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**Official Report
of Debates
(Hansard)**

Thursday 14 June 2001

**Journal
des débats
(Hansard)**

Jeudi 14 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

Président : Marcel Beaubien
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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON
FINANCE AND ECONOMIC AFFAIRS**

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

Thursday 14 June 2001

Jeudi 14 juin 2001

The committee met at 0900 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 could get your attention, please, good morning everyone. It's 9 o'clock. I'd like to bring the committee to order.

Mr Gerry Phillips (Scarborough-Agincourt): Are we underway now?

The Chair: Yes.

Mr Phillips: Just before we begin—

The Chair: Just a minute. Mr Marchese has a point.

Mr Rosario Marchese (Trinity-Spadina): Mr Chair, with your indulgence, I have about seven pages of names of people who want to get on the list. For the record, if you would allow me your indulgence, Mr Chair, I'd like to read the names of the people who would like to come to make a deputation: Becca Ansley, Paola Ardiles, Richard Bartley, Luz Bascunan, Lois Bedard, Jordan Berger, S. Birnie, Allan Borodin, Patricia Bregman, Brad Brown, Cathy Brown, Lester Brown, Tim Burns, Michael Butler, Ian Cameron, Jim Challis, William Clark, Ruth Cohen, Elizabeth Cook, Daryl Currielle, Janet Davis, Dan Delong, Francine Dick, Debbie Douglas, Merv Edwards, Tarek Fatah, Anne Fitzpatrick, John Friesen, Lela Gary, Adam Giambone, Jennifer Gillion, Avvu Go, Jeremy Hannay, Karen Harrison, Rob Hawks, Sheila Hazell, Sheri Hebdon, Monica Heikle, Steve Heikle, Alan Herman, Janet Hethrington, Cathy Holliday, Saeed Hydaralli, Louise James, Julie Jerred, Barbara Johnston, C.K. Kalevar, Howard Kaplan, Don Kendal, Harry Kopyto, Olga Kremko, Chie Kuno, Stephen Laing, Jason Law, Micheline Leering-Smith, Voltaire de Leon, Dan Lovell, Joanne Lyne, Lorraine Mackenzie-Butler, Ali Mallah,

C.O. Martin, Fred Mayor, Gordon McClure, June Mewhort, Del Milbrandt, Nacia Miller, Farrah Miranda, James Mitchell, Larry Miyata, Michelle Munroe, Tricia Neub, David Orenstein, Ian Orenstein, Bonnie Penfound, Ellen Peters, William Phillips, Stavros Preketes, Sam Pupo, Ken Putman, Amanda Quance, Summer Renault-Steele, Ben Romanin, Kavli Roopchan, Wayne Samuelson, Anthony Schein, Russell Schick, George Sefa-Dei, B. Shek, Jean A. Shek, Pete Simpson, Hazara Singh, Cathy Smith, Maria A. Smith, Kirk Sprague, Sharon Stavroff, Dale A. Stewart, Marit Stiles, Simon Strelchik, Javeed Sukhera, Linda Sutherland, Chin Tea, Xiao Ming Tea, Kaliopi Tsimidis, John Wang, Robert Wardlaw, Lancelyn Watters, Barry Weisleder, Sydney White, Herb Wiseman, Vinka Woldarsky, Cheuk-Kwong Wong, Ken Wood, Sharon Worsley, Kim Wright, Cathy Brown, Amy Elkhairi, Martha Friendly, Nadia Lambek, Fiona Nelson, Gary Ng, Mike Seaward and Colin Winter-Horstone.

Chair, these are the people who have asked to come and speak in front of this committee. These are the people who have asked us—

The Chair: Mr Marchese—

Mr Marchese: I move a motion that these people get an opportunity to—

The Chair: Mr Marchese, you know what the rules are. In the list we have in front of us today, 10:20 and 11 o'clock are two spots that were supposed to be taken by the NDP, and it says, "To be confirmed." We don't have anyone listed on that, so I would strongly suggest that of all the names you've listed that you choose two of these people to fill these two spots.

Mr Marchese: Mr Chair, I appreciate that point, but there is a motion in front of you and hopefully out of that list I've read—and the clerk has tried, obviously, to call the contacts. Some on the list we have given her were not reachable; some couldn't make it. There are people here this morning on this list I've read who obviously could be included on that list. I appreciate that.

The Chair: I'll take your motion if I can get unanimous consent, but you know the rules. I need to have unanimous consent in order to change that.

Mr Peter Kormos (Niagara Centre): Agreed.

The Chair: Mr Kormos, you know the rules. You can—

Mr Kormos: I do know the rules.

The Chair: You can play to the cameras all you want. But you know the rules. You've been here a long time, sir.

Mr Kormos: Yes, and the rules are that a motion on the floor should be put to a vote.

The Chair: Mr Marchese has moved a motion—

Mr Kormos: Recorded vote.

Ayes

Kwinter, Marchese, Phillips.

Nays

Hardeman, O'Toole, Spina, Stewart.

Interruption.

The Chair: Order, please. This is a recess for half an hour.

The committee recessed from 0906 to 0935.

The Chair: If I could get everyone's attention, I'd like to bring the committee back to order.

Mr Phillips: Before we begin, we got from the government the 80-page research brief on why they didn't want to go ahead with funding. I want to make sure that we are going to get from the government the things we requested the other day: the backup documentation on the \$300 million—how that was arrived at—and the research they've done that led them to change their mind. I wonder if we've heard back from the minister yet on that. If we haven't, I'd move that the committee send a letter to the minister indicating we'll be dealing with this clause-by-clause on Wednesday and we need the information.

The Chair: OK, Mr Phillips. I think that's a reasonable request. I'm informed by the researcher that we have not heard from the ministry. We'll draft a letter, and it will go out today.

Mr Phillips: Thank you.

The Chair: You've got my commitment on that.

First of all, before we proceed, with regard to procedures, I think I always try to be fair and reasonable. I think my record will show that. I know that whenever you're discussing any issue there are two sides—and maybe sometimes more than two sides, but we'll say two sides today. I know emotions can get high at times. However, I think everyone is entitled to a fair hearing. Some people have made a commitment to come and make a presentation in front of the committee. We have to make sure that these people have the opportunity to make their presentation in front of the committee. So I would ask everyone to please give us some co-operation so that we can continue in an orderly, responsible manner with the proceedings.

ACCENTURE INC

The Chair: With that, I will go to the first presenter this morning, who is a representative from Accenture Inc. I 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.

Mr Paul Brown: Good morning, Mr Chair, members of the committee, thank you for inviting Accenture to address the committee today. My name is Paul Brown.

By way of introduction, Accenture is a consulting and technology company operating in 46 countries with over 75,000 employees, 1,400 of whom work in Canada, the majority living and working here in Ontario.

As a global leader at the frontier of the new economy helping to bring innovations to improve the way the world works and lives, we're proud to be part of Ontario's strong economy.

Let me start by congratulating the government for its role in introducing positive economic measures to Ontario during the past six years. By aggressively cutting red tape for businesses, implementing a sound tax policy and tackling our province's deficit and debt, the government has contributed to a sound business climate. Accenture believes that Ontario is a good place to do business.

I might at this point, before getting into specific issues of interest to our company, point out Accenture's support for the new Ontario Institute for Technology announced in the budget. As a new economy company, Accenture is well aware of the need to harness the tremendous technological innovations and skills in the province. We must provide our young people and workers who seek retraining opportunities in the growing high-tech field. The new institute will certainly assist in ensuring that the students of today are prepared for the jobs of the future, and the government should be congratulated for its foresight in this area.

There is no doubt that the new digital economy provides the government of Ontario with an opportunity to encourage economic growth and manage the cost of government. The Internet provides the new channel for delivering government services effectively and at reduced costs. But essential to achieving these efficiencies is the requirement for citizens and businesses to move from traditional channels of service delivery—such as the counter at a government office or the telephone—to new electronic channels.

0940

I'd like to share with you some of the conclusions of a study Accenture has recently completed regarding the capability of Canadian provincial governments to deliver electronic services. Our study found that although the breadth and depth of services offered on-line by the government of Ontario is among the best in Canada, there is still a very long way to go before the government can realize its full potential in this area and match the lead established by the private sector. Our study found that too often government Web sites mirror the structure and organization of government departments and agencies. The majority of these Web sites offer limited value to citizens and generally focus on what the ministry or agency delivers rather what the citizen intends to achieve.

The challenge the government faces is in delivering electronic services that meet the intention of the cus-

toomer. E-government cannot be restricted by program or departmental boundaries that traditionally exist within government. Until government Web sites have a common look and feel, are easy to navigate and provide services that meet the needs of citizens, movement from traditional to electronic forms of service delivery will not occur and the potential benefits will not be realized. Citizens will continue to wait in line rather than receive services on-line.

However, the government has made an excellent first step in this area by moving to consolidate electronic services under the Ministry of Consumer and Business Services. We believe this is necessary if the government is to achieve the benefits that electronic services can deliver. Accenture also acknowledges that implementing e-government is considerably more complex than a private sector company introducing on-line sales or moving procurement to a trade exchange.

MCBS has started down the path where services will be consolidated under "life bundles." This means services will be offered in groups corresponding to the requirements of a life event. For example, getting married may involve more than just a marriage licence. Changes in address, changes in name and honeymoon vacation plans are all potential additional requirements that can be satisfied in one "life bundle" grouping. This service delivery strategy can be expanded to encompass the majority of government services and impact the majority of government ministries. Rapid expansion of existing "life bundles" will create tremendous incentive for citizens to increase their use of the Internet to access government services.

Let me, at this point, caution that the effective delivery of government services is not just about changing the channel. It requires a rethinking of the services themselves. For example, take the changes that are occurring in education and health care. Accenture believes these sectors can benefit in terms of service quality and reduced costs from the creative application of information technology. Our company's experience in other jurisdictions has taught us that such reforms require a transformation on a large scale, and the skills required to effect that transformation and the required funding might not be available within the public sector.

Accenture believes the government can expand upon its previous successes with public-private partnerships using the resources and capabilities of the private sector to deliver and drive benefits for the public sector. We're encouraged by the budget's intention to expand the SuperBuild Corp's mandate to explore public-private partnerships in information technology.

Our company is pleased to be involved with the Ministry of Community and Social Services in transforming the information technology supporting the delivery of social assistance. This project is a public-private partnership that has transformed the social assistance delivery system at no cost to the taxpayers of Ontario while delivering more than \$300 million in measurable benefits to date. The project is on target to generate \$1 billion in

administrative and program savings to the provincial government and the taxpayers of Ontario by 2004. Accenture believes there are other opportunities for the government of Ontario to take advantage of private sector funding and experience to accelerate changes at no cost to taxpayers.

I'd now like to touch on two areas where Accenture would like to make specific recommendations to the government of Ontario.

Firstly, because of the government's inability to consolidate its purchasing information and conduct fact-based negotiation with its suppliers, significant opportunities to save money on the cost of goods and services are being lost.

As an aside, you must be clear that this is not a failure of the public service. It's a failure of the fact that multiple ministry systems cannot be connected to allow this information to be aggregated for use by procurement people. Management Board is in fact looking at alternatives to get around this.

Accenture estimates it could save the government of Ontario in excess of \$1 million a day if it were to implement an electronic procurement marketplace for the broader public sector while also reducing red tape and opening the government marketplace to a larger number of small-to-medium-sized businesses. We're seeing governments around the world reduce their costs and streamline their procurement to the benefit of buyers, sellers and the taxpayers.

Finally, let me touch on a taxation issue that the expansion of e-commerce will create. In the new economy, borders are obscured and jurisdictional sovereignty is unclear. The purchase of goods and services on the Internet does not require the buyer to know, or even care, what province or country the goods or services come from. It's logical to assume that, all other things being equal, buyers will choose to purchase goods and services to which taxes are not applied. This will not only reduce the tax revenues Ontario will receive but it will put Ontario-based businesses at a competitive disadvantage to those in low-tax or no-tax jurisdictions. Ontario-based businesses might then have reason to relocate to remain viable, resulting not only in the loss of sales tax revenue but also in the loss of high-paying jobs and the associated impacts of those losses.

We recommend that the government of Ontario create a special committee made up of private and public sector tax and technology experts to address this issue and make recommendations before the volume of trade increases to a level where the issue becomes a major tax headache for Ontario.

