is Annie Kidder and I am a spokesperson for People for Education.

I wanted to come here today and be able to say the 10 or 20 perfect words that would make the members of this government change their minds about the tax credit and tax money going to private schools.

I know that over the course of the next week and a half in these very, very limited hearings, you're going to hear a lot of numbers. You're going to hear that this tax credit will probably cost us, the taxpayers, closer to \$700 million, not the \$350 million originally announced. You'll hear that for every student who leaves the public education system, the government can cut \$6,800 from its education budget. You'll hear that well over \$1 billion has already been cut from the public education system. You'll hear that because this tax credit, unlike any other province, goes directly to parents, it will act as an incentive for them to take their children out of public schools. You'll hear that because public education is so underfunded, every child who leaves the system brings another school closer to closing or losing its librarian or music teacher. You'll hear that 59% of Ontarians oppose the tax credit, that 68% think it's a bad use of tax dollars and that 87% of Ontarians believe that if private schools receive public money they should be required to meet the same provincial standards as public schools.

You'll hear all sorts of numbers and statistics over the next eight days, but maybe when it comes to the perfect words, the words that will make you understand the damage that this will do, you need to hear from a parent. There are two million students in the public education system in Ontario. They don't have any high-paid lobbyists working for them. They don't have any connections to the inner circle that controls the cabinet. They have their parents.

Tomorrow morning in a school, in a publicly funded school in Toronto, we will release the People for Education's fourth annual tracking report. This is a survey that goes to every school in Ontario. It's not an opinion poll. It just asks parents to take an inventory of their schools so we can keep track of the effects of policy and funding changes. We just ask parents to count things in their schools. "Do you have a librarian or a phys ed teacher? How many custodians does your school have? Does your school have a secretary? Are there children on waiting lists for special education in your school? How much fundraising do you do and how much of it is for school supplies or textbooks? What are the class sizes in your school?" It's things like that, things parents care about in their schools.

What we know from this year's results is that now is the time to put money back into the public education system; now is the time for the government to recommit to public education in Ontario; now is the time for the government to ensure that every child in Ontario, regardless of their economic status, the language they speak, their race or religion, is given a chance to succeed in a publicly funded education system.

When I was looking for the perfect words to say about schools and what parents think about their schools, and the perfect words to make you understand how important it is that, if the government of Ontario has extra money to spend on anything, it be spending it on public schools, the most perfect words I could find were in a letter that was sent with our tracking survey from a school in the Lambton Kent board. This is a letter from the chair of the school council.

Some people don't seem to be interested in it, but I will read it anyway. Would you like to listen?

Mr Hardeman: Yes.

Ms Kidder: Thank you.

"Our school is a wonderful school! It is located in the country and has a manageable amount of students attending. Our school has an enormous playground in which our children can safely play and learn about the world around them. The staff at our school is very dedicated and hard-working. They set a good example for our children and the best interests of each student are taken into account when making decisions. This can be done when the amount of children in a school is reasonable and all of the students are well known by the staff.

"Fortunately, we also have a very supportive parents group who work co-operatively and are helpful with regards to assisting our school in many ways.

"A country school provides an ideal situation for learning academics and producing a strong, responsible member for our society.

"My main concern about our school is all the 'cut-backs' we have had to endure.

"Our school had a music program and with the support of a music teacher our whole student population was exposed to a background in music. Our school board no longer employs music teachers.

“At one time our children were transported to a local school where they were taught design and technology skills. What better way to prepare our children for adult life and the working world. This program no longer exists....

“Support staff has also been cut to a minimum. Many students struggle academically; however, there is no money to hire support staff to give individual attention.

“A VIP program was run in conjunction with the local police department. This is another very valuable program that has suffered cutbacks.

“Sporting events have been restricted because of lack of funds for busing students to different schools and money is not available for supply teachers to replace the classroom teacher accompanying the sports team.

“Our library is maintained by our principal and a parent volunteer. Is this fair to place responsibility on a volunteer and someone who is already performing a full-time job?

“Each of these ‘cutbacks’ has affected our school and every other school in Lambton county. It has been very disappointing to watch all of these valuable services disappear or change.”

Those are the most perfect words I can think of.

I’m here to say that taking money away from the public system, taking public money and using it to fund private schools, which can exclude whoever they want and which are not accountable to the government, is going to mean more damage to this woman’s school, it’s going to mean more losses in this woman’s school.

I plead with this government to rethink this policy, to remember the two million children in the public education system and do your job, which is to be advocates for those children. You have to be the lobbyists for those children.

1210

The Chair: We have approximately three minutes per caucus and I’ll start with the official opposition.

Mr Kennedy: Ms Kidder, I know you can’t relate the tracking report, but you’ve done this in years past. There was a statement a week and a half ago by the Premier that the reason he is changing his mind and funding private schools, when he said before that he would not, is that there’s lots of money now, that the economy is working and there’s money in public education. We have submitted a set of figures we’ve yet to see a response to from the government side. You started off talking about figures. I just wonder if you could relate, though, in any way you like, how that statement resonates with you.

Ms Kidder: Tomorrow, when we release our tracking report, we will show that there is an increased number of students on waiting lists for special education. Parents are fundraising more than ever before for classroom supplies and textbooks. We will release numbers that show the damage that’s been done to the system and especially the damage that’s been done over the last year to specialist teachers, psychologists and social workers in schools. We will talk about small schools and what has happened to them over the last year.

If the Premier says that there is more money and that there is lots of money in the economy, then I go back to what I said before: that money should be spent in the public education system, which is suffering dearly right now.

Mr Kennedy: I wonder if you could comment for us philosophically. The government has said this is about parents having choices. This is the government line, if you like, that’s been picked up by many other groups and I’m just wondering—

Mr O’Toole: Mr Chair, the word “lying,” I want that struck.

The Chair: Mr Kennedy, you will have to retract that word, please.

Mr Kennedy: I said “line.” I said it was a “line.” In other words—

The Chair: We can play with words, Mr Kennedy, but I think—

Mr Kennedy: I don’t want to be misunderstood. I just said it’s the statement of the government. I didn’t say they were lying. I just want to be clear.

The Chair: OK.

Ms Kidder: The government line.

Mr Kennedy: The government statement or the government public relations have been about parent choice, yet I’ve been struck in my travels around the province by how fewer and fewer choices are available to parents for their kids within public education. I just wonder if you can attest to that, or how you would remark on that whole idea.

Ms Kidder: I think it’s very important that parents have choices and that parents be allowed to make whatever choices they want. One of the things there used to be in our public education system was a lot of services and supports for parents of many different kinds of communities. We used to have more ESL teachers. We used to have anti-racist funding within the public education system. We used to have a lot of work done in the area of understanding and nourishing the diversity within the public education system. That has been taken out of the public education system. Parents should be able to choose between fully funded, fully equipped, broadly based public schools, and that choice is being taken away from them.

This legislation is going to do more damage to the public education system than anything this government has done before. It’s not about choice; it’s about taking money out of the public education system. It’s about not understanding how important investment is in the public education system, because it’s the next generation of society we’re taking care of, and if there are any dollars, that’s where they have to be spent.

The Chair: I have to go to Mr Marchese.

Mr Marchese: Your main argument is that we should be investing more money in education, because primarily this government has taken money out of education. I’m in full agreement with you in that regard, in spite of the protestations of members who are saying, “We’ve put in millions of dollars.” The Minister of Finance—they all

claim they've put millions of dollars into the education system, while you describe a litany of problems we're facing in the public school system. So you and I are in agreement and most of the people who are involved in education are probably in agreement.

But what about the philosophical arguments? If there were more money put into the education system, would you then say it would be OK for governments to fund religious schools from public dollars?

Ms Kidder: This piece of legislation is not about funding religious schools. That's not what this is.

Mr Marchese: I appreciate that.

Ms Kidder: As to the bulk of children who are in private schools, it's not the majority who are in religious schools.

Mr Marchese: I understand that. It's non-denominational schools and religious schools. You're right.

Ms Kidder: This is not about funding religious schools. This is about fragmenting the public education system. This is about giving money to private schools that can exclude whoever they want to exclude. It's about giving public money to private schools that have to meet no provincial standards up to grade 8. It's about giving money to private schools what will further fragment the system when what we need to be doing is bringing the system together. This is not an issue about religious freedom.

The Chair: You still have a bit of time.

Mr Marchese: You're quite right. To be fair, it funds non-denominational schools—the bulk will go to them—but it also funds people who send their children to religious schools, obviously. It does do that through the tax credit. And while they don't call it a voucher, we argue it is effectively the same except they call it a tax credit. The money goes into both systems.

Ms Kidder: It's a voucher because it's money that a person is given to spend in the private education system. I would argue that it is the job of government to support a system that is for everybody. That is their job, and I think that is the first job they have to do. That's where the support and the money has to go right now.

It has to be understood that this tax credit is not happening in a vacuum. This tax credit is happening at a time when parents have spent the last six years having their children in a system that's been underfunded, that's been destabilized, that's been mismanaged. It's not happening at a time when public education is flourishing and being given the full support of the government. You cannot say, "On the other hand, if it were a different kind of world..." We have to deal with the world we have right now, and right now we have a government with no commitment to public education, and then they're doing this, which will undermine it even more.

The Chair: Mr O'Toole.

Mr O'Toole: It's good to see you again, Ms Kidder. Appearing on all the education reform bills, you've opposed all of them: the quality ones, the accountability ones, so—

Ms Kidder: That's not true, Mr O'Toole, thank you.

Mr O'Toole: Just a brief summary, there.

It's too bad you missed a couple of presentations this morning by the Hamilton District Christian High School. The students were just superlative in their tolerance and their thirst for equity. It was quite genuine and not quite as orchestrated as some presentations. The other presentation this morning, by the Sikh community, the Khalsa school, was one that embraced the opportunity for parent choice. I'd be remiss if I didn't mention the Jewish Parents for Equality in Education Funding.

We've generally been hearing from those schools that are very much accountable to the parents who've made the choice. That's what I've heard most strongly—parent choice—and with that the mechanism of accountability, the relationship between how their children are educated, where they're educated and who's accountable to whom. Are they accountable to Earl Manners, or are they accountable to the parents?

In some respects you have spoken, I must respectfully say, about parent choice. I've heard you say that. "Fully funded, broadly equipped" is another term you've used. I'm hearing, on one side, that it's between \$4,000 and \$5,000 in the independent school. The parents are paying that and they're looking for some equity on that at the independent schools. It's \$4,000 or \$5,000; in ours it's about \$7,000 per student. I guess the question is: the money goes in and where it goes is sort of like the black box question. So it's about \$7,000 per student versus \$5,000. Most of your presentation here this morning was asking for more money. I have a question, Mr Chair: how much more money do we have to give the public education system, and what are we going to get for it? Extracurricular? How much more money, and what would we get?

Ms Kidder: Is that your question?

Mr O'Toole: How much more money do you think would solve the problem for the public system today, \$8,000—

The Chair: Mr O'Toole, you've posed the question.

Ms Kidder: Can I answer the question, please? I want to answer the first part of your question first, to do with accountability. Your government, sir, talks about accountability in every piece of legislation they've passed. They love accountability. They talk about nothing but accountability. When you speak of accountability, you speak of it to the people of Ontario, because we are taxpayers. We're talking about public money, and that's why there has to be public accountability for it. Saying that public money can go somewhere where they're accountable to a very small group of people has not been the policy of your government at all. It's an extraordinary thing for you to say. The poll we commissioned said 87% of the people in Ontario believe private schools should meet provincial standards if they receive public money.

1220

Now I'll answer your second question. In our tracking report tomorrow we make recommendations as to exactly where the money should be spent. We say the thousands of children on special education waiting lists should be

taken off those waiting lists by funding psychologists. We say that all elementary schools over a certain size should have music teachers and librarians and that their libraries should be open more than two days a week. We say there should be enough custodians in schools to keep them clean.

We have itemized what schools need and what has been cut from schools over the last five years. We're not just saying, throw money at the system. What we're talking about is what has been cut out of the system, and it can no longer be blamed, as Mr Flaherty has, on school boards and their palaces. There is now a law about how much school boards can spend on administration, and that is all that is being spent. The rest of the money is coming out of our children's schools.

The Chair: With that we have run out of time. On behalf of the committee, thank you.

ONTARIO MULTI-FAITH COALITION FOR EQUALITY IN EDUCATION

The Chair: Our next presentation is from the Ontario Multi-Faith Coalition for Equity in Education. I would ask the presenters to come forward. You have 20 minutes. On behalf of the committee, welcome.

Mr Gerald Vandezande: Thank you, Mr Chairman and members of the committee.

Just for the sake of clarity, it should be understood that I appear here as a retired government relations coordinator and also that the Ontario Multi-Faith Coalition for Equity in Education did not include representatives from the Jewish or Buddhist communities. There were representatives from the Islamic, Hindu and Sikh communities as well as numerous Protestant Christian groups.

I also want to make the point that my children graduated from Christian elementary schools and from one Christian high school and one public high school, and my grandchildren attend Berner Trail public school in Scarborough.

It is my deep conviction, and I'm sure you'll agree, that justice delayed is justice denied; fiscal fairness delayed is fiscal fairness denied. That's why I support in principle the introduction of a refundable tax credit as proposed in Bill 45. However, I do so on the following conditions:

(1) that there be public consultations with respect to the definitions that will be included in the regulations to be issued in connection with the tax credit;

(2) that all educational stakeholders—public, separate and independent—be at the table to help formulate mutually acceptable criteria and definitions; and

(3) that the Legislature appoint a special committee whose task it should be to examine how best to expand the existing public and separate systems to ensure that they become fully accessible, inclusive and non-discriminatory, so that alternative programs and independent schools become bona fide partners within the Ontario system.

In that connection, Mr Chair, I want to refer you to the appendix, called Guidelines for Public Justice in Education, which my friend and private consultant, Lyle McBurney, helped formulate way back in 1988 when we were negotiating with the Liberal government, and subsequently with the New Democratic government.

What is lacking in the current debate on the proposed refundable tax credit for parents of children at independent schools is the urgent need for an appropriate framework for an inclusive education system, a framework that would make it possible for faith-based and other independent schools to become bona fide partners in a non-discriminatory system of education in Ontario. Our province urgently needs a consistent education policy that is shaped by a common denominator defined by public justice for all citizens.

"Justice" is not spelled "j-u-s-t u-s." The government needs to do equal justice to all Ontarians. It must not merely protect certain powerful interests. Ontario needs an inclusive policy that promotes the common good of all.

The Legislature must develop an education policy that is not driven by private interests or partisan priorities. It must deal with the public good of all. That is quite different than the ideological pursuit of majoritarian interests. A non-discriminatory legislative framework would deal fairly with the educational rights and responsibilities of all parents, students, teachers, schools and boards.

Such a justice-rooted approach provides clear guidelines on how we can relate respectfully and live together harmoniously, on how in our society, with its diversity of beliefs and values, all Ontarians can engage equally in the responsible exercise of our citizenship. Good policy advances and protects educational justice for all without discrimination, as guaranteed in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

In an open society, government ought not to permit any faith or ideology to have socio-cultural dominance. The government should establish equal educational opportunity and social space for all, including minorities. Public recognition of Ontario's diversity allows people to think and act according to their basic convictions, provided that their actions do not violate other people's human rights and social responsibilities. This public-justice commitment affirms genuine pluralism and facilitates the legitimate participation in society by different faith and values communities. It rejects the ideology of the melting pot, which insists on a colourless uniformity in the public square. Instead, it affirms the socio-cultural reality of the Canadian mosaic.

Good policy ensures that all citizens and communities, with their various views of life and education, can exercise their legal equality rights and fundamental freedoms. All are entitled to enjoy the equal protection and equal benefit of the Canadian charter, the Ontario Human Rights Code, and the UN's Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which recognizes that parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children.

A truly pluralistic education system is an inclusive system, a democratic system that comprises all the members of the public. It is a non-sectarian system that also invites faith-motivated and other values-based independent schools to become integral partners in an expanded system that accommodates them with their alternative educational perspectives and programs intact. These partners would not be seen as fearsome competitors but as friendly contributors to an enriched, multi-faith, multi-cultural education system that advances quality learning for neighbourly living and Canadian citizenship.