In conclusion, I'd like to reiterate Accenture's belief that the fiscal policies of this government have contributed to a vibrant Ontario economy. Accenture is convinced there are tremendous new opportunities for the Minister of Finance to continue to provide the fiscal leadership that will ultimately result in the delivery of better government services at lower cost to the taxpayers of Ontario.

Thank you for the opportunity to address you. I'd be happy to answer any questions you might have.

The Chair: Thank you very much for your presentation. We have one minute per caucus, and I'll start with the government side.

Mr Joseph Spina (Brampton Centre): Thank you, Mr Brown. It's very interesting in your comments at the top of page 5—well, I guess they kind of overlap from page 3 to page 5—regarding life bundling. We also wanted to add in the issue that divorces cause changes in information, not just marriages. The element here really has to do with how government conducts business. I guess the question is, is it possible to have a multi-ministry access card, if you will, or a process or mechanism to access government services while still keeping private the critical elements of that individual's personal life that do not pertain to another ministry? If transportation accesses it for driver's licence information, it wouldn't be accessed by people in health and vice versa, as an example. Is it possible to have that while still retaining the privacy, the so-called firewalls perhaps in the system?

Mr Brown: Absolutely. The whole function of electronic service delivery is not to combine the data or to break down the program walls between ministries, it is to provide an overriding layer, really a presentation layer, that allows you to connect to various databases and get various services without in fact connecting the services themselves. It's an artificial layer above things which allows customers to receive services in the way that they prefer to expect them, but not in a way that requires you to consolidate or combine information in a way that might jeopardize privacy.

Mr Monte Kwinter (York Centre): Thank you very much for your presentation. I notice you talk very supportively of the Ontario information technology centre, and I agree. In your industry—and I have some contact with it—there seems to be a very desperate need for IT people. I know the companies I'm involved with are going to India and Russia to find these people. I know at the University of Waterloo a lot of their graduates are immediately scooped up by Microsoft and go to the States. Do you have any ideas of how we can deal with that in the short term? One of the things that I hear in the information technology centre is their number one problem is getting qualified people.

0950

Mr Brown: I don't think that I have a short-term fix for that, but I think the government has made a very good step toward a long-term fix.

Mr Marchese: Thank you, Mr Brown. I appreciate the generosity that you bring to Ontarians and to the government in trying to lower costs for taxpayers. It's magnanimous. You say on page 4:

"Accenture believes that there are other opportunities for the government of Ontario to take advantage of private sector funding and experience to accelerate changes at no cost to taxpayers."

You're not doing this for free, obviously; there's a cost somewhere. We pay one way or the other, do we not? It's not done for free; someone's got to pay somewhere for a service that's provided. Isn't that true?

Mr Brown: That's correct, but the payment is made out of the benefits that are derived from the improvements that the private sector partner develops on behalf of the government, improvements that are unlikely to occur without the expertise and support of a partner to do so.

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

KOHAI EDUCATIONAL CENTRE

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

Ms Mary Southcott: Hello. My name is Mary Southcott from Kohai Educational Centre. Thank you for being able to speak to you today.

We're not a global leader. We're a very small school, 50 students who have special needs. We're an independent school. Mostly the students come to us because they have failed in other settings, either public or private. Our tuition is very steep to provide services. For our adults tuition is \$12,500 for the year. For our younger students from the age of three, it's between \$20,000 and \$25,000 a year.

The families that use our services have disabled children, and already those children are more expensive. It's a bad way to put it, and I don't mean to put a value on children's lives, but when you have a disabled child there are fewer services available to you and they cost more money.

The education that we provide is a very good one. Our ratios are small. We deal with children who have behaviour difficulties, neurological/genetic disorders, autism, spectrum disorder, Down syndrome and other types of disorders. We take children with behaviour problems. They come to us because they have assaulted teachers or have no language, for example. They come to us and we teach them. We teach them to read. We teach them to speak. We teach them toileting. We do things that can't be done in the public school system, and our parents have to pay for that service. So this tax credit is a very good thing for them.

We're not an elitist school. We're not a religious school. We will attempt to take in any child or family that comes to our school. In fact, when we first began in 1976, there was funding that came to us from Comsoc, the Ministry of Community and Social Services, for children involved with the children's aid society and children who had difficult families or difficult pasts. When Bill 82 was passed, that funding was stopped. As a group of teachers and educators, we in fact made it possible for

families who could not afford the fees to get subsidies in order to come to the school, which meant that the teachers made less money.

We are also a charitable organization so we do raise money in order to offer subsidies to families, and we do subsidize families who have very little money and offer a range of subsidies to families. We actually provide a very important service in the city of Toronto. We probably save the taxpayers a lot of money because our per-pupil cost is much less than what it would be in the public school system. Our students are the type of students who would need an educational assistant in the classroom, speech therapists, pathologists, psychologists, child and youth workers, and we provide that in one setting.

I know we're a very small part of the community, but a very deserving part of the community, and I think that this tax credit is a very good thing for our parents.

The Chair: That completes your presentation?

Ms Southcott: That completes my presentation.

The Chair: Thank you very much. We have approximately four minutes per caucus and I'll start with Mr Kwinter.

Mr Kwinter: Could you just tell me the structure of your classes? You say you go from school age to adults.

Ms Southcott: We go from preschool to adult. We actually take children in from the age of three, and we have adults at the school in a program which blends academics with life skills and vocational skills as well. We have an academic primary-secondary part of the school, as well as preschool and post-secondary.

Mr Kwinter: My concern is that because we haven't seen the regulations, we have no idea how this particular tax credit is going to be administered and whether or not institutions like yours—and we've had a couple of others appear—will even be eligible. The reason I say that is there's no question that you're an independent school, but you do have other components to what you're doing.

You say that your school was funded by community and social services. I know for a fact that in my riding we had an adult learning school and the funds were totally cut. They shut it down. Bathurst Heights Collegiate is totally closing down, and it was basically an adult training centre. The government just cut those funds. I can't see them suddenly saying, "We're not providing funds for that in the public school system but we are going to provide it in the independent school system." Do you have any thoughts on that?

Ms Southcott: I'm not here to do politicking, really. I'm here to represent the parents in my school and the opportunity that this tax credit would afford them. When a family is paying \$25,000 a year because their child is autistic and doesn't speak and needs to learn to be toileted and learn social skills, I actually think there is some responsibility for the government to help those families and those children. Those children have a right to learn the same way that other children do. Currently, the way those children are served in the public school system, it's not working, and we provide an alternative.

Mr Marchese: Ms Southcott, I appreciate the work that you do. It's a very complicated job working with young people, and older young people, who have these problems. You say the public system really can't do some of the things you do—can't or is unable or won't. Why not?

Ms Southcott: Whenever you have a large organization, the way in which you have to structure that organization to work is by building rules and regulations. When you have a 12-year-old autistic girl who doesn't know how to go to the bathroom by herself in a system where the teachers are not allowed to go into the bathroom with that child, then you have a problem. It's very difficult in the public school system to make exceptions to those rules. We all know that.

In the private system—at least our school, because we work with the individual child and set a program for that child—we have a lot more freedom to do that. We don't have to follow a grade 3 curriculum if a child is at a grade 1 level, even if they're at a grade 3 age. We can still teach them the mechanics of reading. We can teach them how to speak. We don't have to force them through a curriculum that's not appropriate to them.

Mr Marchese: In the same way this government is trying to give the flexibility and the choice to everybody to be able to take their children wherever they want, why can't they provide that choice and that flexibility for the system if it's not available to do so?

Ms Southcott: I very much believe that the system should be able to do that, but at the moment it doesn't. When your child is three years old and doesn't speak, you can't wait 10 years for the system to work. You have to do something now.

Mr Marchese: I appreciate that. Shouldn't we be lobbying this government in particular, dare I say, that we provide these services, because these people need the help? If they don't send them to your centre because they don't have the wherewithal, shouldn't we be fighting governments to provide for these things? Isn't that our role?

1000

Ms Southcott: That's not what I'm here to do today. What I'm here to do is to try and help some of the families who don't have the funds to be able to use our resources to have a better chance to do that.

Mr Marchese: Thank you.

Mr John O'Toole (Durham): Perhaps one question and then I'll share it with my partner here.

First of all, I appreciate the work you do. I have some experience, having been a trustee and having served on a special education advisory, and there are hard-to-serve students and other people. The public system has developed over the last three or four years a system on special education where high needs or hard-to-serve, an intensive support amount, ISA—you're probably familiar with that term. There's up to \$40,000, I think; there's an assigned person in a regular classroom for an individual who needs intensive support.

I think what I hear you saying is that you have a compact delivery form where you have the speech and language person and you have the counsellor working as a team. I see by the resumé here some are qualified teachers, some are qualified in other kinds of provision of service, not maybe members of the same professional association, teachers' association. It's hard to find the right word there because that's part of the problem, "it's not my job," kind of thing.

You use one instructional method I'm familiar with, which is the intervention program, the intensive behaviour intervention, which is a very specific technique for dealing with ADHD. Could you perhaps address that in terms of, do these individual children get funding through any disability? Some of them must be identified on some kind of disability pension or—

Ms Southcott: There is no funding available except for autistic children who are under the age of six and that's a new—

Mr O'Toole: The speech and language money and—

Ms Southcott: No, it's TPAS, Toronto Preschool Autism Service, which has been funded, I believe, by the Ontario government, and it's for children who are autistic between the ages of three and six. But that funding ends at school age. There is no funding once they reach school age.

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

ONTARIO SECONDARY SCHOOL
TEACHERS' FEDERATION
DISTRICT 12

The Chair: Our next presentation is from the OSSTF, district 12. I would ask the representative or representatives to come forward please and state your name for the record. On behalf of the committee, welcome. You have 20 minutes for your presentation.

Mr Jim McQueen: Thank you, Chair. Let me begin, if I may, by introducing myself. I'm Jim McQueen, president of the Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation. To my right is Doug Jolliffe, the vice-president, and to my left is Wendy White, the other vice-president.

In preliminary remarks, let me just suggest to you that we concur with a number of the criticisms that have been made throughout the hearings of this particular proposal on private schools. What we have attempted to do in our brief is to outline some variables that we don't think have been given consideration.

The secondary school teachers of the city of Toronto, 7,000 strong, wish to state their unconditional support of the Minister of Education when she said the Ontario government "continues to have no plans to provide funding to private religious schools or to parents of children that attend such schools.... Extending funding to religious private schools would result in fragmentation of the educational system in Ontario and undermine the goal of universal access to education."

As with the funding model, the impact of the government's proposal in Toronto is enormous and growing exponentially as it works its way through the vastness of Toronto. The following statistics are alarming:

If 15% of the students who presently attend public schools switch to the private system, as OSSTF polling suggested might happen, an additional 15,000 students would be lost by the public system;

The loss to the Toronto school system would be \$315 million. Teacher job loss would be 2,500 positions;

Teaching and professional services staff loss would be 375 positions;

Secretarial loss would be extensive and reflect the same dramatic loss in positions.

The possible impact of these figures on a single board of education will seriously hamper Toronto's ability to maintain quality education in Toronto.

The Toronto board of education has already presented its report to this committee. The teachers of Toronto can only second their concerns and indicate support for their position.

District 12 OSSTF would like to express the following concerns about this ill-conceived initiative. While the focus on the proposal has been funding to religious schools, we see no barrier to the extension of this funding to other forms of private institutions. What is to prevent the corporate sector—be it McDonald's, Cisco, IBM or any other manner of corporation—from creating private schools focusing on their particular interest, registering students, offering Mac-credits and instructing applicants to apply for the private school subsidy to offset tuition costs? Lest you think this is alarmist, consider the enormous growth of corporate credits presently being offered in the Toronto school system, the activities of the Learning Partnership, the invasion of Youth News Network and the number of conferences held for private entrepreneurs on how they might gain access to the public educational system. We fear that the government is on the verge of opening a Pandora's box which will see an even greater fragmentation of the system than anyone anticipated.