For example, in Alberta, Edmonton public schools are giving people educational options. EPS programs ensure that parents and students have various options in educational programming while following the provincial curriculum. They are developed based on feedback from parents and the community. Their spectrum seeks to meet the changing needs of students. These alternatives include several aboriginal programs and Christian schools, language programs, including Cree and French as a second language, and Arabic, Hebrew, Mandarin and Ukrainian bilingual programs. Then there are special-needs programs and a number of transition programs for students at the junior and senior high school levels who are not experiencing success in traditional school environments. Let me emphasize, this choice is available under one huge public umbrella, adequately funded by the government.

My proposal is the following: that the Legislature should empower both the public and separate systems to allow and enable the local boards of education to provide the equivalent of Edmonton's model. These alternative programs and schools would be required to meet specific educational guidelines and fiscal conditions, such as following the provincial educational criteria and being publicly accountable to the relevant school boards. The goal would be to promote diverse learning opportunities, responsiveness to students, parents and various communities, as well as provide accessibility and flexibility. Thus, various alternative educational programs and independent schools could be accommodated and become integral partners within the public and separate systems.

1230

Such an inclusive system recognizes that different peoples have different beliefs and have the legal right to live and educate in different ways. This open system would be genuinely representative, adequately funded, and publicly accountable. It would develop mutually acceptable academic criteria, curriculum guidelines, teacher qualifications, admission policies, and health and safety standards. All partners would respect the world views and core values that reflect our precious Canadian mosaic. Educational alternatives, already provided, by the way, by a few public boards such as the Niagara and Toronto boards, would contribute to the quality of learning for societal responsibility.

Such all-embracing education helps to build a caring and sharing society that increasingly becomes a beacon of hope and light. Our political parties owe it to the

common public good to work together in a non-partisan way on this major project

In conclusion, educational justice delayed is educational justice denied. Delaying fiscal fairness is denying fiscal fairness. Delaying justice and fairness is like saying to poor and powerless people, "We'll be fair and equitable to you after we've taken care of the rich and powerful." It's like saying to aboriginal peoples and visible minorities, "We'll recognize and respect your legal equality rights and fundamental freedoms after we've looked after the rights and interests of white people." It's like saying to gay and lesbian people, "We'll safeguard and secure your human rights and civil liberties after heterosexual people's demands and interests have been looked after."

Clearly, that would not be a fair, just and respectful way to demonstrate genuine respect for the human dignity of all Ontarians. Let's resolve to demonstrate, in Ontario law and public policy, that we, together, are determined to promote and practice full-fledged justice and educational equity for all Ontario students, parents, teachers, schools and boards. Indeed, let's work together for a vibrant, mutually respectful Ontario where the common good, rooted in justice for all, finally prevails. Thank you for listening.

The Chair: Thank you very much. We have two minutes per caucus, and I'll start with Mr Marchese.

Mr Marchese: Mr Vandezande, do you oppose public dollars for private, non-denominational schools? We haven't talked much about that here.

Mr Vandezande: I propose and support public monies for all public, separate and independent schools that would meet the criteria that I speak about in my submission. I think only those alternative programs and independent schools that are prepared to co-operate within a broad, what I call Ontario system of education, are entitled to the kind of protection that the Canadian charter, the Ontario Human Rights Code and the UN declaration speak about.

By the way, the Supreme Court of Canada, in 1996, ruled unequivocally that the province of Ontario is perfectly entitled and permitted by the Canadian charter to fund schools outside of the existing public and Catholic systems. It is permitted to do so, it is free to do so, it may do so, and I think it is obliged to do so, morally, today.

The Chair: You have time for a quick point.

Mr Marchese: It's not a quick one.

The Chair: We've only got about 30 seconds.

Mr Marchese: Let me pose it. Currently, as the system is, many of the religious schools sometimes appear to be very unicultural. They appear not to have the mix of students that one would like possibly to see. I'm not sure that some of these religious schools accept gays or accept homosexuality as something that is either acceptable or normal. Do you have concerns about religious schools that have such views? They have no children with disabilities etc?

Mr Vandezande: I have appeared before numerous committees, long before the parties here passed the legislation with respect to public protection of gay and lesbian

people. I have appeared before this committee to make sure that poverty is eradicated in this province. I have, and our organization has, worked hard, all the way up to the Supreme Court, to make sure that aboriginal people are protected.

What I'm saying to you is I am utterly convinced that given the proper input and participation by the public, Catholic and independent school systems, a reasonable agreement can be reached as to what the criteria and conditions should be to ensure that our constitutional documents, people's constitutional rights, including the rights of religious parents and schools that you heard from this morning, will be properly recognized, acknowledged and respected in law and in public policy and funded.

Mr O'Toole: You've appeared before many committees and I commend you for that. You've always had a consistent view of standing up for all. I like the way you've broken down "justice" to "just us." In the public system, the outrage today perhaps comes under the term "as long as it's us, just us."

I do have a question. You have the provision here conditional on three supports, which is in your opening statement. I just wondered if you could accept whether this is a good initiative—I mean, the details could be worked out and I'm sure you'll be monitoring them—or is it, let's close the door once more?

Mr Vandezande: Previous governments have consistently closed the door to Jewish, Protestant Christian, Buddhist, Muslim, Sikh and other schools that sought public recognition, public funding, public participation outside and within the public system. I was part of that over the last 40 years. There have been recommendations made by the Shapiro commission, by other committees, to do something. No government has done anything. My hope, my dream, is that something be done.

I draw your attention to the appendix. In 1988, we drafted, on behalf of a great variety of communities, guidelines that we then advocated be adopted by the government of the day and by the opposition parties to use in formulating a public policy that would do justice to all, discriminate against none within the legislative framework that respects the Human Rights Code, the charter and all that comes with it. We need to take those determined risks, because all Canadians are entitled to equal protection of their citizenship, equal protection of their rights in law, and also equal protection with respect to their religious, ideological and other value systems that may come into play in education.

The Chair: The official opposition?

Mr Kennedy: I want to say "Mr Vandezande," but I have to say "Gerald." I've known you for a quite a long time.

Mr Vandezande: Why not? It makes it easier for me.

Mr Kennedy: Except for this. I'm going to ask you a somewhat difficult question. You're urging us to say, if something's done, it's better than nothing being done. Yet you look at your framework, you look at the principles you're talking about here for justice, and we have a shotgun piece of legislation and eight days to

discuss it. Everybody's thrown into the same soup. There are no distinctions being made here between people who meet the criteria or not. Maybe some people will get to consult with the finance minister. He made it very clear in his press conference—not his four minutes of questions here, but in his press conference—that maybe some people could talk to him privately.

So I want to ask you, can what you've described here, can this framework that you say would meet justice, be reached by the process we're in today?

Mr Vandezande: I gave conditional support, and the conditions are clear. So it is crucial to me that the public consultations that I speak about in the three points indeed be carried out and that this committee should have the audacity and the courage to say to the minister and the Premier and the Minister of Education, "We need public consultation with respect to the key criteria that are at issue." At the same time, I would say to the opposition parties, do not throw the baby out with the bathwater. It is very important that Ontario for once now take a public stance.

When I read the ads by your leader, Mr McGuinty, and I see his letters to friends of mine and I hear him saying—I wish he were here—that public tax money is meant for public education, then I say be sure not to exclude any members of the public.

Mr Kennedy: But I asked—

Mr Vandezande: Just a minute.

Mr Kennedy: Yes, go ahead.

Mr Vandezande: Practise justice. Practise fairness. In a letter as recent as May 31, he says, "My acknowledgement that there is a fairness issue in the way Ontario funds religious schools has never"—underline—"wavered." I say demonstrate that, show it, and support the legislation, but insist on making the public consultations with respect to the conditions that must obtain in order to be entitled to public funding, public recognition. That can be done. I've seen it done before. I appeared on Bill 26 years ago—my MPP took the initiative; one of your members took the initiative—and through a session in the Legislature, forced the government to reconsider.

I think you have the political power, if you have the political will, to pull that off for the sake of the common good of all, rooted in justice for all.

The Chair: With that, we've run out of time. On behalf of the committee, thank you very much for your presentation this morning—or this afternoon, I guess.

Mr Vandezande: I'll be glad to appear further, Mr Chairman.

The Chair: This committee is recessed until 4 o'clock this afternoon.

The committee recessed from 1241 to 1600.

TORONTO DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD

The Chair: If I can get your attention, I'd like to bring the committee back to order. It is 4 o'clock.

Our first presentation this afternoon is from the Toronto District School Board. On behalf of the committee,

I would like to welcome the presenters. Could you please come forward and state your name for the record. You have 20 minutes for your presentation.

Ms Irene Atkinson: My name is Irene Atkinson and I am chair of the Toronto District School Board. I'm here today representing over 300,000 students and 1.4 million taxpayers in the city of Toronto.

The Toronto District School Board believes that public education is the most important element in maintaining a strong and stable democratic society. However, Ontario's public education system is under attack.

The proposed education tax credit is a \$3,500 voucher for parents who choose to send their children to private or religious schools. This is in addition to the other tax supports and write-offs that most religious schools already enjoy, such as income tax deductions for the religious portion of the tuition fees. The government has stated that this will cost Ontarians a total of \$300 million annually once fully implemented.

This tax credit will reduce our board's funding by approximately \$6,500 for every student leaving our system for private schools, a net saving to the government of \$3,000 per student.

Extraordinary diversity enriches our school system, but also presents many challenges not faced by other school boards. These challenges must be met so our students can achieve success in school. Along with parents and guardians, we are responsible for preparing tomorrow's citizens by ensuring they can be productive and contributing members of society.

We welcome this task, but we need the tools to do it properly. In this, we agree. You want effective, cost-efficient education. So do we. But children are not widgets and learning does not occur in a vacuum. Programs and services that support student learning are critical for student success.

Between 1996 and 2003 funding for our schools in Toronto will have been reduced by half a billion dollars. How can the provincial government remove hundreds of millions of dollars from Toronto's public schools while giving private schools tax credits? Our system can compete with the best in the world, but we have to have a level playing field. We are calling on the provincial government to level the playing field for all students by giving public schools adequate funding to ensure equity in education.

Lest you think we are crying wolf, consider the following: a recent OSSTF survey found that 15% of parents would consider private schools because of the new tax credit. If all these parents removed one child from Toronto District School Board schools, that would represent a loss of 39,000 students. Assuming equal numbers are removed from elementary and secondary schools, which are most likely to lose students to private schools, that represents a potential funding loss of \$225 million, or about 11% of our total budget.

In order to cope with this significant reduction in revenue, major restructuring would be required by the board. The first outcome would be the reduction of 1,700 teaching positions and many other support staff such as

supply teachers and education assistants. The reduction in enrolment would also mean that many schools would be forced to close, particularly those in areas where a high percentage of students would leave to attend private schools.

Further, the board does not receive full funding for building maintenance and operations where school attendance is below the 80% capacity level. Loss of students in these schools would have an extreme effect.

In summary, the board could not adjust its levels of operations resulting from the reduction in enrolment and grant revenue quickly enough to avoid a deficit position.

We at the Toronto District School Board celebrate diversity in our schools and work hard to instill a sense of tolerance and respect for all cultures in our classrooms every day. We have a proven record, developed locally over many years, of successfully educating our diverse student population, and it is a record of excellence.

The Toronto District School Board calls on Premier Harris to withdraw the proposed equity in education tax credit until full public hearings and research have determined it will not place the public education system at risk. The board also calls for restoration of adequate funding to the board so that it can continue to provide quality education to the students of Toronto.

That, Mr Chairman, is my presentation.

The Chair: We have approximately four minutes per caucus and I'll start with the government side.

Mr Hardeman: I think, when you started your presentation, you talked about fairness and a level playing field for all students. I know you may have a little trouble agreeing with me on the premise to the question, but I would just like to go to the end. The government's commitment to public education is secure and that's why there is \$360 million more in the public education budget this year than there was last year. The level playing field, the parental choice and the issue of fairness for the students and the parents who have chosen, for whatever reason, to think that what is presently being provided in the public education system is not what they want for their children: do you believe there is some need for fairness in addressing that so all children have an equal opportunity in society as opposed to all children having the opportunity to fit in the mould we've set for them?

Ms Atkinson: Mr Hardeman, I don't really think it's my place to comment on that. That's going to be a government decision. The point I'm making today is that, if you do that, it should not be at the expense of the public school system funding or reducing services.

You've mentioned an increase of \$360 million. That translated, for the Toronto District School Board, into a general legislative grant increase of \$37.5 million. Our funding pressures are over \$35 million for wage settlements, the incredible increase in the cost of fuel, which for the Toronto District School Board was an annual increase of \$17 million, and \$5.1 million for inflation. So we're not even keeping even with the increase in the general legislative grant. We're going backwards because of the funding pressures and the enormous increase in enrolment that we're getting.

Mr Hardeman: Am I to understand that you are not here today objecting to fairness and equity in the education funding formula to provide some relief for parents who make the choice, for whatever reason, that your concern is more for the level of funding presently in the public education system?

Ms Atkinson: Yes. The way the optics of this are to those of us in the public school system, which is open to all regardless of race, colour, creed, religion, whatever—all children can come to us—is that the tax credits, the private school tax credits, are being funded at the expense of reductions to public school funding.

1610

The Chair: Thank you, Mr Hardeman. We'll go to the official opposition.

Mr Dalton McGuinty (Leader of the Opposition): Madam Chair, let me begin by thanking you for appearing here today, and let me take the opportunity as well to thank you for the work you do on behalf of the Toronto District School Board. It has become fashionable in too many circles of late to criticize those who shoulder the responsibility for public education, particularly those who take on the job of trustee.

I was surprised, and frightened, I think may be the appropriate word, to get your estimate that it represents a loss of 39,000 students based on your calculations with a commensurate potential funding loss of \$225 million, which is close to 11% of your total budget. I believe we have a responsibility in government and positions of authority to inspire confidence in parents when it comes to the quality of public education being afforded to their children. What would this mean from a parent's perspective? What would it mean in terms of, if I were a parent with my four children enrolled here in Toronto in the public board, what changes would my children experience as a result of this policy? You told me in terms of numbers, but in terms of on the ground, in the classroom, what would it mean?

Ms Atkinson: One small statistic you didn't mention is the loss of 1,700 teaching positions, plus ed assistants plus supply teachers and so on. It may mean for some schools that the children will not be able to go to their local neighbourhood school because it will be closed because enrolment will go down.

Trustee Donna Cansfield in Etobicoke has one school that's 95% Muslim, so that school may very well become a private school, and the other 5% or so would have to be relocated elsewhere. That's one quite obvious difference. If you reduce the number of teachers overall because your enrolment goes down, you will lose in elementary school specialty teachers. It will be much more difficult for the schools to staff and provide a variety of options, and that would also apply to the secondary schools. The ramifications for us could be quite dramatic and quite severe.

Mr McGuinty: So it would have a negative impact on the quality of education for those children who remain behind in the public system.

Ms Atkinson: Yes.

Mr McGuinty: The government asserts day in and day out that it will not have such a negative impact. Obviously, based on what you're telling us here today, it will.

Ms Atkinson: Yes, but Mr McGuinty, if I may, the government insists every day that the reduction of half a billion dollars is only going to make the public school system better, so I suppose they'll try anything.

Mr McGuinty: Yes. You should know that contrary to the government's approach, we put forward a plan to improve education. We call it Excellence for All, and we would start with an investment in smaller classes from JK through to grade 3. The government removed money from the public system. We would invest in a public system. Frankly, what I want us to be able to do is compete in a sense that we will inspire confidence in the minds of our parents and we will afford our children the very best education through the public system. But we need the tools to do it; we need the resources to get the job done. That's one of the most frustrating aspects of this new policy. It will further rob us of the tools we need to improve public education.

Ms Atkinson: One of the major US television stations about six years ago did a study of education systems and their conclusion was that the system in Metropolitan Toronto was the best in the world, and we would certainly like to keep it that way. We are now being forced by the government into a state of competition with private schools and we must be given the resources to do that with a level playing field.

Mr Marchese: Madam Chair, welcome. Mr McGuinty touched on some of the issues you've spoken to, but it's important to repeat the questions because we have a hell of a time with those Conservatives on the other side, who continue to say, and you heard Mr Hardeman say, "We've given \$360 million," suggesting of course that it's so much money you ought to be happy with it, and that if you're not happy with it somehow you're wasting it once again on some mythical fat bureaucracy over there. But you pointed out that you get \$37 million—

Ms Atkinson: Thirty-seven and a half million, to be precise.

Mr Marchese: I'm sorry for that half; I'm sure it's going to make a big difference. You get \$37.5 million out of that \$360 million, and you said that barely meets some of the pressures you've got to deal with. You mentioned hydro costs being up \$17 million, of which they only cover \$6 million, I believe you said, and there are other costs.

Ms Atkinson: That was only for last year. This year we don't get a penny. Sorry for the interruption.

Mr Marchese: How could that be? Where is all this money they're giving you going? With all this money they're giving you, all these billions of dollars that are going to education, how come at the Toronto board you're losing—what?—at this point approximately \$300 million, \$325 million or \$350 million, and in the next couple of years another \$200 million? How do the two correspond between the losses and what they claim,

which is oodles of money going into the education system?

Ms Atkinson: I think that's a question you have to put to the other side.

Mr Marchese: There's no point in talking to them.

Ms Atkinson: I'd like to point out that we have another significant pressure I didn't refer to here, but now that we're talking about money, the government gives us in the funding model—what I really think we need is a proper, formal review of the funding model. At any rate we're given \$37 million a year for capital, which sounds like a lot of money, except that by industry standards we should be having about \$100 million a year. The old Metro school board, as you will recall, used to provide \$70 million a year for capital projects. We have documented proof of \$310 million worth of critical building maintenance that is unfunded. This is for things like boilers, roofs, window sashes, basic structural things that we need. There's no way we're going to find that money in the next five years.

Mr Marchese: The other question most critical for me is that you pointed out very graphically how the funding of religious schools and the nondenominational schools—of which by the way no one has appeared yet and is not likely to—would be a loss in terms of money, a loss in terms of teachers and a loss in terms of the funding formula and the implications of it to the school board—

Ms Atkinson: And possibly schools.

Mr Marchese: But don't you think this government ought to give some guarantee? You see, I don't trust them. Don't you think they should give you some guarantee that if there's going to be such a dramatic loss as we anticipate—they say no, but if there is—shouldn't they say, "Don't worry, we will make up for it"? Isn't that a demand you want to put to this government?

Ms Atkinson: What we are actually asking for is just to withdraw this.

Mr Marchese: That would be the better thing, of course, but that's not likely to happen.

Ms Atkinson: That is my board's position, asking to withdraw until full public hearings and research have determined it will not place the public education system at risk. That's what we're asking for.

Mr Marchese: Irene, they're not going to withdraw it; you know that.

The Chair: With that, we've run out of time. I'm sorry. On behalf of the committee, thank you very much for your presentation this afternoon.

1620

ONTARIO PUBLIC SCHOOL BOARDS' ASSOCIATION

The Chair: The next presentation is from the Ontario Public School Boards' Association. I would ask the presenters to come forward and state your names for the record. On behalf of the committee, welcome. You have 20 minutes for your presentation this afternoon.

Ms Liz Sandals: Good afternoon. I am Liz Sandals, President of the Ontario Public School Boards' Association. I would like to introduce my colleagues Gerri Gershon, who is second vice-president, and Rick Johnson, who is the regional vice-president for the central east region of our organization.

Thank you for the opportunity to address you today. Public school boards across the province are deeply offended by the provincial budget, which contains in it a refundable equity in education tax credit. Let me be clear: there is nothing equitable about taking taxpayer dollars from the public education system. It affects all of us. It affects over 95% of the children in the province who attend the publicly funded system when they lose programs and resources they desperately need. It affects society when we begin fracturing along class, religious and cultural lines. It affects rural communities that will face challenges to keep small schools open. It affects large cities with immigrant populations, whose children currently learn with children from all income levels, faiths and cultures.

Our association deeply believes in the value of our system of public education. Public district school boards and school authorities in Ontario provide every individual with equal access to educational opportunities regardless of gender, race, religion, ethnicity, disability and place of residence, in English or in French. We believe that a strong and effective publicly funded education system, responsive to the needs of our students, is the cornerstone of a democratic society.

Let me talk a bit about funding. With the late release of the general legislative grants this year, public school boards are only now having a clearer picture of the extent to which they will be underfunded. A modest estimate suggests that school boards will face a funding shortfall of \$175 million for the fiscal year 2001-02. The government estimates that the private school tax credit will cost their treasury at least \$350 million by the time it is fully implemented. These figures do not account for any further loss of students from the public education system to private schools. Our association believes that with the withdrawal of \$7,000 from the public system as each student leaves, the resulting tax credit to the parents of \$3,500 could actually end up netting the government money over time if a larger number of students vacates the public system. No other province pays parents to transfer their children to private schools.

In addition to the long-term implications of funding for public education, our member boards have serious concerns about their upcoming fiscal year. Funding has been curtailed drastically in the public education system. The \$200-million local priorities fund represents an increase of just 1.57% over last year's operating grants. This compares to a 3.2% increase in the consumer price index for Ontario. The \$70 million the government projects to spend on private schools this year would have covered the cuts in school board grants announced on May 11. Specifically, this includes the \$23 million cut from transportation and the \$40 million cut from school

heating budgets. These cuts come at a time when fuel costs are skyrocketing and school bus operators are facing bankruptcy. The dollars this government is spending to provide this private school tax credit are desperately needed within the public system.

OPSBA strongly believes that all government spending on education should be directed to the publicly funded system of education in this province.

Over the course of the last few years, many people have been saddened by what is viewed as a massive shift in the direction of political ideology. This government has fundamentally reshaped the education system within our province. Our association believes, and the judiciary has confirmed, that much of this reform has been anti-democratic. The announcement in the provincial budget of a tax credit for private education was done without any previous consultation, research or fact-gathering.

A brief history of legislation over the last few years: in the Bill 104 case, Justice Archie Campbell stated, "This power is constitutionally suspect because it confers upon the government the unprotected authority to pull itself up by its own legal bootstraps and override arbitrarily, with no further advice from the Legislative Assembly, and no right to be heard by those who may be adversely affected by the change, the very legislative instrument from which the government derives its original authority."

Bill 160 accorded the government more extreme regulatory powers, to which OPSBA objected. However, with Bill 74, the Education Accountability Act, we saw those same powers over school boards increased rather than reduced. Bill 46, which was introduced in conjunction with the provincial budget, further extends the power of the government and penalizes boards for non-compliance.

Bill 45 includes a stunning reversal in government policy that was announced without any previous consultation. The tax credit-voucher scheme contained in this budget will continue the course this government has followed of systematically dismantling public education.

During the last election campaign, the Premier made promises to the citizens of Ontario that his government was committed to a strong public education system. The citizens took him at his word. When the United Nations declared Ontario's funding for education discriminatory, the Premier and the Minister of Education reaffirmed the province's commitment to supporting a strong publicly funded education system for all of Ontario's students and their families. At the time, the government stated, and again I quote, "Extending funding to private religious schools would result in fragmentation of the education system in Ontario and would undermine the goal of universal access to education."

For almost two centuries, education in Canada has reflected the progress of a free and evolving society. Ontario's system of universal education has developed during this period and has been used as an instrument of public policy in the pursuit of democratic and humanitarian goals.

OPSBA recommends that the provincial government extend public hearings on this legislation to all regions of the province. We further recommend that the government delay passage of this legislation and bring it forward, if necessary, in the next sitting of the Legislature. We also recommend that the passage of this legislation be delayed until the government consults more fully with the citizens of this province on this important issue.

We also continually hear about competitiveness. We hear that a strong, well-funded public education system is critical to ensuring that we remain competitive in our global economy. Business leaders know and continually repeat that the success of their companies depends on a highly skilled workforce.

Much research exists to prove the cause and effect between a well-funded and efficient system of public education and economic success. Stephane Garelli of the World Competitiveness Project states, "The most convincing support for the argument that there is competition among nations can be seen in the areas of education and know-how. In a modern economy, nations do not rely on products and services; they also compete in brains."

OPSBA believes that the most effective way to ensure that all students succeed is to provide for them a well-funded public education system. Segregation along class and religious lines will not achieve a strong workforce for future generations.

OPSBA recommends that the provincial government conduct further research into the potential impact of removing dollars from the public education system in favour of funding private schools, and that that research be made publicly available.

Finally, accountability: public school boards are accountable in many ways, to many people. Trustees are democratically elected and must answer to their constituents for the decisions they make. They must ensure the provincial curriculum is delivered in the schools within their board. They must balance their budgets or be held personally responsible. The threat of ministry takeover, personal fines, and the potential restriction to even seek public office again looms over every board table. This government, unlike any other, has established unparalleled control mechanisms against democratically elected trustees.

Private schools, however, do not share the same accountability measures. They can teach what they like in elementary schools. There are no sanctions against their financial operations or their governance structures. The Ministry of Education has no control over their curriculum, management functions, hiring practices or outcomes. Private schools are also exempt from provincial testing.

1630

School boards, on the other hand, are required to hire certified teachers. Certified teachers will be required to pass licensing exams and take 14 courses every five years to maintain their certification. Only certified teachers are subject to discipline under the College of Teachers and can lose their licence to teach in the province for serious

misconduct. Private schools are not required to hire certified teachers. In fact, only about 2,000 teachers at Ontario's more than 700 private schools are members of the College of Teachers. That's less than three certified teachers per private school—not a very good record.

Taxpayers pay for our system of public education, and as the government has repeatedly stated, demand accountability for their dollars. With the introduction of a private school tax credit, the government has issued a double standard where it uses public dollars to pay for a private system without demanding any accountability from these private schools.

This particular form of a disguised voucher system is most appalling. The issuing of a tax credit paid directly to parents and not to the school removes any such accountability. Financial incentives to parents to remove their children from the public system does not bring the accountability demanded by the voting public.

OPSBA recommends that the government eliminate its double standard on accountability by eliminating their proposed tax credit-voucher scheme.

In conclusion, on behalf of the Ontario Public School Boards' Association, I would like to thank you for the opportunity to present our views. There is much at stake with this legislation. We feel strongly that Bill 45, if passed, will negatively impact future generations. We must ensure that all children have the opportunity to learn together, that all races and languages and income levels reap the benefits a well-funded public education affords our society.

We would also respectfully request that the dialogue continue. We call on the government to reach out and speak to all sectors of society on this issue. It impacts us all. Everyone who would like to, should be heard. Please extend the timelines to allow that to happen.

Thank you, and we would be pleased to entertain questions.

The Chair: Thank you very much. We have two minutes per caucus, and I'll start with the official opposition.

Mr McGuinty: Thank you very much for your presentation. It's good to see you again.

A couple of things. First of all, you expressed the frustration that my caucus and I have been expressing for some time, and that is, what's the rush? What we're talking about here is a provision that would enable parents in April 2003 to file an income tax return at that time, claiming a tax credit, and that's how much time we have to examine this in some detail.

The second thing I'd like to put to you—I'm wondering if you might offer us any insights or you may even want to surmise—why is it that we've had appear before this committee a number of earnest and sincere representatives from denominational schools, but we have yet to hear from somebody representing for-profit private schools or secular schools at large, and yet they make up half of the so-called private schools in Ontario and they stand to gain, much more so than the denominational

schools, when it comes to the breakdown of the tax credit? Why is it we're not hearing from those people?

Ms Sandals: I think there are perhaps more than just the secular schools that you're not hearing from. I know that in my own community of Guelph the press has talked to the two largest private Christian schools, and one private Christian school is in favour of the tax credit and the other is opposed. So I would suggest to you that it isn't only some of the secular schools that are opposed to the tax credit; some of the religious private schools are as well.

However, I think it goes in part to the issue of accountability, that in many cases the reason private schools are private schools is because they don't wish to follow the controls that are put on the public sector. They are looking down the road and presuming that even if this bill doesn't impose accountability, eventually the public will demand accountability of private schools. I think we've seen with some of the polling that 87% of the public is demanding that if there is a tax credit for private schools, then private schools should have to follow the same rules. Quite frankly I think there are a lot of private schools out there that don't want to follow the rules.

I think you will also find that a number of the higher-end private schools have waiting lists. They have competitions to get in. They certainly don't want to take all comers, as the public system does, and might be concerned about the exclusive nature of some of the schools if they were to have public rules imposed on them. So I think there are a variety of reasons why a number of the private schools are not supporting this incentive.

The Chair: Thank you very much. Mr Marchese.

Mr Marchese: Thank you and I thank the association for their presentation. A number of the deputants from the religious schools say there shouldn't be a loss to the public system by this initiative, and many of them also argue that if it were to be the case, they certainly wouldn't agree with it. The government denies, the minister denies, the Premier denies ever having said that if they ever funded religious schools, there would be a loss of \$300 million—that was Minister Ecker. The Premier doesn't make mention any longer of the fact that there would be a \$500 million loss. When you mention it to Monsieur Flaherty, he just goes into another orbit. He doesn't ever address that, as if it was never really said. So someone is not telling the truth, I suspect, with respect to at least moving away from what they believed then.

In terms of the fragmentation that I believe there will be, the Premier used to believe it but now they don't argue that, they argue choice. You don't have Monsieur Harris saying it would fragment society. They're saying, like all the other folks over there are saying, "What's wrong with choice?" In fact they use language that suggests it should be inclusionary and that we should be tolerant.

Mr O'Toole says, "One size fits all shouldn't be the norm." The funding formula is OK for one size fits all, but in this instance he turns it around and says that one size fits all shouldn't be the norm, but that people should

have a choice to take their kids wherever they want. What do you say to all that?

Ms Sandals: Oh, all sorts of issues. I think the first issue you raised around the flip-flop on the issue is part of the reason the public is so tremendously upset. It was perfectly clear to the public that the government was not going in the direction of private school funding and now they've done a tremendous flip-flop.

In terms of the whole issue of choice, if you look carefully at what went on in public schools when public school boards actually had the ability to raise taxes, I think you would find that public schools tended to have more alternative schools and to provide more choice for their students, when they had a tax base, because they recognized that one style of learning wasn't necessarily right for every student. Where there were sufficient students who wanted an alternative form, they provided that. What has unfortunately been happening is that the choice within public school boards has been restricted—its funding has been restricted—and I know that in my own board we have closed the program we had that was an alternative school because we couldn't afford to run it any more.

I think what we've got going on here is a bit of double-speak, in that if you remove the ability of the public boards to fund alternative schools and then say, "Gee, there's no choice, we're going to have to fund private schools so there's more choice," we've got a little bit of circular thinking going on here.

1640

The Chair: Thank you very much. Mr O'Toole.

Mr O'Toole: Thank you very much, Ms Sandals, and Rick is a person I've met with before. It's good to see you again.

It is an important debate and I take it you represent the views of all the public school boards in the province, and the position you've presented us reflects that.

Ms Sandals: Yes.

Mr O'Toole: It's important to get us all on the record as to what we actually stand for. I think that's important and I hope you agree.

I've been listening to Mr McGuinty over the last while on this issue and I've got all four of his positions: for, against, maybe and no. I'm not sure which one is actually right. Members of his caucus have a couple of different positions on this. I think they recognize it. In fact, he said, "I'm not ideologically opposed to considering it," and a few other ambiguous statements.

I'm very clear and supportive of where Mr Marchese and his caucus are coming from. They are clearly opposed. There is no ambiguity about it. At least they have a strong leader. They have a strongly articulated position and basically—

Mr McGuinty: Are you working on a vote split or what?

Interjections.

Mr O'Toole: They still probably have another position now. It sounds like they're having a little disagreement.

I suppose what I'm trying to get to in the form of a question—I like the tone; I really do respect it—is on the accountability part of it. There was a commission on education finance and there was the Fair Tax Commission. There have been commissions on this since I was a trustee in the early 1980s. Are you opposed to parent choice and on what grounds?

Ms Sandals: We're not opposed to parents having choices—

Mr O'Toole: As long as it's yours.

Ms Sandals:—but we would like to explore how we can make those choices available within the public system. What we are opposed to is public funding of private schools. I liken it to the health care system, perhaps, where just because I choose to have a private room in a hospital doesn't mean the government is required to pay for my private room in the hospital. The public, in a number of areas of government, provides public services. The fact that I choose not to use the public service doesn't necessarily obligate the government to pay for the private service.