The teachers of Toronto also take issue with the concept of freedom of choice. While we concur that democracy allows any number of freedoms of choice, including governments, it is fallacious to suggest that this choice should be extended to public services. No citizen is allowed to select their favourite subway system, their politically correct sewage system. The citizens of a province or metropolitan setting gather together and provide a single public service for the good of all. In those odd occasions when choice has been permitted, such as in the gas industry and the electrical industry, the results have been costly to the citizens. As David Stratman, director of the National Coalition for Public Education in its defeat of the American Tuition Tax Credit Act of 1978, stated: "Charter schools, school vouchers and school choice attack the idea of a public good and undermine the power of ordinary people by replacing community relationships with the competition of isolated people."

In the matter of providing support to religious and other private schools, the impact in Toronto will be enormous. Consider that, in the Toronto Yellow Pages alone, 82 schools presently advertise private schooling. This list does not include day care centres or early childhood education. The Toronto board of education, in dealing with contractual matters, works from a list identifying some 65 various religions which have accepted standing in the community. Legally, this tax credit could be used to support a school of Scientology where students are taught under a portrait of L. Ron Hubbard. To suggest that the government's proposal is a minor shift in government policy is to totally underestimate its impact and potential growth.

It would seem appropriate for us to comment on the issue of funding of the Catholic system. District 12 OSSTF does not want to enter into the debate on the funding of this educational system. Suffice it to say that the fathers of Confederation saw fit to provide constitutional guarantees to citizens of Roman Catholic belief. A Conservative government of another day saw fit to extend those constitutional guarantees. Whether that funding should continue or not is a different question than confusing the issue by appearing to expand those limited constitutional rights to all other religions. If this is the question that the government is attempting to answer with this proposal, then the question that should be asked is whether all public education should be secular. More importantly, a full and open debate on that question should take place before any decision is made.

In conclusion and in continuing to find points where the teachers of Toronto can support this government, we concur with Premier Harris when he said: "As our provincial Minister of Education has made clear, our government is committed to preserving and improving our public education system by upholding our constitutional obligation to fully fund public and separate schools. Complying with the UN's demand, as the federal Liberal government would have us do, would remove from our existing public education system at least \$300 million per year, with some estimates as high as \$700 million. Obviously, such an action would run directly counter to Ontario's long-standing commitment to public education."

We include four recommendations:

(1) That the government withdraw this proposal from its budgetary legislation;

(2) That before this bill is reintroduced or offered for public debate a full accounting of its impact be provided to the citizens of the province, including an estimate that ensures that this funding expansion would not place the provincial government in violation of its own law requiring balanced budgets;

(3) That a province-wide referendum on extending funding to private schools be held to determine the citizens' opinion on the merits of such legislation prior to any government introducing legislation of this nature;

(4) That, as an alternative to number 3, no extension of funding to private schools be implemented until a provincial election is held.

We'll be glad to take any questions.

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The Chair: We have two and a half minutes per caucus.

Mr Marchese: Thank you for your presentation. One of the things I have been saying as a New Democrat, and New Democrats support this strongly, is that the best way to reflect our diversity is within our public system, and within Toronto you do that very well. Within Toronto you offer international languages, which teaches languages and culture. It reflects it very well. You have religious readings that reflect the different religions, the different communities we have that come from all over the world. You teach black studies as well, as part of the international programs. You have native studies, or you did when I was there.

If we taught religion as a course of study, that would be the best way to reflect diversity and the richness of all the different communities. Isn't this the best way to provide that, as opposed to saying we should reflect the diversity by offering to the communities their own education in their own culture, in their own religion?

Mr Doug Jolliffe: I'll answer this. When I first started teaching I taught in a very large downtown Toronto school, and I had only recently moved to Toronto. We counted, and there were 88 languages being spoken in the school. All the religions that took place in the school were all accommodated. Friday prayers were a part of the school week. The school was Western Tech.

Just prior to that I had a short-term engagement at another school, which, thinking of the last presenter, did what her school now does in dealing with severely disabled students and adults. Those kinds of things have been lost recently due to the lack of funding. We've heard that Western Tech has lost about 40% of its students due to the cut-off of adult education, and the other school, Brockton, has been closed down.

We can do it. We used to do that. We used to recognize diversity of all kinds in the public education system.

Mr Marchese: By the way, I do think, like you, that there will be a proliferation of other private schools. We're talking about religious schools at the moment. My question was directed to that because that's all they're talking about. They're not talking about the other private schools, like Upper Canada College, that they dare not mention. They're going to be funded, but they dare not talk about that.

I see a proliferation of these other schools, and I know that, on page 2, you obviously see that as well. I just wanted to say that I support your view as well. They would rather not talk about it, but I see them proliferating.

Mr R. Gary Stewart (Peterborough): I have one very fast question. On page 2, I cannot believe the statement you've made: "The teachers of Toronto also take issue with the concept of freedom of choice." Is this a fact that members of your union believe that? Have they all signed saying that you could use that statement?

Mr McQueen: First, Mr Stewart, we are a democratic organization. We're elected to speak on behalf of the membership. We don't have to consult with them on a daily basis. But also, to be fair, one should read the whole of the statement, where we state that freedom of choice does not exist within the provision of public services. As we indicate, you don't choose your subway or your sewage system or whatever. In a democratic society, that is perceived to be the coming together of a civilized group to provide those services which individuals can't afford but collectively it can be afforded. So I think for you to suggest that we have taken that stance is a total misrepresentation of what we're saying.

Mr Stewart: I don't wish to be argumentative, but certainly the idea of that comment made on behalf of all your teachers is rather unfortunate.

The Chair: Mr O'Toole, you've got one minute.

Mr O'Toole: On page 3, you made a statement: "A Conservative government of another day saw fit to extend those constitutional guarantees. Whether that funding should continue or not is a different question than confusing the issue by appearing to expand these limited constitutional rights to all other religions."

I guess your position is clearly stated, since about 1980, that you want one system, one homogeneous system. That's an assumption I've made and that's what I've heard from all the directors of education. They want one system—one size fits all—and you aren't stopping until it happens. But I'm quite surprised at the intolerance on page 3. On what academic basis are you able to assess that L. Ron Hubbard and Scientology, or whatever—you're assessing a judgment on that page which smacks of intolerance.

Interjections.

Mr O'Toole: It does.

Mr McQueen: My understanding of a committee hearing is to exchange views. If one does or does not have those views—

Mr O'Toole: You just said you don't need to consult with your membership.

Mr McQueen: I didn't say that either, but—

Mr O'Toole: Yes, you did.

Mr McQueen: It's not appropriate for any member of the Legislature to characterize what we're saying. With the situation that exists, we feel under this legislation that those kinds of examples are possible.

In relation to separate school funding, we acknowledge the fact that both the Fathers of Confederation and the government have taken into consideration what they considered to be a constitutional requirement. We don't have any argument with that. As an organization, we could suggest any number of ways that the education system could be changed. But we think it is not helpful to take that issue, which has already been decided, and muddy the waters in this particular issue with it. If you want to deal with that issue, then let's have a public debate, let's discuss all the alternatives and let's let the people of Ontario make a decision as to how they want to go.

The Chair: Thank you very much. Excuse me, we still have one more.

Mr McQueen: I apologize.

Mr Gerard Kennedy (Parkdale-High Park): Thanks, Mr McQueen. I can understand why you might want to leave after talking to the member of the government party.

Members of the government, and some of them sitting over here, don't have the courage to put it on the table. They didn't have the courage to divide this into a bill. They certainly didn't have the courage, like some of their American counterparts, to submit this to a referendum. So we're here because of the timid government that says they want to do something but they want to slide it in.

They would blame unions for all the problems. They would say that all the problems of recent years have come from unions. We used to have a system that allowed people to address needs in Toronto according to the needs of the people of Toronto, in Hamilton, in Ancaster, in all the different places. They're the ones who have given us the one big system.

There are two questions I want to ask. I just want to let you know that about a year and a half ago in their official submission to the UN the government said that funding private schools "would have negative fiscal impacts as there would be a marked increase in the duplication of services and capital costs ... and a concurrent diminishment of the range of programs and services that the public system would be able to afford."

That's what they used to say. That's the only published report there is to actually cover off what this would do to the public school system. This government said it would hurt the public school system, and they haven't produced anything to the contrary.

There is one thing I would like to ask you, on behalf of the students you serve every day. Yesterday we had a report, and today in the paper, about the amount of money that has been taken out of the Toronto system. Our estimate is that it's close to \$2,000 per student since 1995. I wonder if you could take a couple of seconds to tell us some of the main impacts that has had, because I think that's mainly what this is about: they would divert more money away than they have already taken from the students in the publicly funded systems.

Mr McQueen: I sent a memo yesterday to all our members because of the end of the year, simply suggesting to them that unfortunately the education system has been totally disrupted and there is no particular hope for the future. I did that because I visit the schools and I talk to the members, and as I go into those schools, those schools are bitter. You have teacher against teacher, you have teachers against the administration and you have teachers against the board. The morale has simply plunged, and much of it has been as a result not only of what this government has done to them as professionals, but also what they see in the classroom. They see ESL classes disappearing; they see class sizes, in spite of what the legislation says, growing; they see a loss of resources. I started teaching at Stephen Leacock in 1975. It was a

joyful place to go. I'm going to a retirement today in that particular school, visiting a teacher I taught with who doesn't have to retire, but he said he's had it; he can't stand the job any longer. That's the kind of environment that has been created in the school system.

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

1020

GERARD ARDANAZ

The Chair: Our next presentation is from Gerard M. Ardanaz, if you could come forward, please, and state your name for the record. On behalf of the committee, welcome. You have 20 minutes for your presentation.

Mr Gerard Ardanaz: Good morning. Thank you for allowing me the chance to speak today. My name is Gerard Ardanaz. I was born in Spain and came to Toronto with my family in 1958. I had the good fortune to study at St Peter's elementary, Harbord Collegiate and then at York University. I have been teaching for over 20 years, the last 12 at St Mary's Catholic Secondary School. I am grateful for the great education that I received and even more grateful for having had the opportunity to teach.

Let me say that in my opinion, this city and this province have grown in ways that few people in the 1950s, 1960s or 1970s could have imagined. In many ways Toronto grew but still maintained the sleepy-town atmosphere of my early years here. What also grew was an education system that helped this city grow in a way that was the envy of many cities around the world. I am very much convinced that one of the pillars of this city's growth was our education system. It offered opportunity to all, and those who didn't take advantage of it could at least say they didn't take advantage of their chance. This system allowed many employers to find a qualified labour force in this province. It was not a coincidence that one of the popular songs of the time was *People City*, a song celebrating Toronto and its people.

In the last 10 years, much criticism has been directed at our system, some of it—not all—well-founded. This system, like any system, needed some fixing, but it was not a complete disaster. We still had a system that was producing good graduates and good citizens. I personally know of three individuals who graduated in the last eight years who are now working in Europe, two of whom are doing work that would be the envy of many young people. I can also tell you that many graduates from St Mary's have gone on to do quite well and, even more importantly, have become good citizens. This system was not broken. In need of change, yes; in need of fine tuning, yes; in need of a major overhaul, I doubt it. But the government has decided it needed a major overhaul, and that is the government's prerogative.

For the last six years, we have had an incredible amount of change. It seems that every month brings on a new announcement. The change has happened at such a pace that even the answers we get for our questions seem to change from day to day. In our school, the amount of

discussion that has gone on as to how to handle the changes cannot be measured. The people who have been discussing these issues are the real professionals in education: our teachers, our vice-principals and our principals. They have worked to implement changes that were still in the formative stage. Courses were being discussed at times without the course profiles having been printed. Mapping out a student's future was at times difficult, since we didn't have all the information we needed on future courses. In special education, many teachers and specialists have spent many hours filling in forms to convince the Ministry of Education that we needed the money—hours that could have been put to better use—yet the changes seem to continue. We need time to make sure all these changes are implemented properly, or they won't work, before we make a major change like extending funding.

The literacy test has been put out there as the great remedy for whatever ailed our system, yet we haven't discussed what to do about students who decide to give up on school if they can't get a diploma. Students are now being told by grade 9 that they can't go to college or get an apprenticeship. We spend our time testing our students, but in reality there is very little time for remedial work, since the amount of work has increased significantly and there is little time for catching up. Students who don't mature as quickly as others are quickly finding out what failure is all about. We need time to make sure all these changes are implemented properly.