The Chair: We've run out of time. On behalf of the committee, thank you very much for your presentation this afternoon.

TORONTO PARENT NETWORK

The Chair: Our next presentation is from the Toronto Parent Network. I would ask the presenter to come forward and state your name for the record. On behalf of the committee, welcome. You have 20 minutes.

Ms Cathy Dandy: My name is Cathy Dandy. I am with the Toronto Parent Network, which is a network of parents from across the Toronto District School Board. I would say we are networking into the thousands at this point, because parents are deeply concerned about what is happening in education today, especially in the Toronto board.

I have to confess I come today feeling a little bit angry. I know people aren't really comfortable with anger, but I'd like to maybe make you feel a bit better by saying I believe it's a righteous anger. I am a mother. I have three children. I've just rushed in from track practice. I have to rush home. I have to cook dinner and then I have to coach my daughter's soccer. I am deeply tired of having to come out and try and help parents have their voices heard with this government.

I listened to Mr Flaherty this morning in his opening address to this committee regarding Bill 45, and specifically the equity in education tax credit, and this is the portion of the bill I'm speaking to. I'll assume the reason he got many of his facts wrong was because he was relatively new to the job and not out of a desire to misrepresent his party or his government.

First of all, I'd like to take issue with his claim that he has heard from parents. I know the Minister of Education often makes that claim and she is speaking only of a very small hand-picked council, the Ontario Parent Council. I find it interesting that the parents Minister Flaherty spoke

about were those who would be getting the tax credit; he did not speak about thousands of parents in the public system who do not agree with this tax credit. I think he has not spoken to the thousands of hard-working immigrants who came to this country specifically for its rich, inclusive public education system, and he hasn't talked to the middle-class parents who want their children to learn together, to grow together and to go on to build a society together.

I would also like to take issue with his claim that the funding for public education has increased. He claims that in 1995 the government was spending \$12.9 billion, and that it has increased to \$13.8 billion. One of the biggest factors in that is that he is now paying for three large cities, and despite that he still managed to cut out \$2 billion.

I'd also like to take issue with the \$362 million he claims in additional funding for public education. That does not even cover the cost-of-living increase in this province, let alone the enrolment increase. So in actual fact, our education system has lost a great deal of money and continues to lose money. Parents in the city of Toronto are starting to feel that first-hand as we lose our mitigation money and work toward the funding formula.

He claimed that boards were overspending. But in actual fact, as the board moved to get on to the funding formula—and any board that has moved to get on to the funding formula anywhere else in this province, plus their board has cut all the spending they are required to cut, still sees deterioration in the classroom. Special ed is in appalling shape. Every group that has looked at special ed has said the funding is inadequate. ESL, adult education, music, physical education, library: the list goes on.

When the province is given the bill for things as fundamental as heating our schools, they turn us down. The board had a \$17-million excess in heating costs due to the increase in gas prices. The province only agreed to pay \$6 million of it, so we have to find \$11 million out of operating to pay for a bill the government should be paying for itself. Those are the kinds of funding problems.

Now I'll get to the part of Bill 45 I'm here for. This kind of change of funding in education is an enormous change that will have repercussions for decades. Why is this happening with no larger debate? We should examine the issue of funding for religious schools, both Catholic and other religious schools. If we agree, after that larger debate, that our society benefits from funding all types of schools, then we should debate how it should be accomplished. But none of that is happening. I think that is what I find most distressing.

Consistently, this government has denied us our democratic right to determine our own future and the future of our children. Why? Is it too time-consuming? Is it too difficult? Are these issues too contentious? Is it what I hear from some, that parents don't care to debate the issues, that we're not informed? I want to know why there is no broad public debate about something so critical.

The government moves ahead with this plan without public mandate to do so, or discussion. As we know, and as I'm sure we've heard repeatedly today and certainly in the press, Minister Ecker and Premier Harris stated emphatically that it was not their intention to do this and that it would destroy public education. This morning, when questioned on that, Minister Flaherty dodged it, refused to elaborate on this shift in government policy. I want to know what has prompted this shift. I want it to be clearly spelled out, and I don't want to hear it's about parental choice.

Is there good research? Where is the research? In 1985, the report of the Commission on Private Schools in Ontario by Bernard Shapiro, commissioner, was released. Has the government studied this report? Have any of you read it? It's filled with research about our "sister provinces," as Minister Flaherty referred to them, and countries that fund religious schools. Not one of these provinces or countries funds religious schools using tax credits.

In his press conference, Minister Flaherty said that tax credits were being used to encourage parental choice. I find that ironic when regular parents in the city of Toronto are now having to choose between whether to get rid of their music teacher to keep class sizes down or get rid of their librarians, because as we know from every other board in factual tracking reports, you cannot have both. You cannot have well-paid teachers and have teachers. You cannot have a music program and have a music teacher. You cannot have a full-time teacher-librarian in your school on this funding formula. Those are the choices this government has given parents, and we would like to be able to choose to have all those things. That's the choice we're looking for.

In the report, groups consistently call for per capita operational grants, which are common in other provinces and countries and usually have very clear strings attached: teacher certification, common curriculum—which is not required in this province before grade nine—testing and regulations around accessibility for all students.

1650

I'd also like to speak to the comment that was made about parents who choose to send their children to private religious schools, that they have to pay twice. Minister Flaherty said he was going to give them relief. Seventy-five per cent of Ontario taxpayers do not have children in the public education system. Should they have relief? Thousands of Ontario taxpayers do not use the medical system. Should they have relief? Thousands of us didn't vote for this Tory government. Should we get relief from paying your salaries?

We are a democracy which pools its resources for the public good. Parents may choose to send their children to religious schools, and I fully support their right to do so, but they are not further exempt from building a society by withdrawing their money. Public school children in Canada largely form the basis of business and government leaders, unlike the United States whose elite attend

private schools and then largely run their country. It is regular, common children going through a common public education system who grow up to build this society.

In Canada, we support this kind of goal to be a larger, richer, brighter country, and it is fostered in the public school education system because tolerance is built there. This thought about the Canadian public education system has been remarked on by the United Nations and many other international groups.

Minister Flaherty also spoke about per pupil funding and claimed that the public education system would not lose anything in this form of tax credit. In actual fact, I've spent a great deal of time—too much time—reading about the funding formula, understanding it and understanding the kind of impact it's having on our board, the Toronto board. The funding model is based on per pupil spending. For every child who leaves our system, \$7,000 will be taken away from our system. That's the financial part. The other part refers back to what I talked about in building a tolerant, pluralistic society. For every child who leaves the public system, that's one less person who learns to move and operate within a diverse and rich and really good public education system.

Parents want a large, complex debate about this issue. They want to listen to those in religious schools and public schools. They want to continue to build this tolerant, diverse country. Parents want public dollars to be spent on educating children for public life. They want to see their government value democratic principles and not push this tax credit through because it suits a private agenda.

Parents want their government to value public education and understand that it costs a lot of money to educate children. That doesn't always fit with an agenda that wants to see product for money spent, but it does fit with a well-built, thoughtful, productive society. Please stop this and let us discuss it. There is no rush. Let our children see that you do listen when the majority of citizens say, "Stop and let's debate it." This is a fundamental change, and we need to do this before it's too late.

I want to leave you with some questions which really refer back to everything I've said. Why is there no broad public debate? Why are these hearings narrow and staged, heavily weighted with support groups, even though the polls tell us the majority don't support it? Why are you using tax credits when no other province or country does this? This government couldn't possibly have good research on this, and if you do have research, why is your research not public? Why are you rushing this through and not listening? That is acting against the principles of democratic debate.

The Chair: We have two short minutes per caucus.

Mr Marchese: Ms Dandy, I congratulate you and your network of people who are devoted to the public system and congratulate you for all the countless hours you put in there as volunteers. You're not paid to do what you do, and it amazes me there are so many like you wanting to defend the system. So I will just say that.

This government puzzles me. You may have heard Mr Flaherty this morning when he said that he had heard a lot of people saying they want education in their culture and their religion. It was a complete surprise. This is the same government that got rid of the Anti-Racism Secretariat, got rid of all the welcome houses, got rid of all the ESL funding from citizenship, and all of a sudden they have come with this new-found—I won't say religion, but they now want to serve these other multicultural communities in their own religion and culture. It's just a wonderful revelation to see and to witness; and then to hear Mr O'Toole talk about, "One size fits all is a wrong approach to education"—he said that earlier—and that we should have a system that encompasses the diversity we've got. In fact, different people today were using language such as, "We should be more tolerant and inclusive, and multiculturalism should actually be reflected through this kind of funding."

I think it's the wrong way to go, that multiculturalism doesn't include that we go that route of fragmenting society in the way Harris talked about, that the right way to do it is within an inclusive system that reflects all of our cultures and do what the Toronto board did by having heritage languages, which are disappearing now because there's no money. I'm sure you share that view. Isn't that the view you and the others have been defending?

Ms Dandy: Absolutely. I talk to parents across the city daily and I talk to many parents from many different cultures. There has been a sort of testy, ironic laugh at the fact that this government is the one defending diversity at this point.

Before 1995 this board and this province were known throughout the world and were remarked upon, like I said, by the United Nations and other international groups for their ability to take such a diverse society, to foster diversity yet also to foster tolerance and broad-mindedness and the ability to work together. In fact, our social studies curriculum was purchased by several European countries for that very fact. So to say that we now should offer up choice in the form of segmenting people off into their different groups in a public way seems to run directly against the evidence.

The Chair: Thank you very much. Mr Hardeman.

Mr Hardeman: Thank you very much for the presentation. I'm wondering, in the first part of the presentation prior to yours—I believe you were present when it was made—it says, "We believe that a strong and effective publicly funded education system, responsive to the needs of our students, is the cornerstone of a democratic society." Is it unreasonable to make an assumption that parental choice for something different than what's presently being provided in one system is student choice and parental choice for quality of education? Having said that, if this one system is what everyone wants, even though they're still going to have to pay at least 50% of the tuition—in some cases more than 50%—why is it we have this concern that parents would move their children out of the system that's presently there?

My children have all gone through the public education system; one is still in the system. The presentations we had this morning seemed quite emphatic that they had reasons other than the ones you spoke of as to why they wanted to be in an independent school, because there was something in that education that their parents wanted for them. One person talked about how their grandmother was willing to pay the tuition to allow him to go to an independent school. Is it unreasonable to assume that's part of the parental choice and fairness in education that we owe all the children of this province?

Ms Dandy: I think there are two points there. As far as their willingness to choose something that matches their own beliefs, I fully support that. I used to belong to a particular religion which did not involve my taking any medicine. I did not choose to go to doctors, which flummoxed some people, but that was my choice. But I never expected to withdraw my funding from the public sector, and I never expected the public sector to fund my choice. It was my choice, based on deep religious convictions, and I completely understand that kind of conviction. But I also know there are two things we still need in this. One is that we need to make sure this government puts back the money it has withdrawn from the system, which has caused choice to crumble within the public system. Things like the heritage language programs are threatened. Adult education is in atrocious shape—and that is a form of choice, the choice to better oneself. There are all sorts of choices that are being withdrawn because of lack of funding, and funding is critical to choice. Funding in the public education system has been drastically reduced, so choice is being reduced.

1700

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Ms Dandy: Sorry, I have to say one other thing. The other thing is, we want a debate. I'm not saying any of this is wrong, but we want a debate before this happens.

The Chair: Thank you. The official opposition. Mr Phillips.

Mr Phillips: Thank you for your articulate presentation. I've been trying to determine what caused the change in government direction. The staff just handed out to us a few minutes ago the Ontario government's arguments used when they were against extending funding. For anyone who's interested, in the one dated February 22, 1999, on pages 2 and 3, there is some very strong language why Ontario was strongly opposed to this. Everyone should read it. I won't take the time to read it right now, but I urge your parents' network to read it, because, as I say, there's some strong language.

Have you or your group any idea of what caused the government, in a period of just months almost, to go from arguing strenuously against it to now including it in the budget, kind of out of the blue?

Ms Dandy: I honestly don't know. I can only speculate. Much of what drives this government seems to be financial. There have been rumours—and I believe even Mike Harris might have said it—that in actual fact it could save the government some money if they take this

course. They will not have to spend as much on public education. They will save by spending only half of it for each child who moves into the private system. I don't honestly know.

What I do know is that they're not talking to us, they're not having a debate and they're rushing it through. We can't possibly find out the answer to that or any other question that parents around the province have, while they drive forward this fast and this hard and this unmandated.

The Chair: We've run out of time. On behalf of the committee, thank you for your presentation.

RIVERDALE PARENT COUNCIL

The Chair: The next presentation is from the Riverdale Parent Council. I would ask the presenter to come forward and state your name for the record. On behalf of the committee, welcome. You have 20 minutes for your presentation.

Ms Norah McClintock: Thank you. I have to apologize if I misstep in any way, because I have never, ever presented to a committee of this type before. It's never even occurred to me to want to present to a committee of this type before. So, if there's one thing I think this government can take credit for, it's turning a person who was just content to cast her ballot every couple of years into someone who is rather determined to make her voice known on an issue that matters greatly to me, and that is the education of our children.

I am a member of the parent council at Riverdale Collegiate Institute in Toronto, which is located at Jones and Gerrard Avenues. I'm also the parent of two children, one attending a public high school and one in university. I have concerns about Bill 45, which would provide tax credits to parents who choose to send their children to private and independent schools.

My first concern relates to tolerance. The student population at Riverdale Collegiate is a diverse one. Students come from a wide variety of religious, cultural and economic backgrounds. I'm really proud of this school, where my daughter is in grade 10, and part of that pride stems from the fact that so many children from so many backgrounds with so many belief systems go to school together every day. Because they sit in the same classrooms, lunch in the same cafeteria, use the same library and, one hopes, in the near future will participate in the same clubs and play on the same sports teams, they learn about each other's cultures, values and beliefs. I have seen this in my own home.

To my mind, this type of direct learning through direct contact is every bit as valuable as curriculum-based learning and does a great deal to turn our children into citizens of an increasingly multicultural Ontario. It is critically important for our children to become tolerant and understanding young men and women. By learning acceptance of people from differing backgrounds with differing values, beliefs and abilities, our children can

take a giant step toward becoming the kind of Ontarians we can all be proud of.

Although we live in the 21st century now, still when we look around the world we see civil wars and strife that are rooted in ethnic, religious and economic differences. We see societies increasingly divided along these lines, and it seems to me that one of the factors that will allow us to overcome such strife is to teach our children that being different is not a matter of right or wrong and that differences between people, whether they be faith-based, values-based, nation-based, race-based or gender-based, are to be respected.

I fully support everyone's right to his or her own beliefs. I also fully support everyone's right to impart those beliefs to their children. But I also believe that as citizens of a democratic country we share common values and that the best way to convey these common values is through a high-quality, publicly funded, commonly accessible education system. Yes, personal and religious beliefs and values are important, but there are ways to impart these values through our families, through our places of worship and through other institutions. It does not have to happen by fragmenting our school system and undermining public education.

The members of my immediate family come from different backgrounds and religious upbringing. I was raised a Christian, and my husband was raised a Jew. My children have benefited by learning and understanding the background of both branches of their family. This learning and understanding has gone beyond our household and into the community, as my children have attended public schools that welcome children from richly diverse backgrounds. My children have learned that just as we all would want and expect our beliefs and values to be respected, so we should respect the beliefs and values of others. I think this will become increasingly difficult if we divide our schools and our students according to those beliefs and values.

My second concern relates to the goal this government has purported to be advancing, and that is the need to provide our children with the best education possible to prepare them for their future. As a parent of a child in grade 10, I have been greatly concerned, over the past few years, at the declining resources this government has allocated to our public education system. On February 28 of this year, our parent council at Riverdale Collegiate held a forum on the state of our high schools. We made numerous requests to the Minister of Education for a representative of her ministry to come and speak to parents and answer their questions, but to no avail.

Among the concerns that were raised by the parents who attended our forum were those relating to the declining government commitment to excellence in public secondary school education. In particular, parents expressed profound concern that inequities in public education are deepening. For many, particularly at my school, it has become a case of economic discrimination. Budget cutbacks that force schools to rely increasingly on parents to fill the gaps leave disadvantaged students farther behind.