So here we are. The Minister of Finance decides that he should expand the education system. He hasn't shown any impact studies on what this will do to the public system. He hasn't explained how the system can continue if the kids who leave are the ones who cost the least because of their abilities and some of the ones who stay cost more because of their special needs. The minister didn't address the fact that in year one the government stands to save approximately \$6,300 for every student who leaves the public system. The minister didn't even consult with the Minister of Education. Even Mr Harris, our Premier, spoke against this a while back. What is the urgency? This party has three years left, yet they are willing to rush this fundamental change without any studies and very little discussion. We need time to make sure all the changes are implemented properly before we extend funding.

As committee members, you have a chance to speak up. In a leadership situation, one cannot say, "I was told to do this." If this change is good, then why the rush? Let me say that I was told by a colleague just yesterday that after a meeting he had with teachers from a different school, there was still disagreement as to what criteria there were for MID students. What is the pathway for students who don't pass the literacy test? What do we grant students if we cannot grant them a credit?

There were many other questions that I was given, but the point I am making is that these professionals, those in the trenches, as some would say, are still grappling with the changes. If the professionals are confused, what is the

state of our parents and students? Many are just beginning to find out that they are making decisions without really understanding their consequences. This is not the way we should be dealing with our young. Before we extend funding, time is needed to make sure all prior changes are implemented properly, or they won't work.

This government has adopted the label of accountability. It rushes out to make sure that everyone is accountable, yet look at how this change is being implemented. Did they hold hearings to deal only with this very important change? No. Did they inform the electorate in the last election that they would be doing this? No. As a matter of fact, they did the complete opposite. Did they discuss this thoroughly in caucus? I'd have to say no, since not even Ms Ecker, the Minister of Education, was aware of it. They didn't even offer up a few trial balloons. Even some government members are upset by this policy. You can call this many things; accountable isn't one of them.

The government of Mike Harris has prided itself on handling the affairs of this province in an efficient and responsible manner. If they are truly doing this, why are there no studies on what the effects of this change will be on public education? Why is the finance ministry instead of the education ministry handling this significant change? What has happened in the last while to change the Minister of Education's mind on this issue? Semantics aside, why has the Premier gone back on his words during the election, that he would not do this? What business would run in this fashion? Is this really efficient and responsible?

As committee members, you have to speak up. Leadership is about showing us the best way to the future. You can't hide behind party affiliations. The future needs a sound foundation. Rushing through major changes that even Mr Harris said would not be wise is not the way to serve our future citizens. Our people need to have their voices heard and considered. Passing laws without proper process is not governing; it is an exercise in power. Governing occurs when the people feel and act as if they were part of the process. Governing will lead to a better future; using power will not.

I am not an expert in government, committees or any of the procedures you use here in what should be the centre of leadership for this province. I do, however, know something about the classroom and schools.

1030

Years ago we had a problem with vandalism, and within a matter of months we had reduced vandalism by over 90%. This was not done by one man, one woman or the passing of some law. It was done by everyone working together: teachers, parents, students, caretakers, secretaries, principals and vice-principals. It was done through respect, communication and co-operation. Without this collaborative effort, vandalism would have continued.

Teaching is a very humbling job. The only power I have is the power of someone choosing to listen to me. I might be wrong, but to govern without listening and

trusting the very people you serve is a risky venture. Personally, I find it doesn't work in the classroom. In the long run I fear it won't work in your classroom, this fine province of ours, Ontario.

Let me finish by saying if you must proceed then give us time to make sure all prior changes are implemented properly before you extend full funding. Then do it properly by studying the situation and presenting it properly. Its significance warrants at least that. It takes courage to defy your leader, but leadership is about acting courageously.

The Chair: We have two minutes per caucus, and we'll start with the government caucus.

Mr Ernie Hardeman (Oxford): Thank you very much for your presentation. It was very well presented and well researched.

One of the things that caught me is the studies to see what effect a tax credit has for people who make this choice to have a different type of education for their children. One can talk about doing studies, but the fact that five other provinces have already done it and found minimal migration would seem to me to be a better study than a poll that says 15% of people might consider it. Yet we want to base our position—your position in the presentation; I'm not sure you mentioned it, but I know the previous presenter did, that if 15% move, this would be the impact. It would seem to me that's a rather vast jump.

There is no information out there in studies that would show that there is going to be a major migration of students. There is, at least in my community, support from people who are presently in the system who are going to great sacrifices to be able to send their children to their choice of education and who are going to have a small benefit. I guess when I get to the small benefit I just want to—and I'm sure it was a misstatement you made, that before we go to full funding we should do studies. I just want to point out that there is nothing in this legislation that talks about full funding for all independent schools. I'm sure you understand that this government is talking about a minimal tax credit to help people with their choice of education for their children.

Mr Ardanaz: First of all, I understand it's 50% in five years, 10% next year. Second of all, when I refer to a study I don't refer to a poll. Anybody can go out there and grab a poll. I'm talking about a serious study. I'm talking about, what are the consequences to a school system if 15% leave. I'm not familiar with the other provinces. I do believe some of them have a set fix on spending on public education; they do not have a per-pupil funding formula. What we have done here in Ontario is we have created a per-pupil funding formula and now all of a sudden when people leave, that money goes with them.

You can have a student who's a darned good student and he will not take up all your resources. We might be getting \$7,000 for him. But you can have a boy next to him who is taking up \$25,000 worth of resources. So

forget the polls. We need studies that show all these things.

You talk about choice. When a public system opens the door, it doesn't present a student with a test and say, "We'll see if you're good enough to come in here." I'm familiar with a couple of private schools and in order to get in there you have to write a test, and if you don't measure up you do not get in. If a student comes to St Mary's—we're a composite school, and by the way a darned good composite school, also very low on the literacy testing results because we take kids from everywhere—

The Chair: Thank you very much. We've run out of time. I have to go to the official opposition.

Mr Kennedy: Mr Ardanaz, I want to thank you for your presentation. I also want to remind you that if you have a copy of it, the clerk can circulate it to everyone.

Mr Ardanaz: I only have one copy extra. Sorry, I'm only a teacher; I don't have a secretary.

Mr Kennedy: That's fine, and I appreciate the appropriately sombre tone. Just very quickly, I know the government, and particularly Mr Hardeman, didn't mean to leave any wrong inference, but of course there is no voucher or tax credit system anywhere in Canada, or in the United States, for that matter. There are two experimental systems in Milwaukee and Cleveland and some very dubious results have come from that.

The one study in Ontario of alternative funding for schools not in the private system is the Shapiro report of 1985, and it had this to say about private school tax credits or vouchers. It said it would be the most damaging to the public system. So I certainly want to endorse what you've brought forward today around how reckless it can be to proceed without any idea of what damage or benefit you're going to obtain.

The part I'd like to ask you about—and by the way, each of the members opposite and members of all caucuses we invited to go and visit a school and explain this. If we're not in such a rush, if we're prepared to show the minimum amount of respect, then we'll go to the community that you represent and the communities of all of the schools and explain to them what this would do and allow them to participate, because for some reason there has been a tendency in this House to simply over and over again pass laws without regard for the consequences.

I'd like to ask you about your students. I'd like to ask you what this says to them about the commitment of the government to their having a good education. If the government sets up a system that is biased toward private schools, how is the student at St Mary's Composite going to feel that this government is committed to their doing well?

Mr Ardanaz: I don't know how the students would feel. I do know that they have an image at times of themselves as inferior to private school students. That came out during the literacy tests. In one class, I walked in and I had to remind the students that if we took our top 20% of our students, divided our school with 20% aca-

demically, 40% applied and the rest of the students essentials, or 20-60-20, something like that—they all of a sudden began to realize that the literacy results were not a fair comparison, say, between certain schools and other schools. If you have a school in a certain part of town where there's a highly educated group of people and you have a school like St Mary's with a lot of immigrant background etc—no insult to the immigrants here, because they all bring their expertise, but if you haven't got the first language of English at home you are at a disadvantage.

I really feel that a place like St Mary's would suffer great consequences if all of a sudden more money is taken out. After this, I've noticed a difference in the last 10—not 10 years; well, actually, let's be fair, the last 10 years, because money has been removed from education for over 10 years, especially the last few years even more so.

The Chair: Mr Marchese.

Mr Marchese: Thank you, Gerald, for your presentation. It was very thoughtful.

Mr Ardanaz: Gerard.

Mr Marchese: Gerard. I was looking at the presentation made by Duncan Green yesterday. He was a former director of the Toronto Board of Education. His position was supported by 20 other directors from other parts of the province. One of the things he says is, "Usually, a tax credit is introduced to encourage a particular action or behaviour. We cannot think of a tax credit that is designed to discourage activity. Therefore, we anticipate that a greater number of parents will consider, and opt for, educational settings outside of the more regulated and publicly accountable school system."

I believe that to be true. Do you believe a tax credit is designed to discourage people from leaving the public system?

1040

Mr Ardanaz: I don't know if that's what will eventually encourage people to leave, but I think the conditions would change. Finally people would say, "I'm going to have to make this decision."

I'll go back to my school. The great thing about St Mary's is that we learn a lot of things and one of them is how to live together. We have students who go to university, students who go to college, students who go to work and students who go to co-ops to learn how to work. I think if we lose the top end of our students in a school like that, we become poorer and they become poorer because then they do not understand the intricacies of living together.

I remember getting my Canadian citizenship and walking to school, and the teacher saying to me, "I guess this means you'll behave better." But that's what education is about. It's about creating citizens, it's about living together.

I'm afraid that if this goes through—I can't see the future and I'm not going to tell you flat out it's not going to work, but before I make a change to my house, I study it to make sure it's going to work, and there's no study

here. This is too important and the price is too big if we fail in this.

The Chair: On behalf of the committee, thank you for your presentation this morning.

CHEUK-KWONG WONG
GRANT ORCHARD

The Chair: Our next presentation is from Grant Orchard and C. K. Wong. I would ask the presenters to come forward, please. On behalf of the committee, welcome. You have 20 minutes for your presentation this morning.

Mr Cheuk-kwong Wong: Thank you so much to the Chair and good morning to everybody.

My name is Cheuk-kwong Wong, resident of Toronto-Danforth, 223 Chatham Avenue. I am speaking against the government proposal of giving a tax credit to private school parents. I understand so many public schools are not as good as private schools by comparing their academic performance. I suggest using the money to improve every public school in line with the private schools. Then everyone can choose which school to go to. Why do we not spend the money in the area needed, but put the money in a spot nobody wanted?

I am a private school parent. I have not needed the tax credit in the past 17 years. Also, I realize that private schools have existed longer than 100 years. Who asked for a tax credit in the past?

My daughter finished high school this year. Every top university in Ontario offered admission with a scholarship. The University of Western Ontario, faculty of engineering, is giving a scholarship of \$8,000. The University of Toronto, the top program, engineering science, is also giving a scholarship of \$3,000. McMaster University, engineering faculty, is giving a scholarship of \$3,000. Queen's University, applied science, is also giving \$1,000. Those are the top schools in Ontario. They are all giving scholarships. My daughter also received an offer of admission to the University of Waterloo in system design engineering. This is the most difficult program to get into in Ontario, and I believe also the most difficult in Canada.

I consider this private school gave my child suitable preparation for university. My daughter has been in private school since being two years old, all the way to grade 13, totally away from the public school system. The reason I put my child in private school was because we worried about: (1) Do we have equal opportunity of access to the public school system? (2) In many cases the decisions are made by the individual teacher. If you get a good teacher, you get everything. If you do not get a good teacher, you get nothing. That is totally the opposite, and we have very little choice.

I wish to answer your questions. I'd like to mention that I am an example of a private school parent. I do not need a tax credit. This is an example. I don't know how big that example will be, but I am an example. I do not need a tax credit.

The Chair: Thank you. Mr Orchard, do you want to go ahead with your presentation and we'll go for questions after.

Mr Grant Orchard: Thank you, Mr Chair and members of the panel, and thank you to Mr Marchese for allowing me to speak here.

Others have spoken very eloquently and articulated the implications of the cuts to our public system. I'm not going to delve into that.

I'm a founding member of Citizens Concerned about Free Trade, so we've been involved in the free trade agreement, the NAFTA and the problem with those agreements. I'm also a director of the Toronto-Danforth federal Conservative riding association. I have a certain amount of pride in the history of our federal party, because we brought in public institutions across this country—the Bank of Canada, unemployment insurance, the CBC. Mr Diefenbaker was a strong supporter of our public institutions. He started a system of health insurance payments. Certainly historically, this country has been built on a mixed-managed economy of public and private.

Since the free trade agreements we've seen an erosion of our public institutions in favour of the private sector. Mr Green very well referred to the history of the three principles—free, compulsory and secular—of our system of education that go back to the beginning of the Dominion of Canada.

The question is the same, really, that pertains to what's happening in our health care: Why? What is broken here? This is my question, too, to the government: What kind of research has been done? What has been looked into as far as the effect of NAFTA on the move to put public money into the private sector?

Under the free trade agreement and NAFTA, education is listed as a non-conforming service. The implications of that are we cannot discriminate against foreign companies of the countries signed on to the NAFTA and free trade agreement, so those would be American and Mexican companies. They see an expanding market for education up here. We can't discriminate against them. We have to allow them to come in. Then the American schools have the right—our Ontario private sector schools don't—to lobby and to sue for equal treatment. What they could call the public system, then, is a subsidy.

So I'm wondering, has this been looked into? What are we walking into here by the process of transferring public money into the private sector? Under the national treatment clause, once that has been done—and we saw the experience with the Bob Rae government when he wanted to set up public auto insurance. He was threatened with a multi-billion-dollar lawsuit from State Farm and the other American companies in the field that if he went ahead he'd have to pay a lot of compensation. If we want to reverse this at some point, are we going to be facing these kinds of lawsuits, these kinds of threats? What are we walking into here and what is broken? Those are my real concerns.

1050

I don't know what is wrong with the public system. There's been a process, and other people have spoken to it: the \$2-billion cuts to public education, the dismantling of our public system in the sense that it's reducing choice, it's making the private school system look more attractive. There could be a possibility now that there's an expanding market there that's open. Others have spoken well to that.

But my question to you is, what is broken, to initiate this transfer of public money into the private schools? What's going to be the outcome? What are we facing under the free trade agreements and NAFTA? What research has been done on that? What kind of consultations—what are we walking into if we allow these American companies or Mexican companies to come in? What are we facing here? Those are the questions and real concerns I have.

Also, others have spoken to the lack of public debate on this bill. I know members in our own party, who have put years of work into the party, who are very alienated by this bill. I warn against the repercussions of this and I also ask what kind of study has been done as far as what we're walking into here.

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

Mr Kennedy: Thank you both for your presentations. Mr Orchard, I'd like to ask you—this is also a Conservative government, maybe a little more libertarian than Conservative in actual nature. The idea of the NAFTA effect: you may be aware, because it's just two pages in this bill, that it's wide open. Any private company can just fill in a three-quarter page information form and become a school in this province. If it is a high school and they want to give Ontario diplomas, they get inspected twice a year. If they don't want to, there are no inspections. In elementary schools there are no inspections whatsoever. So it's an absolute no-barrier entry into the market, I would agree, that has been created by this government. They created the market and now they're going to create the means to have it. There is a possibility they may address some of this in regulations, but the government of the day has said they want parents to have the choice.

Maybe you could comment on it for me. Why would a Conservative government take such a risk with the institution of public education? There is an institution that has served the country well; it has served it remarkably well, I would argue, in the last 10 and 20 years of immense change. A lot of that has been absorbed in there. I know Mr Wong has a view that didn't allow him to have confidence, and I wonder, after you answer that question, if he could tell us what he would like to see in the public system so that he would have more confidence in it for his family. I wonder, Mr Orchard, if you could answer that first.

Mr Orchard: Of course, our concern is NAFTA. You cannot discriminate. Under the national treatment clause,

the American corporations get the same treatment as Canadian citizens for their rights of investing in Canada. They can even get preferential treatment over out-of-province companies and schools. We've called for this, and actually this resolution has passed the federal Conservative Party, that there be a review done on the international agreements. Has this kind of work been done before in the proposition of this bill? You're right: we can't discriminate. Once they are set up here they can demand—and this is the question I would like to ask. Under the free trade agreements they can sue for equal treatment, which means that if the public system gets \$7,000 for students, they can sue for equal treatment. Has this been explored?

This idea that we're saving money by letting the private sector in here, I really question what kind of studies have been done. I'd like to see them. This has to be done. What are we walking into here?

Mr Marchese: Thank you, Mr Wong and Mr Orchard, for your presentations. Mr Orchard, I'm just going to say a few comments in agreement with you and then ask Mr Wong a question.

I agree with the position you put forward with respect to the national treatment clause. We have raised that concern with respect to this government's initiative to introduce for-profit universities in this province. We said to them that that will have implications, but Conservatives don't seem to worry about those areas, nor do the Liberals federally. The Liberals, it appears to me, are the biggest boosters of liberalized trade, and in fact in the next year or two they will probably throw services into the hopper too, as you indicated, which includes education and health. I am equally concerned, as a New Democrat, about what the feds are doing and what these people are doing.

Mr Orchard: I wouldn't let the federal government off the hook.

Mr Marchese: So they're both, in my view, implicated. I hope that Mr Hardeman might attempt to answer your question, which would be good to see.

Mr Wong, the reason you moved your children to the private system is because you were worried about the public system, and you are saying, "I don't want a tax credit, because that's a choice I made, but secondly, money will be taken out of the public system by giving a tax credit." Money has got to come out of the public purse, and you're saying, "Please don't take it out of the public purse to give it to those who make that choice. Improve the public system." That's your position, correct?

Mr Wong: Yes.

Mr Marchese: If you want to comment on that again—

Mr Wong: I think you mentioned my key point already. If you want something to emphasize it or a little more detail on that, then I would suggest that the private school system is already there for over 100 years and everybody can see it, and of course the governing party, this government, also can see it. Why can the private school do better than the public school? What I men-

tioned here is that we want to bring the public school in line with the private school. Whatever they can do, the public school can do the same way as well.

I don't know how much money is involved to improve the public school system, but there is still some way to improve with the money you give to the private school parents, which they do not need. Whatever is there, you still can build it up. I think in 17 years of my experience, and I always feel that, the teachers are working very closely with the parents and also in giving the child confidence to learn. The teacher always comforts the students, saying, "If you have any questions, anything you do not know, any time, it doesn't matter day or night, you can telephone," and the student can reach the teacher.

Now, I was never exposed to the public school system. I don't know whether they have it or not. The correlation between the teacher and student and the parents, that's what I'm saying.

The Chair: Thanks, Mr Wong. I have to go to the government side.

Mr Hardeman: Thank you, gentlemen, for your presentations. I want to discuss a little bit with you, Mr Wong, and I want to say that I agree with you that we do need to make sure that we have a strong public education system in this province. That's why I do think we need to put more money in, and we are this year putting \$360 million more into the education budget to make sure that we support that strong public school system. I wasn't as fortunate as you, I suppose, or unfortunate, however we may put it. My children are and were in the public school system and I'm happy with the results that they have received from that.

In your presentation, first of all, I want to say that I don't think you can totally attribute your daughter's success to the system. It would appear from what you have told us that a lot of that goes to you as a family and to her as a very bright individual who is going to do very well in society. We commend her for that. But because you could afford that—and if we take the assumption in your letter that the independent is a better system, and you could afford it, don't you think it's fair and equitable that for other people who want to make that choice but are not as able as you and I am to do that, that they should be given some assistance to be able to provide the type of education they believe is most important for their children?

1100

Mr Wong: No. I think the people who are sending children to private schools are already prepared. The money has been set aside from their normal spending to put into the private school. I think the money is already there. They don't need the tax credit on it. On the other side, I understand from these public hearings there have been so many people who have complained about why some school systems are getting the tax credit and the others don't get it. I understand there will be not sufficient money to give credits to everyone. If you do not have sufficient money to give everyone, why give to some? I would suggest don't give it to anyone.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr Wong: Because you don't have enough money, don't give to anyone. That is fair to everybody. If you give some to A and do not give it to B, C or D, it's not fair. So many people have said it's not fair, but I would suggest you make it fair. Everybody none.

The Chair: On behalf of the committee, gentlemen, thank you for your presentation this morning.

ANNA GERMAIN

The Chair: Our next presentation this morning is from Anna Germain. 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.

Ms Anna Germain: Hi. My name is Anna Germain.

The Chair: Go ahead whenever you are ready.

Ms Germain: Thank you. While I approach this committee today as a lone parent, I assure you that at the very least hundreds of parents across Ontario would sit with me in agreement. Since the government has chosen to name the private schools' tax credit the equity in education tax credit, I will begin with equity in education in Ontario.

Equity would mean that all students receive an excellent education. While it is questionable whether education in a private school is really better, since much of the time teachers are not required to have accreditation, all parents who choose these have a choice between private and public. They have a choice because they can afford it. They also receive federal tax deductions of various sorts. They are not under duress and freely make this choice by virtue of their buying power.

Further, in the US private institutions can freely raise tuitions because there are no restrictions on tuitions in the private school sector. Are there any restrictions on private school tuitions in Ontario? There aren't, and that's unfortunate. It seems that this could provide great incentive to view such schools as big business. Quality would surely suffer as cost minimization becomes the greater goal.

Currently, religious-based schools get hefty credits. I am told that federal tax credits would have to be decreased when the proposed tax credit begins. The results of such tax credits in the US are now denying access and supports in private schools to special education students. I have this documented if you need it. As the numbers grow, the cost of supporting these students is no longer a concern to these institutions, so they simply get rid of them or refuse to take them in. This is illustrated in a recent article from Los Angeles.

Where is the equity in the aftermath of propagating private schools through tax credits? For years I've heard critics say this government would fund private and charter schools while letting the public system die financially. I wondered if this could be. Well, they've got my attention now, I can tell you.

On a different note, I wish to zero in on the proposed plan. Based on a \$7,000 tuition, a tax credit of \$3,500

maximum will apply by the end of a five-year phase-in. Let's take a look at what happens when a student leaves the public system to go to a private school.

In year one, the credit is a maximum \$700—I'm dealing with maximums here. The public board loses \$7,000. The parent at the private school gets \$700. The difference—\$7,000 minus \$700—is \$6,300.

Who gets this \$6,300 that the public board has just lost? The government. Have I stumbled upon something here? The public board loses \$7,000, a family gets \$700, the Harris government gets \$6,300. How clever. How many times will this profit be multiplied? The losers are all the students in the public system, because their education is funded based on the number of pupils in attendance.

Year two of this phase-in plan: a \$1,400 tax credit. The public board loses \$7,000. The parent at the private school gets \$1,400. The difference is \$5,600. This story is simply too profitable, especially as the numbers increase.

In the year 2006, when it's complete, the government profits to the tune of \$3,500, while institutions revel in huge growth that this tax credit has engendered.

As the public system is eroded, or bled, where is the equity? You put "equity" in the title. Where is the equity?

The public system is in trouble financially. Even though government representatives keep making claims of what wondrous benefactors they are to our children's education, the reality is that there is bloodshed in our system. And private schools are absolutely not the solution.

Boards are facing huge cuts again this year: the TDSB, for instance, \$85 million. There are no more closets or toilet stalls to add to the square footage formula. Pools are closing. Books are falling apart. Busing is going. Many good staff have packed up and gone home. The funding formula is a failure. So I guess things are ripe for an exodus, aren't they? But things were not this dismal a few years ago.

I'm going to quote to you quickly from a few articles; I've just selected small passages. If you need the dates, they're pretty much this week.

From the Toronto Star: "More than 3,700 disabled children in Ontario are waiting for special education, up from 3,500 a year ago, according to a report released yesterday by People for Education. 'Things are getting worse,' Dyson says. We don't have enough education assistance. We don't have enough supports in programs, and that's all because costs have risen, there are more disabled children in need, and provincial funding isn't meeting those needs."

Another one: "Public schools need \$1.17 billion, group estimates.

"Ontario would have to spend \$1.17 billion more on education for its public schools to serve all 2 million students equally, so it has no business spending one penny on private schools, says a parents' group.... People for Education state that it would cost \$327 more for every elementary student to set things right.

"And when improvements to high school funding are included, the price tag for a fully supported school system exceeds \$1 billion, the group says.