The government's funding formula does not recognize the real differences and the needs and costs of educating our children. The needs and costs in Thunder Bay are not the same as those in Toronto, and they are not the same in Regent Park as they are in Rosedale.

A weekend article in the Toronto Star on poverty in the greater Toronto area makes it clear that some neighbourhoods, primarily in the 416 area code, face major economic challenges. Do we want children in these areas to break out of that poverty trap? Doesn't this government espouse education and training as the keys to economic independence? If so, then real differences need to be recognized and appropriate steps taken to give all children the best chance to succeed. Simply put, equal opportunity for all means that some require more support than others. Despite what this government seems to believe, that costs money. Personally, I cannot think of a better investment for a government to make than one in the future of our children.

1710

At our parent forum, concerns were also expressed about the implementation of the new curriculum. My child in grade 10 is a guinea pig throughout her high school years. It was noted that there have been severe cutbacks in curriculum supports for teachers, further adding to their individual workload. Due to budget cutbacks, there are fewer curriculum consultants at the school board level. Due to budget cutbacks, plans are well underway to cut the number of department heads and assistant heads, those teachers expert in their subjects who are responsible for ensuring that all teachers within a school have the support and guidance they need to implement the new curriculum.

Surely, with so many changes being so swiftly introduced, these funding envelopes should be increased, not decreased, to ensure that our children are getting the best our teachers can offer. When a business is implementing new, challenging systems that require its employees to work in different ways, it allocates more, not fewer, resources to training. Why doesn't this same logic apply in our schools?

What do these concerns have to do with the proposed tax credit for parents who choose to send their children to private, independent schools? As I understand it, tax credits represent forgone revenue for the government. They represent dollars the government would have spent itself. Naturally, I can only assume that the money the government is now planning to spend in the form of tax credits would have been spent on public education, although it is conceivable that the government is planning to make up for this revenue by cutting in other areas—health care, for example, or perhaps home care for our frail elderly.

By giving up revenue that would otherwise have gone into public education, the government is further eroding what it has always said it stands for: a public education system of the highest quality that will make Ontario children among the best educated in our country. By proposing to implement these tax credits, the government

is contributing to an alarming and increasingly widespread feeling that quality education means private education. It seems to forget, or perhaps it chooses to ignore, that private education is and always will remain out of the reach of a large proportion of parents and children, even with tax credits. An emphasis on private education will only undermine and ultimately lead to the demise of high-quality universal education freely accessible to all, surely a basic right of citizens in a democratic society.

I would have thought that the last thing anyone, including the Premier, the Minister of Education and the Minister of Finance, would want is for parents to abandon what this government has always claimed to be striving for: the best possible education for each and every child in this province, no matter what their socio-economic or cultural situation. Yet removing resources from the public education system while at the same time providing incentives for parents to send their children to privately run schools, which are not subject to government regulation, whose teachers are not required to undergo the same testing as their public school counterparts and which are not accountable in any way to the taxpayers of Ontario, is the surest recipe for decline in quality of public education in this province and a decline in tolerance in our society.

Why is this government not instead making good on its commitment to ensure that Ontario's students have the best education that an advanced and enlightened country like Canada can offer? Why does it not consider increased investment in public education the best investment that we as a society can make? Why is it instead allowing our schools to decay, our playgrounds to get dirtier and more dangerous, our teachers to become more and more demoralized, and our new curriculum to be implemented with fewer supports?

I believe that Premier Harris and Education Minister Ecker were right when only 18 months ago they stated their firm opposition to government funding for private schools on the basis that such funding would fragment and weaken public education and cost the government of Ontario between \$300 million and \$700 million in revenue lost to the public school system. I cannot think why they have reversed themselves on this position, nor can I think why a government that prides itself on being immune to pressure by lobby groups and special-interest groups has succumbed on this issue and then has done its best to limit any public discussion on the matter or even to commit itself to acting according to the wishes of the majority of parents and taxpayers.

I am here today to voice my opposition to Bill 45 on the grounds that it will lead to further reductions to funding in our public education system, further erosion of confidence in the public education system and a growth of intolerance among our children. I urge this government not to go through with this measure and to invest the necessary resources into the public education system, and I would say to the Minister of Finance, who has stated that parents in Ontario want more choice, that this

parent chooses public education. If this government truly wants to find out what most parents want, it will not implement this measure without first having the courage to put it to a democratic vote in the next general election. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much. We have about a minute and a half per caucus.

Mr O'Toole: Thank you, Ms McClintock, for a very real and sincere presentation. I appreciate that. I speak as well as a parent of five children.

You spoke in quite a tolerant tone—encouraged the increasingly multicultural society we live in. Certainly it would be different than it was 10 years ago or 20 years ago. There's a lot of history. In 1982, when then-Premier Bill Davis introduced this—I could show the research document I have. The Shapiro commission came out of that debate, which was about a multi-faith, cultural thing. I think the reality is, the majority of language in Toronto probably—I've heard people say that in less than a decade it won't be English.

The Chair: Question, please, Mr O'Toole.

Mr O'Toole: I guess it comes down to, the current system you would presume is the only choice parents really have. The current system, to some, is failing. It's failing for a lot of reasons. I suspect it's a power struggle. Perhaps we'll hear from Mr Manners later, who will be presenting.

My question to you is—I won't use the term "choice," but where do parents like you and I get to have some input? They are our children. It isn't about maintaining someone else's job or blah, blah, blah. Where do we get—you sound very intelligent, very frustrated.

Ms McClintock: You tell me where we get input. I am a parent, and I am a parent who has very strong opinions. I sit on the parent council of my school because I have been motivated to get involved by the rapid changes and the changes in funding included in the public school system. I have tried on many occasions to make my voice known, and do you know what? Nobody listens. This government doesn't listen. I'm sure Minister Ecker can show you a sheaf of letters from me expressing my concern, inviting her to come and explain, answer questions and so on. I will be darned if I know what the average parent can do to make his or her voice heard.

That's why I'm particularly glad to be here today, because I am not a member of an interest group. I am not a teacher. I am not a school board person. I don't belong to any organization at all except a very small grassroots organization, which is my parent council at my local school.

The Chair: Thank you very much. The official opposition.

Mr Kennedy: I appreciate your testimony here today. I just want to draw attention to something my colleague Mr Phillips brought up, the state party's response. This is Ontario's official document saying why a year and some ago it was a bad idea to fund private schools. I just want to quote you one part of it. On page 3 it says, "Doing so would have negative fiscal impacts and a marked in-

crease in duplication of services and capital costs and a concurrent diminishment in the range of programs and services that the public system would be able to afford.”

We’ve heard a lot here about parent choice. How much parent choice do you estimate there will be if there’s a dramatic drop-off in resources, the way this government of Ontario said there would be a year and a half ago?

Ms McClintock: There’s already decreased parent choice, to my mind. Obviously if there are less resources available, I would expect there would be a further decline. I do know that music teachers, for example, are being cut in a lot of schools, and I find this really distressing. It’s as if culture is not important. That is an expendable part of our curriculum now, whereas resumé writing, I guess, is really important for your average grade 10 student. We spend a year teaching our kids how to do that.

I’ve never had any input in this; neither have any parents I know. We’re all very upset about this, and yet there is no mechanism; there is no consultation. It’s very distressing, on something that’s even more important to a lot of parents, that there is this limited consultation and really no mechanism, which is why I would suggest to this government that if it really wants to know what parents think, it get out there and ask them and then put these issues to a vote and let’s find out what parents think.

The Chair: With that, we’ve run out of time. On behalf of the committee, thank you very much for your presentation this afternoon.

1720

CANADIAN COUNCIL OF MONTESSORI ADMINISTRATORS

The Chair: Our next presentation is from the Canadian Council of Montessori Administrators. I would ask the presenter or presenters to come forward. On behalf of the committee, welcome. You have 20 minutes for your presentation this afternoon.

Ms Breffni MacMahon: Good afternoon. I would like to start by thanking you for offering me the opportunity to be here today. I come to you to talk about Montessori schools and the Montessori philosophy of education, which is an alternative system of education to the traditional system, traditional whether you talk about private or public. Montessori is an alternative system. It’s a system which reflects a child’s developmental stages in learning and recognizes that children learn best within a social environment which supports the individual needs of each child.

Montessori education has been available in Ontario for the past 40 years. There are 105 Montessori schools currently listed as private schools with the Ministry of Education. They are to be found all over the province. They’re in Sudbury, Windsor, Niagara, Ottawa and all the places in between. They cater to children from three years of age to 14 years of age. That would be through to

grade 8. The first Montessori high school was licensed by the Ministry of Education this year. The schools range in enrolment size from 150 students to 750 students.

Montessori classrooms are multi-aged. They allow the children to progress at their own pace. The classrooms are equipped with a full range of carefully designed materials which support a child’s stage of development and specific learning strengths. Lessons are given individually or to small groups of children. Co-operative learning is encouraged through peer teaching and social interaction. Individual differences are valued and offer an opportunity for everybody to grow because of this diversity.

At this point in time, Montessori education is not available in public schools in Ontario for those parents who specifically want that program for their children. Montessori schools and parents of children who enrol their children in these schools are very excited about the government’s proposal to offer tax credits to private schools.

Typically, fees at a Montessori school are in the \$8,000 bracket. Parents who enrol their children are middle-class families who have chosen Montessori because they believe it best suits their child’s learning style. Their choice is based on the reality that not every child will learn in a traditional environment, whether that’s private or public.

Montessori schools are not based on a religious belief or tradition. Therefore, they do not belong to any of the major religious groups who have been seeking financial support and from whom we’ve heard quite vociferously over the last few weeks. Montessori schools accept applications from students of many abilities and cultural backgrounds. The main criterion for acceptance to a school is based on commitment to the philosophical difference in approach between Montessori and traditional learning.

The Canadian Council of Montessori Administrators, which I represent, represents 86 Montessori schools. It is in its 25th year and it was established to promote authentic Montessori programs. Members are accountable to CCMA for ensuring that qualifying programs meet the standards and criteria established by the council. There is a very stringent post-graduate teacher training program which is required. Schools must employ teachers who have the relevant qualifications from an accredited Montessori college to teach at the age level where they’re working.

The Montessori curriculum is comprehensive and based on an integrated approach to learning. Clear curriculum guidelines and outcomes are an expectation in a Montessori classroom.

The CCMA has an evaluation and accreditation process which members complete every five years to ensure they are meeting the highest possible standards of authentic Montessori education.

The CCMA would like to offer this package of teacher training, curriculum and school evaluation as an alternative to what is currently available in public schools in Ontario. This alternative approach to learning is import-

ant for those children who have different styles and needs and for parents who want an alternative school environment and philosophy for their children.

The council would welcome the opportunity at some other time to discuss the possibility of offering Montessori education in public schools, but for now that's not a reality. For now, the availability of tax credits will offer support to parents who juggle priorities in their lives in order to finance their children's education in a Montessori school.

The Chair: Thank you very much. We have five minutes per caucus, and I'll start with the official opposition.

Mr Kennedy: I appreciate your coming forward today. I just want to ask you a little bit about a couple of things you've raised.

One is the whole Montessori method, Maria Montessori. I think most people, even not versed, would know it's child-centred and there's a range of things that go with it. In fact, I have to declare that my daughter is in a preschool Montessori program in a public school, une école publique Montessori. Part of the question I want to ask you is, why isn't there more Montessori in the public system today? What would be the barriers to having that level of diversity available and offered within the public school system?

Ms MacMahon: I think the Montessori community at large has been consolidating its own work here. We're certainly ready to have discussions—we would welcome discussions—with the Minister of Education. We feel that with a huge emphasis on the importance of the early years in education, Montessori is a perfect format for helping children to learn in those early years.

Mr Kennedy: So there are no real barriers to that?

Ms MacMahon: No.

Mr Kennedy: In terms of your outlook—and it is a particular outlook and there are a lot of different practitioners out there, I think you'd agree. Some of them I think are private operators. Is that right? Some of them own, some of them are non-profit, some of them are in schools.

Ms MacMahon: There's a whole range. There are private, there are parent-run, not-for-profit, board schools, yes.

Mr Kennedy: So to the degree you can be definitive about this, how would the general Montessori outlook regard, for example, the current curriculum in school and the current testing of kids at grade 3 and grade 6? How would that be regarded from the Montessori perspective?

Ms MacMahon: The Montessori curriculum is totally different from the traditional curriculum in private or public school. It's an alternative system. The approach to learning—it's comparing apples and oranges, and it doesn't matter whether you're in the highest-fee-paying traditional school or in your local public school. The differences are striking.

Mr Kennedy: The philosophical part about the tests, though, having system-wide tests and children who sit for a week doing tests distant and separate from their

teachers and so on—does Montessori consider that a beneficial experience or not?

Ms MacMahon: Montessori schools typically don't do tests, but that's not to say that the children are not prepared to take tests. They're all trained in test-taking skills. They prepare for tests typically around the grade 5 level. Many of them would be leaving to go into other independent schools and would be expected to be ready to take tests at that point in time anyway. The difficulty with the grade 3 test is that the curriculum for the grade 3 test is very different from the Montessori lower elementary curriculum, which is a multi-age class. It's a grade 1 to 3 class. It's a cyclical form of learning rather than a graded one from 1 to 3. Therefore, to prepare children for the grade 3 test in a Montessori school would mean cutting into the Montessori curriculum.

Mr Kennedy: When you look at the different styles and so on at Montessori and what's happening today, I guess it's hard to say what is truly authentic Montessori in the sense that you've got principles and there are different applications of them. But how adaptable would that be in terms of general—I mean, there are schools out there that say they borrow from Montessori, and a lot of early childhood people have a great deal of respect for it. What historically would be the reason that hasn't been adapted more by schools in the public system to date, in terms of your knowledge of it?

Ms MacMahon: I think there's a tremendous amount of Montessori, particularly in early childhood education. All the furniture and the layout in schools all over the world come from the Montessori idea that furniture should be child-sized and something which children can manage. All the educational toys that we have available to our children now started with some of that early material.

Mr Kennedy: Sorry to interrupt, but a very quick question, mindful that the time's running out. In the private situation that the Montessori schools are in today—and again, this may vary—what kind of tax consideration can parents achieve for school-age children? What, if anything, can be claimed as a charitable receipt? Anything at all?

Ms MacMahon: For school-age children? Only the daycare side of their time in school.

Mr Kennedy: Right. So the after-school and the before-school time and so on.

Ms MacMahon: Yes.

1730

Mr Kennedy: The government has not put forward any studies or anything, but the apparent way this tax credit works is that it's more beneficial to private sector schools than it is, for example, to religious schools simply because there are tax credits available on that side. But, as you're saying, there isn't really any substantive credit available to—

Ms MacMahon: There are no tax credits over the age of six except for whatever charges are made for the child care side of a child's day.

The Chair: With that, you've run out of time, Mr Kennedy. Thank you very much. Mr Marchese.

Mr Marchese: Thank you for your presentation. With respect to class sizes, is there an average? Does it vary from school to school? Are they generally lower in your Montessori schools than the regular public system? If so, why?

Ms MacMahon: Montessori classrooms are typically large classrooms because there's a three-year age group in each classroom at each level. Grades 1 to 3 children are in the same classroom, grades 4 to 6 children are in the same classroom, and classes tend to go to about 24 children because you want a reasonable mix of children at each age level. At the kindergarten level, there would be two adults with those children. At the elementary level, there would generally be a class teacher and then there would be specialist teachers who also work with them. But a typical class size is about 24.

Mr Marchese: Obviously, you don't consider that complicated in terms of the groupings. The three age levels, in my humble view, is a bit tough.

Ms MacMahon: No, it's beautiful, because it's family grouping. Children get an opportunity to learn from those who are older than they are. The older ones get an opportunity to teach the younger ones and to role-model for them. Children get a chance to move at their own pace, so those who are ready to accelerate can do that comfortably and those who need extra time can also have that time.

Mr Marchese: OK. What about children with disabilities? Do you have a lot of children with disabilities in Montessori?

Ms MacMahon: Every school has its share of children who have learning differences.

Mr Marchese: Not learning differences but—

Ms MacMahon: Well, maybe it's a difference in terminology, but these would be children who have a special learning style or a special learning need. Because the program is heavily based in learning through the use of materials, learning one-on-one and learning at your own pace, the classes can accommodate children who learn in a different way or have different needs.

Mr Marchese: My understanding is that many schools of course teach in different ways because most teachers understand that children learn differently, so they do apply those teaching skills. It may not work all the time, having a class of many, where there might be some difficulties of poverty or ESL or refugee issues or drug and alcohol abuse or whatever—it might be complicated—but they do, obviously, recognize the different styles and approach it that way. I'm assuming you accept that.

Ms MacMahon: Yes, but the difference in a Montessori classroom would be that nobody has to get to a certain stage by the end of June in a year. You get to the stage you can reach within your time frame and not within a specific academic year. You have three years to complete. For children who don't make it in that time and where there is a professional assessment indicating that

there may be developmental delay or a serious disability, the program can be modified.

Mr Marchese: How would that square with some of the requirements of the government in terms of the structures and rigour and of course testing, and how teachers must meet those demands and those expectations, otherwise they're going to send—who knows?—SWAT teams or who knows what to fix those problems? What would you do?

Mr O'Toole: Turnaround teams.

Mr Marchese: But then too they're going to set goals, right? They are going to set goals to deal with it. How would you deal with that?

Ms MacMahon: We have a very rigorous curriculum, but children will only go as fast as they can go. You can't tell a child when to cut its teeth and you can't tell it—

Mr Marchese: Harris is not going to like that. You've got to know that.

Ms MacMahon: Well, I would hope that when it comes to the point where criteria for eligibility are being established, the Montessori teacher training program, the Montessori curriculum and the Montessori evaluation and accreditation process would be considered as an alternative. It's a very valid, international, long-standing method.

Mr Marchese: Don't get me wrong. I—

The Chair: Mr Marchese, you've run out of time. Mr Spina.

Mr Spina: Thank you, Ms MacMahon, for the presentation. I was looking forward to hearing the perspective of the Montessori schools.

I have a couple of questions, some to do with finance and others to do with curriculum, not unlike our friends across the way here.

Mr Marchese: Which friends?

Mr Spina: I thought you were my colleague, I'm sorry.

Would you consider Mr Kennedy, perhaps, someone from the middle class?

Ms MacMahon: I can't answer that one, I'm sorry. I'm glad to know he has a tie with a Montessori school.

Mr Spina: I think most people would consider not just Mr Kennedy, but most MPPs, within a middle-class level in terms of the income in their families that they earn. You indicated it's about \$8,000 for a child, and that's obviously at the elementary level. I'm presuming that would be above the daycare level that some of these children are in?

Ms MacMahon: For preschool, yes.

Mr Spina: That would be for more or less grade 1 and on?

Ms MacMahon: Yes, that's an average.

Mr Spina: I thought maybe your last statement was a little understated, and maybe I could ask if you did that deliberately or if in fact you wanted to expand on that, where you said that the tax credits would offer support to parents who juggle priorities in order to finance their children's education? Is it not in fact in many cases an

outright sacrifice to be able to send their children to a Montessori school, at a cost of \$8,000 a year?

Ms MacMahon: Yes, I think it certainly is a challenge for many parents. It's not a luxury, and Montessori schools are not in the high-flying fees bracket where maybe the tax credits would almost seem insignificant. These tax credits will offer a significant difference to parents who are already struggling and for those who've not even been able to get started in Montessori schools yet.

Mr Spina: Do you have a criteria for entrance?

Ms MacMahon: To the schools?

Mr Spina: To come to the school. I come to you with a five- or seven-year-old child or a 10-year-old. Are there any criteria that perhaps might prohibit my child from coming into your Montessori school?

Ms MacMahon: Well, the criteria for entrance to a Montessori school is that you are at least two-and-a-half years of age and toilet trained. Because our program is based on developmental stages, we typically do not take children into our schools at an older age. The program starts with preschool children and it's a layered program of education; it develops within three-year chunks. So the children who come in at the preschool age and go through JK and SK levels would go on and be the grade 1 students. It's unusual for children to come in at an older age.

Mr Spina: Therefore, is it fair to assume that if Mr Kennedy has his children in preschool, likely they would continue into that program?

Ms MacMahon: We would encourage that all the time.

Mr Spina: If some children do, and I'm sure there are some who would make the transition from the Montessori system to the regular public system, what happens at that point? How are they evaluated, do you know, in the public system?

Let's say you had a nine-year-old who came out of your system and went into the public system. How would a grade be determined—because they have to fit a grade—how would that happen, or do you know?

Ms MacMahon: We have found that when children move into the school public system, they're into an age-appropriate class and that their actual ability and standard of education is not taken into consideration. They must go into the grade 3 class if they're eight years of age, and that's where they're going to go.

Mr Spina: Is it generally the case that their knowledge level is usually far in advance of that group that they would be slotted into?

Ms MacMahon: I would like to think so. That's not the aim of Montessori schools, but the whole education process starts much earlier and children are already reading when they go into grade 1 in a Montessori school, because they've started to read at the age of four. They've started the whole introduction to reading at age four. So they're building on that ability from grade 1 on. They're building research skills, they're building their ability to prepare and present project work, and their

knowledge of the curriculum is able to develop at a different rate because they're already highly literate at that point.

1740

The Chair: With that, we've run out of time. On behalf of the committee, thank you very much for your presentation this afternoon.

Mr Kennedy: One word, Mr Chair. I know there was no inference, but having raised the example I just want to make it very clear—Mr Spina suggested that a child of mine might continue in education—this is a child already in public school and who will continue in public school. I just wanted to have that for the record.

The Chair: I'm sure that's your choice.

ORANGEVILLE CHRISTIAN SCHOOL

The Chair: Our next presentation this afternoon is from the Orangeville Christian School, so I would ask the presenter or presenters to come forward and state your names for the record. On behalf of the committee, welcome. You have 20 minutes for your presentation this afternoon.

Ms Barbara Bierman: My name is Barbara Bierman and I am a parent of children in the Orangeville Christian School. First of all, I'd like to thank the committee for the opportunity to attend a public hearing and to take part in my civic duty to respond to the request from the government to be heard.

I want to start with a little history. My grandfather, who is 87 now, was involved in the movement to begin Christian day schools in Ontario in the 1950s and 1960s. He worked three jobs to do this. One job was to pay for the actual building that needed to be erected for this purpose, one was to pay the tuition for his children to attend and the other was to provide for the everyday needs of his family of seven children at home. He was also one of the first to participate politically by writing to his MPP about first being taxed for education that he did not participate in and then secondly paying the tuition and fees for the system he did use. He has been supporting independent schools in Ontario for 40 years.

His son, my father, has also supported independent Christian schools through sending his children to them and by volunteering as a board member and education committee member. He also campaigned as a parent in the 1980s for complete educational reform in this province. He supported the funding of Catholic schools as well as public schools and spoke to his MPP several times about extending this arrangement to independent schools because it was the just thing to do. He has been supporting independent schools in Ontario for 30 years.

Today, I am proud to appear before this body to state that my two children attend an independent Christian school in Ontario. As a certified teacher, I have taught in independent schools in both the US and Canada. I have volunteered abundantly in my children's school. I have fundraised, right along with all the other parents, in order that our children will have the books, supplies and

teachers that they need to receive a top-notch education. I have also fully participated in the political process of bringing about a fair funding formula for all schools in Ontario, continuing on the efforts of my grandfather and father. I believe in my right, and more so in my obligation, to choose the education that is best for my children. I am thankful that this government has seen fit to finally end an inequitable situation, and I applaud them for moving past being supportive of my choice to empowering my choice. I have been supporting independent schools in Ontario for 20 years.

Independent schools in Ontario have played an integral role in Ontario's educational history by providing quality education to thousands and thousands of students and families at no cost to the Ontario public. In the past 40 years especially, many, many supporters have taken their civic duties seriously and have campaigned for an end to the province's commitment to funding only the public system and then the Catholic system, consequently supporting the notion that everyone in Ontario should support only the choices within the publicly funded systems, leaving the other ones unvalidated.

Independent schools are here to stay. They have enjoyed steady growth in this province even without the presence of a funding formula. For the past 50 years, graduates of the schools within the Ontario Alliance of Christian Schools, and I am one of them, have been solid citizens. We are hard-working, taxpaying, participatory, responsible people who respect others and authorities. The impulse to be contributing members of Canadian society is nothing new to graduates of independent schools. This will continue to be the case even with the introduction of a tax credit provided to the parents of these students.

The ironic part of this whole debate on education justice is that we already have school choice in Ontario. There are two publicly funded systems, each with special interest academies for music, art, etc. There are French immersion schools and all-girl science and math programs, just to name a few of them. All of these choices are within publicly funded systems.

There are also 734 independent schools in this province with either some cultural or religious world view, certain teaching frameworks or certain socio-economic frameworks. Parents have the freedom to choose the education that is best for their children, but must accept the additional financial penalty if that choice is for an independent school, one without government provision.

Since parents are already making these choices and since there is no evidence of the dreaded fragmentation of society or of the creation of an intolerant populace or of the development of a two-tier education system, it would follow logically then that by leveling the education playing field by legitimizing all parents' choices through a tax credit, the situation would not suddenly change, resulting in any of these aforementioned societal worries.

Parents are making these choices already. Parents will continue to make these choices regardless of the money it

costs or the tax credits offered, because they seek these schools out of personal conviction, not to get away from anything, as independent school critics have claimed.

Bottom line, in a proudly diverse and democratic Ontario, is that this is a matter of the government doing the just, equitable and democratic thing. I submit my support of the equity in education tax credit with the following statements:

(a) Both the UN in 1999 and the Supreme Court of Canada in 1996 have determined that not only is there no constitutional reason opposing the funding of independent schools, but that Canada, in particular Ontario, is in violation of a signed agreement by funding one set of religious schools and no others. It is a good thing to have a government that is willing do the right thing even without having to be told to do so by the UN or the Supreme Court.

(b) All students deserve the financial support of their government. Education reform that benefits all students is indeed an issue this government campaigned on. Under this proposed tax credit, all students will finally receive that support and recognition. Any school—public, Catholic or independent—that meets or exceeds the government's standards for literacy, numeracy and civic-mindedness deserves that type of support from its government.

(c) Empowering parental involvement and choice in education is also a good thing. The idea of one-size education fitting all is not only too ideal; it does not coincide with the diversity and freedom of which Ontario boasts. Parents must be trusted to choose the education that best serves their children, no matter what that choice is. Accepting all parents' education choices is an idea that will require tolerance on the part of the general public. I don't expect the general public to agree with my choice, but accept it they must. I am the parent. I know what is best for my children. I accept other parents' rights to send their children to public and Catholic schools. I may not agree with those choices, but I accept that those parents too know what is best educationally for their children. The tolerant and democratic response would be for my choice to be honoured in the same manner.

(d) The government's ongoing commitment to the publicly funded systems will benefit all of Ontario. If critics are looking for enemies of the public schools, they will not find them in the ranks of independent school supporters. Parents whose children attend these schools have gladly and will gladly continue submitting their taxes to these systems, believing that high calibre education is the goal for all students in Ontario. By paying our taxes we contribute to the common good of this province. Empowering parents' choices for independent schools by way of a tax credit will also serve the common good, benefiting all systems, including the public system, as it has in other jurisdictions where such choice has been funded.

In summary, tax credits for independent school tuition make so much sense. This move by the government finally brings Ontario on to the same page as five other

provinces, 37 American states and more than half the countries in the Western world. All such jurisdictions report increased levels of student achievement and parental satisfaction in all school systems, a desirable result for a province that has experienced its share of difficulty in this area. Ninety per cent of children stay right where they are, in the public schools. Many of these jurisdictions report gradual reductions in education spending as all schools streamline and manage more effectively with some market-based principles guiding school governance.

This move by the government is not about providing for the wealthy and the elite, or for those who supposedly profit by operating these schools. It is not about the fear of a mass exodus from the public schools for independent schools. It is not about the fragmentation of society, the creation of an intolerant generation of people or the development of a two-tier education system. It is not about taking money away from public schools. It is not about groups of religious fanatics trying to control the lives of their children. All of these notions can be disproved by the actual evidence in other jurisdictions, particularly the five Canadian provinces where parents' choices are funded in various ways.

This move by the government is about empowering choice. It is about trusting parents. It is about a government that is willing to do the right thing. It is about ending an injustice in Ontario in a way that will benefit all Ontarians for the public good.

In the end, I think illustrations are best remembered. Under the present funding formula for education in this province, with choices for public systems alone being funded, I keep being told that I may have my vanilla ice cream in a waffle cone, a sugar cone or a plain cone. I don't want vanilla ice cream at all. I want chocolate ice cream.

1750

The Chair: Thank you very much. We have three minutes per caucus. I'll start with Mr Marchese.

Mr Marchese: Thank you for your views. I appreciate the fact that you and your family have been committed to education for a long time. Do you support public dollars for private non-denominational schools?

Ms Bierman: I support the notion that the government is taking to supply a tax credit for parents making choices for other schools.

Mr Marchese: And that would be one of them as well?

Ms Bierman: It could be.

Mr Marchese: So in the case of Upper Canada College, where they pay \$16,000 a year for their private school, if that's the choice they want, we should help them too.

Ms Bierman: I don't think the income level matters. I think that if parents want to choose a certain type of school, for whatever their reasons are, it is their choice.

Mr Marchese: God bless; I understand.

What happens if Mike Harris was right when he said—because he no longer says it—with his past view that \$500 million would come out of the public system?

Ms Bierman: If he's right about what?

Mr Marchese: I'll say it again.

Ms Bierman: Yes, please.

Mr Marchese: You must have known this because you use some of the language they're using. You must know what Harris said about all this stuff. All these other MPPs are talking about empowering, "It's about choice; it's about trusting parents," all that kind of stuff. You must have heard Harris say a while ago that if we fund religious schools, it would take \$500 million out of the public system.

Ms Bierman: Yes.

Mr Marchese: What if he's right?

Ms Bierman: He's right in the fact that if all these children who are in independent schools showed up at the door of the public school in their jurisdiction tomorrow, it would cost the province \$600 million annually to service them. You're getting a good deal here.

Mr Marchese: So your argument is that it's better to keep them out with private education—

Ms Bierman: Not better; it's about choice.

Mr Marchese: It's about choice, OK. So you don't want to answer the question about Harris being right or wrong about the fact that if it takes money out of the public system—what do you feel about that? That is the question I asked. Would that be wrong or do you think Mike would fix that, or should fix it, in the event it was right?

Ms Bierman: I think they're separate issues. The fact of empowering parent choice has very little to do with whatever the government's decisions are on funding public education.

Mr Marchese: But they say it won't affect the public system. What if he's right? is the question. But that's fine.

With respect to the funding formula, you said you've been involved in dealing with issues of the funding formula. Is that the funding formula currently in the public system or quite apart?

Ms Bierman: Which funding formula are you talking about?

Mr Marchese: You made reference to the funding formula earlier on, but I just don't know where you might have said it.

Ms Bierman: I made reference to it a few times, though.

Mr Marchese: Yes, you did. If you're familiar with the funding formula we currently have, parents have attacked it because they say the current funding formula is one size fits all, a wrong approach to take, because we have such diversity across Ontario that to take that approach is a mistake. But Mr O'Toole has argued that one size fits all with respect to choice is wrong and that people should have the choice, of course, to send them anywhere they want. I was just suggesting that they use two different, contradictory positions of choice and the one size fits all vis-à-vis the funding formula where they apply the one size fits all, but wrongly, we argue. I wonder whether you have a comment about that.

Ms Bierman: I do have a comment about it. I think the idea of one-size-fits-all education is idealistic. It would be wonderful. If we would close our eyes and imagine children all playing together, being able to learn what they needed to learn in one environment, that would be great. But you don't have enough money to find a way for my child to be in the public school—

Mr Marchese: Why couldn't we fight for that? Why couldn't we do that?

The Chair: Mr Marchese, we've run out of time.

Mr Garfield Dunlop (Simcoe North): If and when this tax credit or Bill 45 is passed, do you expect to see a large increase in enrolment in your school?

Ms Bierman: No. The phone is not ringing off the hook now. Even with the prospect of the tax credit being passed, our phone is simply not ringing off the hook with any more inquiries than it normally does at this time of year.