"Now is not the time"—it is not the time—"to take money out of Ontario's public system and give parents an incentive to leave...." Don't cause an exodus.

Another one: "School cuts anger crowd.

"Angry and frustrated parents, teachers and community activists told the Toronto District School Board the time has come to tell Queen's Park there is nothing left to cut from the city's public schools."

Frankly, the proposed tax credit would not be so problematic if thousands of parents whose children are in the public system could get the access and services their children need to succeed because they have special needs through no fault of their own.

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Many students are not even in school this year, or have reduced attendance, and I've got plenty of supporting documents here, including about the lawsuits that are cropping up all over Ontario because of the funding formula. I should call it the underfunding formula, because that's definitely what it is.

The funding formula has pitted school boards and their staff against children who have a disability and their families. There is simply not enough funding to go around. Why hurt these vulnerable children? Because that is the result. Lawsuits are cropping up everywhere lately. Where is equity and justice? The government replies that funding has been increased. Do you know what? Until every parent can see that their child is successfully at school, with needed supports and services, in a dignified manner, it does not matter what claims you make because we know first-hand that it's a lie. Any way you slice it, it's a lie. We're tired of it.

For the record, many families, parent groups and representatives have told and written Janet Ecker conveying these serious problems, and she keeps saying that nobody has complained. She'll even tell people who have complained before that nobody has complained. I have evidence to support that here too, and some of it goes back three years. Clearly, parents and vulnerable children are simply a nuisance to this government. How unfortunate for Ontarians.

I am not here for myself or for my son today because he is blessed and has the support that he needs, and he is delighting in his ongoing success right now. But I have paid a very high personal price for this. I am fed up—fed up—of hearing about all the terrible situations around Ontario where the most vulnerable children in our society are being knocked, labelled and injured by the language, categories and devastating and humiliating claims that your blasted funding formula forces on them by any means that can be conjured up, and there is no exaggeration in this. None of it is even about educating them.

The worst that can be portrayed on paper, the more dollars they can generate. Even these dollars are greatly insufficient to meet the needs of these vulnerable, valuable and, yes, precious members of our society. They're

our children, not just files, as they are referred to in too many documents. A society cannot conceivably call itself enlightened when it does not take excellent care of its most vulnerable members. Frankly, Ontario does not score very high.

I have heard so much about the Common Sense Revolution and now all I see are senseless devices and a public education system teetering on the brink of disaster. While this proposed credit is not the cause of this, not one cent should be spent on it until—I emphasize “until”—the public system is brought back to health and all children with special-education needs are adequately supported and receive a real education, not funded baby-sitting and horrific labels; until they receive a real education without this terribly discriminating funding formula. Even the leaders of private schools should have enough of a conscience to realize this is the fair and equitable way that priorities should go.

Someone told me yesterday that if I made even a slight error in my calculations in this committee today I could get crucified. Well, I speak as a parent, not a board or professional organization, and this is my first address to such a committee. So I trust that you will respect that.

Further, I will never back down from doing what is right, whatever the cost. You are my government and you have a duty to protect my child and his education, as well as that of all children. This should not be an issue divided along party lines. Could this government not take the high road and give our children the education that they need and deserve? Clearly you feel that you have the money, or you wouldn't be proposing this. You are just deploying it in the wrong places for now. Do the right thing. Please shelve this credit for now. You have much more important business to attend to.

The Chair: We have one minute per caucus.

Mr Marchese: I thank you for your passionate defence of public education and defence of your own child, whom you obviously worry about and care about. I agree with everything you've said, except put this off for now. My view is that private education is private education.

Ms Germain: I'm trying to be diplomatic here and polite.

Mr Marchese: I appreciate that. I'm just saying to you that I don't think the role of the government ought to be to worry about private education. The role of government and our commitment ought to be how we protect the vast majority of people who are in a public system who have been whacked by this government with \$2.4 billion less, which is my concern, and ought to be the concern of government. They're saying, however, parents want choice, and if they want choice, it should be the role of government to simply help them out. That's what their argument is. What do you say to that argument, that if people choose to send them to different religious or non-denominational private schools it is a choice they make and they should be supported financially?

Ms Germain: It's difficult to answer that quickly. What will pan out, and this I get from your own staff—I got it right from the horse's mouth—is that when or if

this credit takes place the federal deductions and whatever it is that they receive currently would be decreased. The whole mix would be looked at as a whole, and don't think it would be \$3,500 just packed on to the rest of their benefits. Also, what they split between religious and education credits would be changed; they would have to become pretty much all education credits, and the religious component sort of becomes a moot point at that point.

Bless the people who want to go and get that. As I pointed out, teacher accreditation is absolutely not mandated, and who knows what that student is going to graduate with relative to the criteria that have been set up for the public system. I wouldn't want my son to go there even if I had the money—no way—and there are tons of parents who absolutely have the money and don't want anything to do with the private system. So I'm not sure what they're really talking about when they say “choice.” They've got the money; they're able to go. The public system can be absolutely excellent. Just put the money where it should be.

Mr Hardeman: Thank you very much for your passionate presentation. It was very well done. I guess your last comments are the ones that I find very helpful. You've made it a solid point that even if you could, you wouldn't move your child out of the public education system. I can relate to that. My children are in the public education system, and that's by my choice.

We had a presentation this morning by an individual who was running an independent school for totally special-needs children where parents were having great difficulty covering the cost of doing that. The lady who made the presentation was supportive of giving those parents some assistance in paying those tuition costs. Do you see that as a negative to the public—

Ms Germain: Which schools are you referring to? I wasn't here to have the benefit of hearing that presentation.

Mr Hardeman: It's not relevant. It's the Kohai school here in Toronto. But it's not the issue of which school it is. That's a choice that parents make because they think that's the most appropriate way to deal with the education of their children. Do you not see that there's a positive to that?

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Ms Germain: What I could say to that is, having been very involved in education and these types of concerns, I'm a strong proponent that all children belong right in the midst of society, and that means in the schools. Children benefit from being in the regular schools because that's what life is about, that's society. You don't graduate at 21 and, “Hello, society, I've never known you, you've never known me, but let's get along.” It doesn't work that way.

Also, the greatest beneficiary of what I call inclusion, letting the children be in their neighbourhood schools, not segregated way out, busing and so forth, is society. Society benefits by it the most. You would probably find

less problems in the schools with students who would be brought in to even be support to these kids.

Mr Kennedy: Ms Germain, thank you very much for your presentation. The member opposite was referring to the Kohai school, which charges parents up to \$25,000 to look after their children. I guess I would consider that in large part to be occurring when there's failure within the public school system to provide for children with special needs. The interesting thing, of course, is that \$24,000 and \$12,000, which is the range of fees at this school, are exactly the amounts for ISA 2 and ISA 3.

Ms Germain: Isn't it \$27,000?

Mr Kennedy: Something in that order. I think ironically the amount of money being charged here is exactly the amount of money that the government isn't giving.

I know you have this expertise. The contrast here is between a government that makes children such as yours—and I know you know other families—fill out paperwork, mountains and mountains and mountains of paperwork, duplicate, triplicate, assessments. You mentioned something about the negative language that is used to describe them. At the end of the day, that brings no funding to those children. At the end of the day, it's just a process centralized. On the other hand, the government is proposing to give tax credits of the kind you describe, and all your figures have been accurate, to private schools with no paperwork, no accountability, no torturing of the parents to have their kids described. I just wonder if you could add to that?

Ms Germain: I didn't read it, but as I mentioned, in the US they've tried this private schools funding and it has already backfired significantly. If someone wanted to see it, I've got an e-mail from the US. In LA they are actually refusing and pushing children with special-education needs out of there, because in their private schools they no longer want to pay the dollars to support the children. So they're just pushing them out.

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

CHRISTINA MONTES
TATUM WILSON

The Chair: Our next presentation is from Christina Montes and Tatum Wilson. I would ask the two presenters to come forward. On behalf of the committee, welcome. You have 20 minutes.

Ms Christina Montes: My names is Christina Montes and I am representing the Toronto-York Region Labour Council. The labour council represents thousands of workers in the city of Toronto and York region. Our members rely on a strong, fully funded public education system. Public education was set up to allow all parents, especially working parents, to send their children to school. A tax credit does not help most of the parents in the city of Toronto. It is an inequity to students when taxpayers' money will be moved away from the public system into the private schools. The Minister of Education, Janet Ecker, said that \$300 million to \$700 million will

be removed from the public schools. Add this to the fact that the public education system is severely underfunded, and we will see the full destruction of public education.

There are schools without textbooks and without the resources needed to help the children of Ontario. There are not enough teachers; there are not enough educational assistants in our schools. Classes are still large, and there is not enough money for special-needs students. The reason? The underfunding of public education by your government.

I would like to quote from today's Toronto Star:

"The Ontario government has cut \$2.3 billion from school boards over the past six years, a new report charges...."

"Toronto-area schools took a 12% funding cut since 1997, a \$728-million loss, said economist Hugh Macenzie...."

In addition, your own government, in your submission to the United Nations, said that the direction which you are now taking—and I quote from the Tory submission to the United Nations, "It will fragment our society." You have no mandate to fragment society.

There are other major reasons why you should withdraw the portion of the bill that gives a tax credit to private schools. First of all, you have not adequately consulted with the public. Research shows that Ontarians are opposed to the tax credit. You have not done the research that shows that a major shift in educational policy will be beneficial to the children of Ontario, and you will not be able to deal with the fallout. Taxes should be used for the public good.

Let me read to you from the statement of educational policy of the Toronto District Christian High School. It says Toronto District Christian High School, along with other independent schools, "rejects the intrusion of a government-imposed curriculum"—the government may not dictate the content or the religious philosophical direction of that instruction—"only totalitarian governments attempt to invade the minds of citizens."

If we look at Bethel Baptist School, they say, "Most of our curriculum comes from A Beka Books publications ... so that students receive an education from a biblical point of view." A Beka Books is located in Pensacola, Florida, and it refutes the man-made idea of evolution.

I ask you, do these statements represent the people of Ontario? I would say no. What we need is one fully funded public education system where all children can be educated so that our society does not become fragmented, so that we learn to live together and not apart. I ask you to delete the portion of the bill related to the tax credit and consult further with the public as to the direction that we should be taking in public education.

Mr Tatum Wilson: My name is Tatum Wilson and I am here as a concerned citizen and someone educated completely through public education.

I oppose the tax credit for private school tuition outlined in Bill 45. I oppose it for several reasons. First and foremost, I fundamentally believe in a strong and effective public education system that provides for all of

Ontario's children. I recognize that there are people who, for a variety of reasons, don't want to have their children educated in that public system or, for other reasons, would prefer to have their children educated through private schooling. I in no way would try to deny parents that right. However, that right should not be supported by a tax credit like Bill 45 suggests. It is hypocritical to say on one hand that you support public education but then to continue to belittle it by encouraging people to remove their children from it.

I was born and raised in Ontario, right here in Toronto, and started and finished my education in the public education system. As a gifted student in a special-education program, my needs were constantly adequately addressed and met. My fellow students who had other special needs, including learning disabilities, artistic programming, athletic programming or second-language learning, also had their needs addressed and met. There is no reason to believe that I would have had a better education in private school.

Some would argue that public education right now is not as good as it once was. My obvious and initial response to that is to stop the consistent and ongoing attack on education, students and teachers. However, that is not the issue right now. If people are going to suggest that public education is not as good as it once was, the logical answer to that is not to encourage people to leave but instead to encourage people to stay in the system and support it through both adequate funding and support.

All of the above reasons that I've given for why I don't support Bill 45 and the tax credit I believe are adequate reasons to not allow it. However there is one truly important reason why I don't support this tax credit and that is the issue of discrimination. Under current regulations, private and independent schools are not required to follow the Ontario Human Rights Code. As a gay person and as a person of colour, I find this to be a shameful and unacceptable denial of my right as an Ontarian.

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This government claims that the reason they believe in the tax credit is the issue of choice. As I mentioned, as someone who is gay, I am not going to be given the same choice as other people. As someone who might have a lower income, I'm not going to be given the same choice as other people. Finally, as someone who one day hopes to be a parent, my children are not going to be given the same choice as other people.

Currently, I volunteer for a Toronto District School Board publicly funded program called Speak Out. This is a program that involves going into Toronto public junior high schools and Toronto public high schools to do anti-homophobia workshops.

While I do value and appreciate the diversity that already exists in our public schools, clearly, through my experience both in school as a student and through the workshops I run, there is still a certain level of discrimination that goes on in our public schools based on a variety of issues. This is in a system that has a clearly

written anti-discrimination code that is meant to not allow this stuff. What would be left of gay students in schools that will either not allow them or will teach them that all of their experiences are unnatural and immoral? This is not choice and this is not fair and this cannot be supported by a government that is claiming to have the best interests of students in mind.

In closing, I would like to stress my belief in our public education system. I realize that it is currently flawed and that it is not without its problems. However, I would implore this government to abandon the idea of a tax credit and instead to choose to adequately fund our public education system and make it so that people don't feel the need that they have to leave.

Thank you very much for this opportunity.

The Chair: Thank you. We have a couple of minutes per caucus and I'll start with the government side.

Mr Stewart: Just a comment. I can appreciate your concern about discrimination. Unfortunately, it does run rampant in some areas, not only in this province but maybe around the world. You talk about discrimination, yet you don't want any tax credits for private or religious schools. Isn't that a type of discrimination as well?

Mr Wilson: No, I don't believe that's a type of discrimination when you have the greater goal of public education in mind. I believe in the right of people to send their children to private school. I don't think that is the problem. They should obviously have that right. However, in a program that is by and large going to be supported by this government that I'm supposed to feel comfortable with, I have trouble believing that they are willing to support people who are looking to teach their children, regardless of what their choice is, that my lifestyle, what I do, what children are doing, whatever, is wrong, is immoral. It's a matter of choosing whose choice is more valuable, and I don't believe that choice supersedes my right to live freely and believe that my government is supportive of me as a person.

Mr Stewart: I don't think it does either, and I can assure you that in my riding—and I can name the names: the Rhema Elementary Christian School, which is from the Dutch community, Montessori, Grace Christian Academy—they do not teach discrimination. What your lifestyle is, is entirely your business, and I appreciate that.

But I guess my concern is that on the one hand you're talking about discrimination here—

The Chair: The question, Mr Stewart, because you are just about out of time.

Mr Stewart: —and on the other one you're asking for discrimination against the other people.

The Chair: Thank you. I'll have to go to the official opposition.

Mr Dalton McGuinty (Leader of the Opposition): Thank you for your presentation today. I think perhaps the greatest mystery connected with this policy development is why the government is doing this. They made very compelling and cogent arguments for a number of years against doing this kind of thing. Mike Harris said

during the course of the leaders' debate in the last provincial campaign that he would not do this. He wrote to me in January of last year, as did the Minister of Education herself, saying that this kind of policy would tend to fragment and weaken public education. They made very compelling arguments before the UN, in a thick legal brief, saying this was not a good idea, that it would cause harm not only to public education but to our society at large in much the same way you talked about here.

Any insights that you might share with us, or speculation even, as to why the government is doing this?

Ms Montes: I believe that you have to look at two things. You have to look at the underfunding of education along with the tax credit and voucher. The reason I say it's a voucher is because usually in a voucher system they give you the money up front; here they're giving you the money later. It doesn't matter when you get the money, it's still technically a voucher. So what does all this lead to? First of all, you underfund education; that means it has no money. With a voucher, every time a student leaves the public system, \$7,000 is taken out of public education—further underfunding. If you underfund the public system so much that it cannot deliver quality public education, that's why I said the public system will be destroyed. And what will we have in Ontario? A voucher system with private schools, which is where I think this government has always wanted to go and where it is going right now. That is not fair because they do not have any mandate to do this.

Mr Marchese: Thank you both for the presentation. I have a curious question that I've been asking from time to time, because Mr Flaherty came here the other day and said that he's heard from people who want their own education in their own culture and religion. I was taken aback by that wonderful feeling of responsiveness to these communities that I guess have been left out or hurt. I put that in the context of wondering, if he is so concerned about those communities that have been asking for their own education in their culture and religion, why he wouldn't worry about the fact that we're losing our heritage language programs, the international languages program at the Toronto board, which teach language and culture. They got rid of the \$750,000 that went to ESL from the Ministry of Citizenship. They got rid of the Welcome Houses that receive new immigrants so they can better prepare themselves to live in this society. They have gotten rid of the Anti-Racism Secretariat that deals with issues of anti-racism. They got rid of any reference to issues of equity in the new curriculum changes that they brought about. Equity doesn't appear anywhere. They also got rid of employment equity that would often deal with some often discriminatory things that have happened to various communities in Ontario.

In light of that, what happened that this government all of a sudden says, "People have been talking to us and they want their own education so they could have their own culture and religion"? What do you think happened that they would do this, while all along, in practice, they've been eliminating anything that deals with issues

of fairness and equity for so many of our communities? Do you have a sense of why they might have done that?

Ms Montes: My personal belief is that they have done this because they are low in the polls and they don't think they're going to be re-elected, so they're trying to find votes and say, "Let's get some votes from the religious community." If you look at the polls, they're way down there, so where are you going to get the votes?

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

B'NAI BRITH CANADA

The Chair: Our next presentation this morning is from B'nai Brith Canada. 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 morning.

Ms Toni Silberman: Good morning. My name is Toni Silberman. I am senior vice-president of B'nai Brith Canada and chair of its League for Human Rights, Ontario region. I am joined by John Syrtash, chair of the B'nai Brith Canada Commission on School Funding; Georganne Burke, member of both the League for Human Rights and the funding commission; and Aaron Blumenfeld, who is a member of the funding commission.

I would also like to indicate to this committee the full support of our organization for equity in education funding, as evidenced by the presence of our national president, Rochelle Wilner, and our executive vice-president, Frank Dimant. We all coincidentally have or have had children in the Jewish day school system and will be happy to respond to any questions you have on our presentation.

B'nai Brith Canada is the senior Jewish organization in Canada representing the Jewish community, with a history in this country of 126 years of community service, voluntarism and advocacy. Our League for Human Rights is considered to be Canada's foremost human rights agency dedicated to combatting anti-Semitism, bigotry, hate and racism.

On their behalf, I thank you for the opportunity to address this issue so vital to members of our community and to all Ontario's school children. Many of our constituents have children in independent Jewish day schools, and those of our members in sister provinces, have, with the assistance of their provincial governments, long enjoyed the economic relief and freedom necessary to convey their heritage to their children—assistance which does not, I might add, affect the system of public education in their respective communities.

We laud the Ontario government's initial gesture to recognize the need for similar financial relief, and are pleased to lend our support to these efforts. They are, we feel, entirely consistent with the Premier's promise to our, and other, faith-based communities to explore possible avenues for ensuring equality in education funding. Even certain political party leaders have themselves

stated they are not philosophically opposed to assisting denominational schools.

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What I would like to do in the brief time available is address just a few of the canards, the mythology, that has accompanied this reasoned and just movement toward educational equality and school choice. Critics of the proposed tax credit for independent schools have over the past weeks tended to reduce serious discussion of the substantive issues to the level of emotion, demagoguery or ad hominem attacks.

When myths go unchallenged, they begin to gain currency in the press and among members of the public. As we view it, the purpose of this tax credit is to return all children to a level playing field, with parents of all colours, socio-economic levels, classes and faiths being able to choose from among the widest range of schools possible, to provide the kind of education that responds to the needs of Ontario's children.

Myth number 1: Public schools are the only institutions transmitting our democratic values, and they alone foster tolerance and anti-racist attitudes. The corollary to that myth is that private and denominational schools foster racial segregation, cultural divisiveness and social fragmentation.

Tolerance is defined as "the capacity for or the practice of recognizing and respecting the beliefs or practices of others" and "a disposition to allow freedom of choice and behaviour." Tolerance manifests itself in many ways, such as racial integration, religious freedom and, yes, school choice. Several key studies have been done in recent years comparing the development of tolerance and strong civic values in both independent and publicly funded schools.

It is true, the ideal of the public school, where students learn respect for their fellow citizens by mixing with students of different backgrounds was, and continues to be, central to the justification of the public funding of education, bringing together children of widely differing social and economic strata, rather than developing an elitist ethos. These schools are held up as the great leveller.

However, studies on this subject, which we will provide to members of this committee, along with our expanded brief, suggest that in reality public schools are not the unifying institutions in our society. The fact is that many public schools are already segregated, both racially and economically, based on community demographics. On the other hand, a mounting body of evidence clearly demonstrates that far from being segregationist enclaves, private schools, on average, are better integrated than public schools, help reduce the socio-economic achievement gap and help increase the level of integration between racial and socio-economic groups within their schools.

It follows, then, that expanding access to private schools is likely to improve integration in education, and not lead to race wars, ethnic cleansing and genocide, as some critics purport.

An ancillary myth to this is the belief that tax credits to independent schools will result in "skimming" the best and brightest students for their schools. However, the concept of "creaming" or "skimming" applies more aptly to the current funded regime. As things stand now, it is predominantly those who are better off, who can choose freely, who may "cream" their children from one public school to another, while other, less fortunate students are left behind.

As well, within the public school system, the wealthier school districts inadvertently promote segregation by only accepting the privileged students who live within their boundaries, or within the artificial attendance areas which the district itself has created. Private and denominational schools have no geographic limits to attendance, thus ensuring a more representative cross-section of students.

Private schools, especially faith-based schools, transcend political and neighbourhood boundaries to gather a more racially and financially mixed student body, as opposed to the geographic criteria which tend to reinforce segregation. Better integration leads to better race and ethnic relations, which promotes greater tolerance and harmony. In truth, racial and ethnic conflict and fighting is more of an issue in the public schools than in the private schools. Racially diverse schools prepare students to compete in a racially diverse world.

Private and denominational schools have a long history of promoting civil obedience, social justice and charitable works, and creating good, solid citizens who are respectful of their fellow human beings. They can boast long lists of distinguished alumni in many diverse occupations such as lawyers, doctors, accountants, union leaders, teachers—indeed, virtually every occupation—who integrate widely into Ontario's social fabric and working world. And here I cite as examples Professor Irving Abella; Irwin Cotler, member of Parliament; the Reichmann family; and Mr Justice Sam Filer.

Myth number 2: The provision of funding to independent schools is tantamount to a voucher system which will decimate the public school system. The tax credit proposed does not represent, as some have suggested, a fundamental change in education, nor does it necessarily raise the spectre of the dreaded V word. Memories are short, because educational choice is not an alien phenomenon to this province.

You may recall that there was once a time when attendance in a public school was rigidly restricted to that institution which was around the corner, within walking distance, part of the neighbourhood. Over the past 30 years or so, beginning around the time I became a teacher, demographics changed, interests changed, needs changed and the successive Ministries of Education responded. Initially, this change allowed for a 5% buffer, that is, 5% of a particular school's population could come from outside the neighbourhood. This concept was eventually expanded to a board-wide basis, so that any child was allowed to attend any school within that board's jurisdiction. And parents made their choices.

Some transferred to schools which could maximize their child's theatrical, musical, scientific or athletic talent; others, to schools which could address their child's special needs. This movement was, and is, officially sanctioned and fully subsidized.

Are the religious and cultural imperatives which determine where a parent sends a child to be educated, in order to support—and I quote Madam Justice Claire L'Heureux Dubé of the Supreme Court of Canada—"the educational practices necessary to ensure future membership in these faiths," any less meritorious?

Further, parents have always exercised school choice, as parents buy or rent property in a school district according to the public schools available in that district, ie, where the quality of public schools is high.

The tax credit proposal does not yet represent full choice, and it is not a tuition voucher. We view it, quite simply, as the first step in recognizing, consistent with the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights—to which Canada is a signatory and thereby, through extension, so are its provinces—that all parents have a right to choose which system of education best suits the needs of their child. It is providing parents with a small portion of the public education funding they already pay through their taxes, to allow their children to attend the school of their choice. Such a system empowers the family and, rather than reducing accountability, infuses the system with consumer accountability.

Myth number 3: The tax credit would cause an avalanche of applications, a veritable mass exodus from the public school system in favour of independent schools. This can be responded to on a number of fronts.