Mr Dunlop: Do any of your colleagues in other Christian schools or private schools around the province you've talked to or does anyone else expect to see large increases in enrolment in the other schools?

Ms Bierman: It is not happening with any of the other schools in the Ontario Alliance of Christian Schools. There has not been an increase in the inquiries to any of the schools due to the tax credit.

Mr Dunlop: So do you think that in the city of Toronto, if I said there were going to be 37,000 students come into the private schools, would you agree with that?

Ms Bierman: No. It hasn't happened in any other Canadian jurisdictions. I can't see why it would be that way here.

The Chair: Mr Hardeman.

Mr Hardeman: Thank you very much for the presentation. I noticed by the number of years, your grandfather having been involved in it for 40 years and your father for 30 and yourself for 20, that's about the length of time we've had this type of education in the riding that I represent. I just want to relate that to Mr Marchese's comments about having the one size fitting all and that the perfect system in the world would be if we had that.

Your comment was that we haven't got enough money to make that happen. I guess I'm kind of questioning the comment about whether that is even possible.

Ms Bierman: That's what I was getting at.

Mr Hardeman: The people I speak to in my community seem to imply that there is more to religious education in these independent schools than just the course, that the parental choice is how it's done. Of course, that would be impossible to do if you put everyone together, so the parental choice in one system would be lost. Would that not be true?

Ms Bierman: I would say that's absolutely true and I can verify that by an example. My son has a child in his class who joined the Christian school this year. He came from the public school in our neighbourhood because at the parent-teacher conference a few weeks previous—or I guess it was closer to the end of the previous school

year—the teacher had complained that the child was obsessed with God, that the child spoke of God to friends in the classroom and to the teacher and that other parents were complaining about that, and could the child please just speak about God at home and not at school?

For a Christian family or for any family of faith the world view, the glasses through which we look at everything, is with that faith. So for a child to be told he may talk this way at school but not this way at home, or vice versa, is going to be absolutely disastrous for their well-being and for being well grounded in any kind of sense of who they are identity-wise. I should be so lucky that my child is obsessed with God. I'm a Christian and that's what I believe.

The Chair: Thank you very much. The official opposition.

Mr Kennedy: I'm sure you didn't mean to infer that there was a school tax scheme in place anywhere else, because there is no state and is no province, so—

Ms Bierman: But there are other funds.

Mr Kennedy: But no direct funding through parents of this nature, tax credit or voucher, and you may be aware that in fact those notions were defeated 35 times in the United States last fall.

Ms Bierman: That's a voucher.

Mr Kennedy: Many of them were tax credits, to tell you the truth. There were a number of them that involved tax credit proposals. In the States they see them interchangeably and the language is pretty much the same.

I just wanted to ask you: you said you wanted to be treated in the same manner. Did you mean that? Is that what you're seeking in your presentation when you talk about "the same as the public and the same as the Catholic systems that exist today?" Is that what Orangeville Christian School would like: the exact same arrangements, requirements, curriculum and those kinds of things? Is that what you meant by the same manner when you said you'd like to be treated that way?

Ms Bierman: I have a couple of comments. I will answer your question, but first of all I want to point out for the record that I have written to the Liberal Party on their notion of who goes to independent schools and whether they're wealthy and elite. I've written probably dozens of letters and never received an answer. On the flip side, I've written to dozens and dozens of Tory MPPs on the same issue and I've received an answer to every single letter.

Mr Marchese: Did you write to us?

Ms Bierman: I've never written to you.

Interjections.

Ms Bierman: I just want to point out first that I'm willing to answer their questions, but I would love the same courtesy in return.

Interjections.

Mr Kennedy: May I offer you a very brief answer right now? It's the government that has put you and your school in the same boat as wealthy and elite schools.

Ms Bierman: The only person—

Mr Kennedy: In other words, if the government had chosen and elected to select your schools, they could have done so. They just decided not to and they've included a wide-open back door of any kind of school whatsoever, including wealthy, rich and elite schools.

Ms Bierman: First of all, the only person I've ever heard using the language "wealthy and elite" is Dalton McGuinty. Second—

Mr Kennedy: Sorry, I just remembered: you agree that it's true that the government has made a proposal that applies for those schools as well?

Ms Bierman: The regulations have not been determined yet. I couldn't say what the final thing is going to look like.

Mr Kennedy: Would you agree that they would be restricted out of this proposal?

Ms Bierman: Again, I couldn't say. All I know is that they have offered tax credits to parents of independent schools and I have been told by that office that one regulation—

Mr Kennedy: But I thought I did hear you agree before that those schools should get the benefit. I was just making that assumption.

Ms Bierman: They should, absolutely. It's about choice.

The Chair: With that, Mr Kennedy, we've run out of time.

On behalf of the committee, thank you very much for your presentation this afternoon.

1800

ONTARIO SECONDARY SCHOOL TEACHERS' FEDERATION

The Chair: Our next presentation is from the Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation. I would ask the presenters to come forward and state your name for the record.

Mr Earl Manners: Thank you very much for the opportunity to be here. With me are Sherry Rosner, a member of our provincial executive; and Mark Ciavaglia, a member of our staff.

Let me state at the outset that OSSTF policy is now and has always been opposed to direct or indirect funding of private or religious schools. In the past we thought we shared this policy of opposing funding to private or religious schools with our Conservative colleagues, and I would ask Sherry if she would perhaps distribute my letter to the Minister of Education and the response of the Minister of Education to that letter after the Premier and the Minister of Education went on record as defending our public school system and opposing one interpretation of the UN decision.

This is a new policy, obviously, of the Conservative government regarding tax credits for private and religious schools and it can only be seen as a flip-flop on the part of the government and specifically a broken promise of the Premier, given his comments in the leadership debate. I would say, therefore, that the government has no

mandate from the citizens of this province to extend funding in this way. And when you look at this aspect of Bill 45 in conjunction with Bill 46, another part of the taxation legislation, you can only conclude that the government is intent on privatizing public education by whatever means possible.

With Bill 45 we see a reward to parents who remove children from public schools, and with Bill 46 a demand that public school boards look to the private sector to deliver programs wherever possible as part of their business mandate. In think the two go hand in hand.

The tax credit initially amounts to a diversion of \$300 million to \$700 million from our public schools—that's according to government estimates—and this is on top of an already underfunded public education system. According to the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, the government is spending \$2.4 billion less than in 1995 in real dollars if you take into account enrolment growth and inflation.

Let's just take the conservative estimate of \$300 million. That money could have been used to reinstate adult education programs for the 20,000 students who have been disenfranchised and set adrift by the cancellation of these programs by the Conservative government. It could have been used to acquire appropriate textbooks and curriculum resources for the new curriculum being introduced next year, when I understand there will be no textbooks available for any workplace course, any open-level course and very few college-level courses. Or it could be used to reinvest in support staff to ensure their safe school policy can be fully implemented and that we have healthy, safe, clean and welcoming environments in all of our public schools. It could be used to increase early childhood education and early identification and intervention programs, as Fraser Mustard pointed out and the government said they supported. Or it could be used to hire 6,000 teachers. Imagine what effect that would have on the quality of our education.

According to government calculations, though, this \$300 million is assuming no enrolment increases. I know that the current funding formula for public schools doesn't take into account enrolment increases, but the tax credit plan in Bill 45 does, because for every enrolment increase in private schools and decrease in public schools, \$7,000 is lost.

Recent polling suggests that up to 15% of parents with children in public schools may be willing to consider the private school option with a tax voucher. If that comes true, that's 300,000 students at \$7,000 per student, or a loss of \$2.1 billion from the public education system. Half of that would go to private schools and half of it would go into your pockets as the Conservative government.

I don't know how anyone could say that this policy would not have a detrimental effect on student enrolment, and it certainly flies in the face of the government's own submission to the United Nations, where they said, and I quote, that "funding private schools would have a detrimental impact on public schools, and hence the fostering

of a tolerant, multicultural, non-discriminatory society in the province and may result in a significant increase in the number and kind of private schools.” Those aren’t my words; those are yours. I don’t know why you’ve changed your mind so suddenly. If that \$2.1 billion is lost, 20,000 teachers and educational workers and the programs and services they provide will be lost to our public schools. To say that wouldn’t have a detrimental impact is beyond belief.

I would ask, too, if the opposition could request that the government table copies of the its submission to the United Nations. It is not currently available in the Queen’s Park library, or no longer available. It somehow has become very scarce.

Mr Phillips: We finally got it today.

Mr Manners: You got it today? Well, that’s good. We haven’t received a copy, no matter how hard we tried to get one.

Parents who send their children to private schools already receive generous and, in some cases, questionable tax breaks from both the federal and provincial governments. I’d ask you to look at appendix 1 of our presentation. If you believe some of these schools that are identified in that appendix, they’re only spending \$1,000 to \$3,000 per year per student for education. I wonder how that’s possible. I wonder whether inspections of those schools are taking place and whether they’re teaching the curriculum.

The government’s tax policy rewards parents who choose to segregate students by religion, ethnicity, class or the ability of students. A tax system is supposed to be there to fund items for the common good, not individual preferences. I’d ask you whether public funding should go to schools or school organizations that say some of the following:

“School choice is a hard sell in Ontario because many people believe the myth that public schooling is the saviour of society in Ontario. The educational establishment continues to feed the motherhood and apple pie myth to a willing audience.” That’s from the Fair Funding special interest group that has been lobbying for this for quite some time. I wonder if you believe that it’s a myth that our public schools play no positive role in our society.

Let me give you another example. The Toronto District Christian High School Web site says: “The school rejects the intrusion of a government-imposed curriculum. Only totalitarian governments attempt to invade the minds of the citizens.” If this is true, is your province-wide standardized curriculum an example of a totalitarian action? I wouldn’t suggest that, but it seems that this school does.

Number 3, from the Ontario Alliance of Christian Schools newsletter, called Nexus: “The Christian sees the world differently from the non-Christian world view exemplified in ministry curriculum perspectives.” If this is the view Christian schools have of the new curriculum, your curriculum, which we support, can you really expect them to use it in their schools if they say that?

Finally, Bethel Baptist School says on their Web site that “most of our curriculum comes from A Beka Book publications,” so the students receive an education from a Biblical point of view. When you go to the A Beka Book Web site—which is located in Pensacola, Florida, by the way—they say, and I quote, “Our publications refute the man-made idea of evolution and present government as ordained by God for the maintenance of law and order, not as a cure-all for the problems of humanity. We represent free enterprise economics without apology and point out the dangers of communism, socialism and liberalism.” In the throne speech, your government deregulated the curriculum materials and textbooks for this province. You said you would no longer support and hold up circular 14, the regulations that would guarantee the quality of textbooks in our province. Is it OK, then, since you deregulated curriculum and textbooks in this province, for them to use this kind of textbook in the province? Is that all right? I ask the question.

1810

We have a number of recommendations. Tax credits for private and religious schools should be withdrawn from Bill 45. The \$300 million that has been earmarked for tax credits should be reinvested in public elementary and secondary education. I say public elementary and secondary education and I mean public elementary and secondary education.

I’ll ask you to distribute a board-by-board analysis of per pupil funding, this student-focused funding you talk so glowingly about. The public school system is already being discriminated against by this government. If you look at the student-focused funding model, on the whole, public boards get less per pupil funding than their coterminous or contiguous boards. In fact, the average per pupil expenditure in Catholic boards is \$7,100 and in public boards it’s \$6,850.

I’m not trying to open the historical contract. You’ve done that. But when you take that difference and multiply it by the number of students in public schools, miraculously you come up with an interesting number: \$349,725,297. It almost sounds like the \$360 million you say you’re reinvesting in public schools but obviously not in our public schools, or it’s close to the \$300 million you’re diverting from our public schools to independent religious and private schools.

That’s why we want you to do something that another province did. They held a referendum in Newfoundland—you, of course, support referenda—and asked a very simple, straightforward question. You believe in choice; let’s give the public a choice: “Do you support a single school system where all children, regardless of their religious affiliation, attend the same schools, where opportunities for religious education and observances are provided?” If you’re going to open the historical contract, then give the public a choice over which direction they want to go. Otherwise, leave the historical contract alone.

Thank you every much.

The Chair: Does that complete your presentation?

Mr Manners: Yes. I’d be happy to take questions.

The Chair: We have three minutes per caucus. Mr Dunlop.

Mr O'Toole: I'll just share time here. I've heard a lot, primarily from the opposition, about the imminent threat of the fragmentation of the public system and the divisiveness that would result. To be brief, I guess my question is simply: I take that as personally critical of the currently over 100,000 students and the history of students who have been educated over the years in those schools. I take that as an offensive remark. Would you support their position that this is divisive and basically a fragmentation, at the same time implying that those who are going through those independent schools today are divisive and fragmenting?

Mr Manners: I think this legislation promotes fragmentation and segregation and discrimination on a number of grounds. That's what is creating any divisiveness in our society today.

I would point out that you constantly refer to other provinces and what they're doing. Let me just give you an example about British Columbia. There's absolutely no funding whatsoever for independent religious schools there. The only schools they fund are elite private schools. Many of them are Catholic in nature, because they don't have a Catholic school system in British Columbia. The same is true in Quebec: elite, wealthy, rich private schools, some of them Catholic, because, again, in Quebec they went to a linguistic-based system, not a denomination-based system. Those are just some examples when you look at the facts.

Mr Dunlop: The charts you give out here today—you're using construction and new pupil places and everything in there.

Mr Manners: We're using total funding to school boards in this province, divided by the number of students. That's what you get on a regular basis. Regardless of where people live in the province or whether it's an urban or rural area, except for minor circumstances, the funding is primarily advantageous to one system as opposed to the other.

Mr Dunlop: School boards use this in the opposite way. They take out the new pupil places and the re-development of schools and that sort of thing. They like to use just operating monies. You're using the total dollars allocated to each board, divided by the number of students.

Mr Manners: Yes.

The Chair: I'll go to the official opposition.

Mr Phillips: Mr O'Toole mentioned that I used the term "fragmentation." That's not my term; I am quoting from the Harris brief. This is the language—and by the way, it's the only report I'm aware of that the government has done on this issue. We've asked them what made them change their mind. The OSSTF and others should look at the document we got today carefully, because it's very hard-hitting against this proposal. It does say, "It will result in the disruption and fragmentation of education. It's difficult to see why it would not also be required for schools established on the basis

of language, ethnicity or culture. The benefits which Ontario receives from a public education system which promotes the value of pluralism and multicultural understanding would be diminished"—it goes on, paragraph after paragraph. I would say to Mr O'Toole, be very careful. This is not my language; I'm quoting from Mike Harris's document here. This was less than two years ago.

I've asked the government, "We know you had this analysis done that said to go in the opposite direction." I asked Mr Flaherty this morning, what new information has he now got that says to turn around and go back in the other direction? I guess my question to OSSTF is, does OSSTF have any advice or rationale for why the government would, in a very short period of time, have done a 180-degree turn on this? I guess they're forgetting they ever wrote the arguments they used just two years ago.

Mr Manners: I would assume that the brief they presented to the United Nations would have been based on extremely solid research, and I would hope they would table that with the opposition and with the public. I believe the only reason they have done this flip-flop is that they've been subject to a very targeted lobby of Conservative MPPs—it was admitted earlier today by some of the presenters—and that they've decided to acquiesce to a special interest group that represents just 100,000 students, rather than those organizations that try to represent the broad base of communities across this province.

It's sad. I tried to write and give credit where credit was due when I wrote the Minister of Education and supported her on her very strong statements in defence of public education a year and a half ago. I appreciated the letter that came back in return, where she said very clearly that the goal of this government was to protect and enhance the public school system. There is no new research to say this is better. In fact, if you look at our American counterparts, or New Zealand or Great Britain, they're going in exactly the opposite direction after these failed experiments took place there.

The Chair: Thank you very much. Mr Marchese.

Mr Marchese: I found it curious too when this government, which has got rid of the Anti-Racism Secretariat, the welcome houses, the ESL from the Minister of Citizenship, the same government that extirpated all references to words like "equity" from the new curriculum, all of a sudden found this new religion that says people have been asking and demanding literally that they have their own education reflecting their own culture and religion. It was a very curious thing.

I want to ask you a question on the polling more pertinent to this discussion, because people have been saying that there's no evidence people leave the system. My point is that the onus should be on the government to show that's the case. They should do some research. They haven't done it. But you did. That polling has obviously been done by some firm that is reputable. Do you want to comment again on that polling? Do you

think the government should be doing some of this research before they embark on this initiative?

Mr Manners: Yes, the government should be doing the research, and yes, they should be filing it with the public, and yes, there should be an opportunity for public reaction. That's why I think this segment of the bill has to be removed. Our polling was done by a reputable firm, according to all the standard practices used by any polling firm. We handed out all the questions and the way the questionnaire was constructed. It's a tough question for us to ask. This is not a question we like to hear, that 15% of the public may take this reward or this bribe or this voucher and take it to a private school; we don't like to hear that. But we asked the hard question because we want to make sure we have a well-informed response. That's what we need as well from this government.

1820

Mr Marchese: I should say that this tax credit is much richer than many of the budgets that are out there. This is a tax credit that in the end, when you apply it to the income tax system, has a higher value.

By the way, I wanted to say, Earl, this is not subject to education considerations. The ministry says, "We just want to help people because those people need help." There were no education considerations whatsoever.

Mr Manners: None. When this government compares itself to other provinces, they're comparing apples and oranges. They are confusing and misleading the public somewhat when it's pointed out that in British Columbia the kinds of schools that are going to be funded by a tax credit could never get funding in British Columbia because they don't meet some of the standards that are required to even get funding in British Columbia.

The Chair: Thank you very much; we've run out of time. On behalf of the committee, thank you very much for your presentation this afternoon.

CANADIAN FEDERATION OF STUDENTS

The Chair: Our last presentation this afternoon is from the Canadian Federation of Students. I would ask the presenter or presenters to come forward. On behalf of the committee, welcome. You have 20 minutes for your presentation.

Mr Rick Telfer: I want to begin by saying thank you to the standing committee on finance for hearing the Canadian Federation of Students. Our area of specialty is more post-secondary rather than elementary and secondary, but we certainly have comments to make on this bill as it relates to many initiatives we've experienced in post-secondary education.

The item that's being circulated at the moment is a letter from MPP Bob Wood. I actually recently moved from London, Ontario, to Toronto. This was a letter I received from Mr Wood concerning Bill 45. My remarks are going to be largely reflections on this letter, or I guess an oral response to his comments, sort of a breakdown of my immediate reactions to what Mr Wood had to say.

Before I go any further, I want to mention that in Ontario the Canadian Federation of Students represents approximately 185,000 college and university students. As I mentioned, our unique perspective arises from our experiences with the provincial government over the last six years on questions of policy and funding for post-secondary education.

I'm going to reiterate a few comments from Mr Wood's letter and then respond to them. In the letter it states, "Our government has always been, and shall remain committed to the publicly funded education system." Elsewhere he states, "We will continue to make new investments in the publicly funded education system to improve the quality of education in Ontario."

Our question is, what does "committed" mean exactly? In the context of public post-secondary education, the provincial government cut \$400 million from colleges and universities in 1996-97. Only a small portion of that funding has been restored since and most of the new investments are tied to private partnerships. From our perspective, this does not demonstrate a commitment to public education, so how then can we expect such a commitment to the elementary and secondary levels of education?

Another statement made by Mr Wood was, "We want to ensure that all students in Ontario have access to a quality education." The Ontario government has told post-secondary and potential post-secondary students the same thing, yet in its latest education quarterly report, Statistics Canada reports a pronounced drop in participation rates among students from middle- and low-income families. That's with a \$60,000 household income cut-off.

The 1999 decline in participation rates was the first recorded since Statistics Canada began tracking such data in 1965. This trend was especially noticeable in Ontario, where tuition fees have been deregulated for graduate and many professional programs. Quite simply, deregulating and increasing tuition fees does not ensure accessibility. So again, how can we expect a commitment to accessibility at the elementary and secondary levels of education, given the track record in post-secondary education?

A few additional comments made by Mr Wood: "We have moved forward with numerous initiatives since we took office in 1995 in order to improve the system for the future of our children. We have introduced a new rigorous curriculum; province-wide testing of students; and the teacher-testing program." Likewise, the Ontario government has moved forward with numerous initiatives related to post-secondary education since taking office in 1995. Many of these initiatives were rushed and implemented with little or no consultation with those directly affected. It is not the quantity of initiatives that matters, but rather it is the quality of those initiatives and whether they were decided upon democratically.

Like targeted funding and key performance indicators for colleges and universities, most of the provincial government's initiatives with respect to elementary and

secondary education are first and foremost attempts to micromanage public institutions, not to improve the quality of education. Bill 45 represents yet another reckless and haphazard initiative.

Some additional statements: “Over many months, members from both sides of the House have heard from many parents who have told us they want their children educated in their own culture and religion or by special methodologies.... At the same time, we will encourage all schools to meet the high standards that we have already set, and we will continue to set standards in Ontario and work to ensure that our students are meeting those standards.”

I am sure that members from both sides of the House have also heard from many parents who oppose a voucher system of education in Ontario because that’s indeed what Bill 45 effectively introduces: a voucher system. I’m also sure that members of the House have learned of various opinion polls on the subject and thus are aware that the majority of Ontario’s people are opposed to Bill 45. Why, then, is the provincial government trying to justify the initiative with reference to many parents? Surely the majority of parents in Ontario have followed or at least are aware of the debate; and the majority are opposed to Bill 45, thus the bill should be defeated.

Regarding the high standards and numerous initiatives that the provincial government has implemented thus far in the public system, we are left wondering what the point of those initiatives was, given that Bill 45 would encourage parents to send their children to private schools. If such standards and initiatives will have little or no impact on private schooling, indeed if the government is only able to “encourage” high standards, then why develop such standards and initiatives at all? This very question speaks to the quandaries and dilemmas associated with the two-tiered system of education. If made into law, Bill 45 will create such a two-tiered system.

Mr Wood states: “This funding will ensure that students—whether they go to a public, Catholic or independent school—have the tools they need to succeed.” Here it is admitted that the tax credit is indeed a form of funding for private education. Further, we fail to understand how funding diverted from public education to private schooling will ensure the needed tools for success in today’s modern and complex society. In fact, the tools we need are new textbooks, improved libraries, smaller class sizes, physical education and extracurricular activities. Students with disabilities need proper attention and adult education needs to be improved and expanded. Exposure to diversity and lessons in cultural acceptance are essential. These are the tools that students need in order to succeed, and those tools are best delivered within a single system of publicly funded and regulated education. In a segregated two-tier system, such tools will be lost and fragmented.

I’m just going to remark on two more final statements: “We feel it is fair to provide support to and offer those

parents more flexibility and choice in education,” and “We have confidence that parents will make the right choice for their children.” Repeatedly, the Ontario government justifies its education policy initiatives with reference to promoting the best interests of our children and our students. Further, the Ontario government has implemented numerous initiatives with little or no consultation with teachers, students or parents, again ostensibly for the good of our children and our students. Yet, on the question of funding for private education, the rhetoric has shifted. Suddenly we are debating the private choices of parents, ostensibly for the good of their children, as if choice itself is inherently a good thing and as if parents always do make the right choices for their children.

From our perspective, not only does the proposed tax credit represent a significant shift in support away from public education, but the arguments used to justify the tax credit themselves undermine the notion and importance of public education. If all questions of government policy were reduced to matters of individual choice, then the very notion of an integrated and socialized society becomes extremely fragile. Only the public system of education can ensure equal opportunity and respect for diversity. High standards and public accountability are possible only within a system of public education.

Like the recently passed Bill 132, which permitted the establishment of private, for-profit universities in Ontario, Bill 45 will undermine public education. For this reason, the Canadian Federation of Students opposes Bill 45 and recommends that the more than \$300 million that would be diverted from public schooling remain within the public system.

Further, we recommend that the Ontario government increase funding for public education and that the government genuinely consult with and consider the feedback of students, teachers and parents related to all future education policy initiatives.

The Chair: Thank you very much. We have approximately three minutes per caucus. I’ll start with the official opposition.

Mr Phillips: Thank you for your thoughtful presentation. I’m going to focus on the tax credit program, although I share and appreciate your view of the cuts in the post-secondary field. I think we’re the only jurisdiction in North America that hasn’t increased investment in that in the last five years.

I use the government’s own documents here to try and find out what they’re all about, because it was just two years ago that they put forward in writing a strong case against extending funding. By the way, I know how sensitive this issue is for many people in Ontario. I’ll read you one paragraph—these are their words—just to get your view on it. It said, “It would undermine the ability of public schools to build social cohesion, tolerance and understanding. When diverse populations separate themselves from the general mix, the public system is the poorer because the opportunities for understanding and accommodating differences are dimin-

ished.” Those are Mike Harris’s words or the Harris government’s words. Do you share the concerns they expressed at that time about what might happen with the extension?

1830

Mr Telfer: Yes, we certainly do. It’s very ironic that they definitely echo the kinds of concerns that are being raised now. It’s the same sorts of reasons why we have things like multicultural policies in this nation of ours. We strive to put people together and integrate rather than segregate. I would agree with those arguments that it would in fact lead to a fragmented system and possibly segregation. I’ll just make one other statement.

Historically, one of the ways the United States attempted to reduce racism within their own country was to integrate black and white schools. So it seems obvious.

Mr Kennedy: From the standpoint of what you’ve seen happening in post-secondary, in a way the government is saying here, “We want to have some private schools. We want to make people pay,” because it’s part of what this does, from the recent experience of deregulation in this province and allowing tuitions to grow at an alarming rate in the last 10 years, what would you draw from that in terms of what it says about people’s access to education and the forward movement of Ontario as a province?

Mr Telfer: What we’ve known is that as tuition fees have jumped, and I do mean quite substantially—

Mr Kennedy: By the way, if a private school wanted to raise their tuition and capture all of this right now, all this money could just go to that.

Mr Telfer: That’s right. Again, coming back to the first comment, it’s ironic that these arguments against privatizing education were made and at the same time they were privatizing post-secondary education. From our perspective education is education, be it elementary, secondary or post-secondary. There are all sorts of problems associated with user fees, obviously access, deregulation and privatization. Because user fees for private education do represent privatization, one of our biggest concerns is in the context of international trade liberalization. For example, in the context of GATS, the General Agreement on Trade in Services, what kind of impact will those agreements have on privatized schools? Will it mean that at some point down the road a ruling will be made by the WTO that public funding is no longer permitted to public institutions? Or should we fully fund private institutions without any public accountability? Those are the kinds of concerns we have that go beyond simply accessibility.

Mr Marchese: Thank you, Rick. I appreciate the concerns you’ve raised, the concerns you have with respect to Mr Wood saying, “We are committed to public education.” You take the view that from a post-secondary education level you’ve seen tremendous cuts, and it isn’t just \$450 million. In the aggregate, I think it’s \$1.2 billion they’ve taken out. You’re right, they put some back in, but cumulatively it’s a lot of money taken out of the system. When they say, “We’re for the public system. We’re committed”—you know the cuts have been tre-

mendous. You also know from the Portals and Pathways report they commissioned that even that report was saying, “You’ve got to pour in close to \$500 million in the next couple of years.” Of course they responded to it by giving I think \$200 million for the next couple of years, which is nowhere near what they’ve taken out. So you’re worried about their commitment to public education, right?

Mr Telfer: Right. The overall point I’m trying to stress here is just that, that we’ve already been through it. We’ve experienced it and we know what’s coming next. We know the closest friends to the government are groups like the Fraser Institute, which for a long time have been advocating privatization of elementary and secondary schools. We have been there. You’re absolutely correct that the Task Force on Investing in Students report, Portals and Pathways, would have suggested \$80 million for next year, and they gave us \$30 million, which won’t even account for inflationary costs. If that’s the road ahead for elementary and secondary schools, then we’re very concerned. Many of us in post-secondary education will also be parents some day.

Mr Hardeman: Thank you very much for your presentation. First of all, you made some reference to the commitment to post-secondary education and the government. I just want to point out that in the year 2000-01 we did increase funds for colleges and universities to address the renewal needs you spoke of by over \$140 million. That’s over and above the \$1 billion we put into the post-secondary institutions for the expansion of building new facilities to meet the rising enrolment that will be coming, and we will by the year 2003-04 have increased the funding for the operations by \$293 million. I think that speaks to the commitment of the government to post-secondary education.

What I’d really like to dwell on: we’re just about through our second day of hearings on this bill and we’ve heard a lot of discussion from presenters who speak to the fact that giving parental choice and allowing parents to make judgments on the type of education they want for their children, and of course building some fairness into the system—that when parents make a choice different from what’s available in the two systems that are fully publicly funded, somehow the students coming out of the parental choice are not equipped or don’t have the same abilities as students coming out of those systems. Some have even said that somehow tolerance can only be achieved by going to the present public system.

You, representing students at universities, would be acquainted with all students regardless of the type of education they came from. Whether they come from the Montessori schools, an independent school, a public system or the Catholic system, you would see them all come to university. From your membership in the student federation, could you define a difference in people, and what will tell you which system they had been involved with in the past?

Mr Telfer: I won’t speak directly to that from a perspective of my organization. I will say, however, from personal experience, having been a university student

both through an undergraduate and a graduate degree, that I'm a small-town boy who went to the public system in both elementary and secondary schools and adapted quite well and quickly into the diverse university environment. Sometimes I've found it wasn't the case for those who came from, say, Upper Canada College or other sorts of schools. That's just a personal anecdote but I think that's OK, given the number of personal anecdotes this provincial government typically uses to justify its initiatives.

I want to make a couple of other comments in reaction to some of the things you've stated, and one is this sort of notion that the provincial government has reinvested millions in post-sec. I just want to aim at that simply because I love this sort of sand-in-the-eyes approach of throwing around, "We've invested millions here and

millions here," without any historical perspective on the millions that have been taken out or the very real and explicit statement of the government to create a crisis in education, and that was fully intended at all levels of education. I question this notion of fairness, and you say that some have argued this and some have argued that. But the majority have already spoken. The opinion polls from very reputable firms have already demonstrated what—

Mr Hardeman: Are you suggesting then that—

The Chair: With that, Mr Hardeman, we've run out of time. On behalf of the committee, I would like to thank you for your presentation this afternoon.

This committee will be adjourned until 9 o'clock tomorrow morning.

The committee adjourned at 1839.

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CONTENTS

Monday 11 June 2001

Responsible Choices for Growth and Accountability Act	
(2001 Budget), 2001, Bill 45, Mr Flaherty /	
Loi de 2001 sur des choix réfléchis favorisant la croissance	
et la responsabilisation (budget de 2001), projet de loi 45, M. Flaherty.....	
	F-79
Hon James Flaherty, Minister of Finance	F-79
Ministry of Finance.....	F-84
Dr Robert Christie, Deputy Minister	
Ontario Chamber of Commerce.....	F-88
Mr Doug Robson	
Ms Mary Webb	
Mr Atul Sharma	
Greek Orthodox Education in Ontario.....	F-90
Dr Dimitrios Oreopoulos (on behalf of Archbishop Sotirios)	
Jewish Parents for Equality in Education Funding	F-93
Mr Robert Samery	
Khalsa Community School, Malton.....	F-97
Mr Richard Szymczyk	
Hamilton District Christian High School.....	F-99
Mr Jake Belder	
Ms Sarah Postuma	
Mr Josh VanKampen	
Ms Corrie Kessler	
Mr Nate DeJonge	
Ms Barbara Hall.....	F-103
People for Education.....	F-106
Ms Annie Kidder	
Ontario Multi-Faith Coalition for Equity in Education.....	F-109
Gerald Vandezande	
Toronto District School Board.....	F-111
Ms Irene Atkinson	
Ontario Public School Boards' Association	F-114
Ms Liz Sandals	
Toronto Parent Network	F-117
Ms Cathy Dandy	
Riverdale Parent Council	F-120
Ms Norah McClintock	
Canadian Council of Montessori Administrators	F-123
Ms Breffni MacMahon	
Orangeville Christian School	F-126
Ms Barbara Bierman	
Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation	F-130
Mr Earl Manners	
Canadian Federation of Students, Ontario National Executive	F-133
Mr Rick Telfer	