First of all, there is absolutely no evidence in any jurisdiction in Canada, or for that matter anywhere in the world, of mass exoduses from the publicly funded system upon funding of alternative independent or religious schools. In Canada specifically, in those provinces where other schools have been funded, fully 90% to 96% of students remain in the public school system. That is because the public schools in our country by and large meet the needs of its children. That will not change as a result of this initiative.

It is true that the independent schools reach out to children who do not benefit from the public school system. But that's OK, because the goal is to do what's best for the student, not the school system. To assume that students will run for the exit doors if given the chance is, in truth, a sad and damning commentary on what critics of the proposed tax credit really think about our public schools.

Secondly, and with all respect to the government, 10% of a portion of the tuition is not that extensive. For those with children currently enrolled in the public school system, even the promise of a tax credit of \$3,500 in five years' time would hardly be adequate incentive to go from paying absolutely nothing to paying a tuition of anywhere from \$7,000 to \$15,000 in after-tax dollars.

With regard to denominational schools, this is, as I have indicated, not a matter of choice, but rather religious

imperative. Those who need to send their children to denominational schools because of the tenets of their faith are already doing so, despite the sometimes ruinous financial burden.

Make no mistake: the proposed tax credit is not a ruse to subsidize only the wealthy. The mean income of parents of denominational school-children is virtually identical to their public school counterparts, according to socio-economic measures. The difference is that denominational school parents are severely handicapped and penalized because of the high cost of tuition.

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Myth number 4: If independent schools are subsidized, the public school system will not be able to withstand the resulting market-driven educational system. The public school system has long held a monopoly on where and how students can receive schooling at public expense. It does not have to compete for a consumer base, and therefore has no real incentive for success and no real consequence for failure.

But deepening dissatisfaction with traditional public schools has changed the landscape. There are those who believe the public system would do better if it had to compete for customers. Experience in other jurisdictions has demonstrated that the expansion of public funding has served to motivate the mainstream bureaucracy to provide programs and curricula to attract diverse segments of the school-going public. Studies have also shown that the competition between private and public schools decreases racial and income segregation and increases school productivity and student achievement, that these achievements do not require higher spending and that there is no evidence that it increases creaming or skimming.

Nobel Prize-winning economist Milton Friedman offers the following: "Only a truly competitive educational industry can empower the ultimate consumers of educational services—parents and children."

Competition encourages new methods of teaching, as well as new types of educational institutions. Freedom of choice and the rules of the marketplace are guarantees against the shortcomings and inefficiencies of a public system.

Some critics within the public school system are motivated by the challenge to their bureaucratic power posed by the perceived threat of choice, or their jobs as union leaders or teachers. Others are motivated by misunderstandings and misplaced concerns. Most of these arguments are spurious and stem from a lack of knowledge of the facts, or irrational fear and intolerance.

Ironically, many people who oppose the tax credit proposal—to wit, school choice—have themselves chosen private or faith-based schools for their own children. If the public school isn't good enough for their children, why should it be good enough for anyone else's?

Mr John Syrtash: My name is John Syrtash. I'm chair of the fair funding commission for B'nai Brith. I just wish to conclude with these words:

On June 12, 2001, the day before yesterday, we witnessed a barometer of real hatred and intolerance. It did not come from any graduate of the independent school community. It came, rather, from those who wish to muzzle democracy and intimidate the Minister of Finance. It came from those who wish to stomp on the right of parents to choose the value system most appropriate for their children without severe financial burden. The riot, sponsored by the Ontario Coalition Against Poverty, is a tyrannical attempt to terrorize this Legislature. It is deplored not only by B'nai Brith Canada but by all the communities who foster tolerance in both the public and independent schools. The true intolerance lies with those who oppose such tax credits, and this riot only proves how irrational some of those individuals and groups have become. We applaud this government's refusal to be cowed by such violent tactics, and offer our heartfelt support for the government, for Mr Flaherty, the MPPs here and the young workers at Mr Flaherty's constituency office who were the victims of this intolerance.

The policy objective of the tax credit bill 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 form of the education funding regime.

Freedom of choice is not a privilege, but we feel it is a right conferred by the Charter of Rights. It is the fundamental right of parents to direct the education and upbringing of their children, yet it appears that the public education lobby worries that a freer approach to schooling would empower parents. How paradoxical. They therefore take the position that parents are incapable of and not to be trusted with making informed decisions for and about their children's education. Proponents of imposing public education on all appear to be more interested in fighting to preserve an inequitable status quo than in fighting to create equity for all children. Yet the recent National Post poll clarified that the majority of Ontarians support this legislation and the right of parents to choose.

By implementing the tax credit proposal for independent schools, the government is not introducing school choice, but it is merely making it more possible for parents to make such a choice. It is allowing parents to find learning environments that maximize learning for their children, and it must trust the parents to make the right decision for their children.

Respect for diversity and pluralism, for the individual and common good, is a cornerstone of a good education. Public education should not merely be what goes on within the walls of a publicly governed school. It should be the public's responsibility to educate all our children, whatever their needs are.

I just wish to add in conclusion that our community's ancient sage, Rabbi Hillel, quoted from the Jewish Bible when he said: "Zek Kallal Gadol haTorah, 'V'eya Havta Lerayacha Kamocha'." This means, "This is the greatest rule of the Torah: you shall love your neighbour as your-

self." We are called upon to love our neighbours and our neighbours' children as ourselves. Distinguished members of the Legislature, this is all we ask of you. Thank you very much.

The Chair: We have one minute per caucus before the bell goes. I'll start with the official opposition.

Mr McGuinty: Thank you very much for your presentation.

The government would portray this policy as a sincere effort to address the fairness issue. I don't believe that's what the government is all about in this. Tell me, what is your opinion with respect to the tax credit, as the government calls it, being afforded to those who send their children to secular schools or even to for-profit secular schools? Why and how is that part of a fairness solution? If you don't support that, then that's fine too.

Mr Syrtash: We believe that the policy of the government, if we understand it correctly, is to give parents a choice, and we know that there are not only members of faith communities but people who wish to send their children to other schools, whether they're special-needs schools or different types of independent schools, who do so for various reasons. It's very difficult to pigeonhole one parent or another. I believe the government's policy, which we support, is to give parents a choice. The idea of some kind of a means test or some such thing would be completely antithetical to giving parents a choice, because it really depends upon the child's needs in any given situation.

The Chair: Mr Marchese.

Mr Marchese: Thank you for your presentation.

There are many questions I probably would be asking, but within one minute—it struck me on one of the pages—it's not numbered—where you say, "The public school system has long held a monopoly on where and how students can receive schooling at public expense. It does not have to compete for a consumer base and therefore has no real incentive for success and no real consequences for failure." It's a bit damning, that comment, I think, in terms of what you're suggesting. What it says, therefore, because of it is that the private schools of course do a better job. You say that, "Studies have also shown that the competition between private and public schools decreases racial and income segregation"—I'd like to see some of these studies, by the way, if you have them—"and increases school productivity and student achievement." They're interesting studies, and I would have liked to have commented on that, but the damning remarks about the system having no real incentive for success nor real consequence for failure strikes me a little bit. If that were the case, my objective as someone who supports the public system would be to say, "We've got to fix this, and we've got to do it now." Are you worried or concerned about that at all?

Mr Frank Dimant: Of course we would support your contention and conclusion that the public schools—

Mr Marchese: It's not my conclusion, it's yours, but I'm saying if that were so—

Mr Dimant: No. You came to the conclusion that public school systems should be enhanced and improved, and by all means we certainly support that notion. But by the same token, we are saying that the system of independent and denominational school systems may in fact move the public school system to reflect more effectively on the manner in which it's providing services. I think in a democratic society where we appreciate a variety of institutions and exchanges and possibilities for differing opinions, this will add one more dimension to our wonderful democracy.

Mr Marchese: It's almost like moving to a private health care system and that that kind of competition would be good for us.

Mr Dimant: I now think you're jumping.

Mr Marchese: I don't know.

The Chair: We have to go to Mr O'Toole, because we're going to run out of time.

Mr O'Toole: Thank you very much for your presentation this morning. It does add some credibility and authentic representation of the historic struggle that you've defined here.

I want to put clearly on the record that the Leader of the Opposition, Mr McGuinty, has had three positions, at least, of which you cited one, "I'm not ideologically opposed," in writing. You can't have it both ways.

Mr Bryant respectfully said, "I can't suck and blow. I've got to support this."

Mr Kwinter, and I respect his great experience here, and his integrity, said, "I'm not thrilled with the idea," but in many ways he's supportive of it.

What I'm saying to you is that it takes courage to make a difference. I think you summarized it quite respectfully in your presentation where you talked about maintaining the current system: "If the public school isn't good enough for our children"—

The Chair: Mr O'Toole.

Mr Kwinter: Mr O'Toole, I just want to correct that. You give the impression that I'm not thrilled with the idea of what the government is doing. That's not what I said. You just misquoted me.

Mr O'Toole: You've interrupted, and I'll clarify that on a point of order.

The Chair: Mr O'Toole, you must pose your question, because the bell is ringing.

Mr O'Toole: My question is, do you think that preserving the status quo is preserving the inequity that you speak to?

Mr Dimant: Absolutely. We're in total conformity with that. The status quo is inequitable, full stop.

Mr O'Toole: On a point of order, Mr Chair: In respect to Mr Kwinter, I would like to cite for the record, "I'm not thrilled with the idea of saying we're going to repeal it"—the tax credit. That was in the Toronto Star on May 12, 2001.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr O'Toole.

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

I must apologize to the next two presenters, because we are somewhat late, but we will come back right after the bell to hear your presentations. If you'll bear with us, we'll be back in about five to 10 minutes at the most.

We will recess until after the vote.

The committee recessed from 1201 to 1210.

ISLAMIC SOCIETY OF NORTH AMERICA, CANADIAN CHAPTER

The Chair: I'd like to get your attention. We'll bring the committee back to order.

Our next presentation will be from the Islamic Society of North America, Canadian chapter. I would ask the presenters to state your names for the record. On behalf of the committee, welcome. You have 20 minutes for your presentation.

Interjections.

The Chair: Mr Hardeman, could you have the discussion outside, please?

Go ahead, sir.

Mr Muhammad Khalid: My name is Muhammad D. Khalid. With me is Deena Thakib.

Good afternoon, Mr Chairman, and honourable members of the committee. Thank you for giving us the opportunity to make a presentation to you today.

My name is Muhammad D. Khalid. I'm the director of education for the Islamic Society of North America, Canadian chapter. I'm also a director of Ontario Parents for Equality in Education Funding, OPEEF for short. My colleague Robert Samery, who is the president of OPEEF, has already made a presentation to this committee on Monday, June 11, 2001, and I fully endorse the brief which he gave here.

With me this afternoon is Deena Thakib, a past student of ISNA Islamic School in Mississauga. I will be sharing the presentation with her. She will give you her perspective on attending a religious school and what it meant to her.

The Islamic Society of North America—Canada is a grassroots umbrella organization representing Muslims in Canada. ISNA Canada has been involved with other multi-faith groups such as Jews, Sikhs, Christians, Hindus and Greek Orthodox for equal funding of all independent schools in Ontario. ISNA Canada operates a couple of schools and has a liaison with most of the other Muslim schools in Ontario. There are currently 27 Muslim schools in Ontario, with a total enrolment of between 2,500 and 3,000.

The announcement of the refundable equity in education 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, the Premier and the finance minister for this bold and courageous step.

The news release explained the policy rationale for the legislation: "The equity in education tax credit would

assist parents who want their children educated in their religion and culture but find the cost of sending their children to independent schools prohibitive.... The equity in education tax credit puts the needs of parents and students first by offering choice to parents who want their children educated in their own culture and religion.”

The fact that the credit is to be refundable is a very strong signal that it is 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 government, by providing this tax credit, has recognized the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948, article 26, “Parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children”; and the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of the Child (1959), principle 7, para 2, “The best interests of the child shall be the guiding principle of those responsible for his education and guidance; that responsibility lies in the first place with his parents.”

Second, the Ontario government, by the provision of this tax credit, has partially provided a remedy for the UN Human Rights Committee ruling in November 1999 which held Canada and Ontario in violation of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights by providing funding only to Catholic schools.

The tax credit fits in very well with the initiatives this government has undertaken to strengthen the role of the parents through the Ontario Parent Council and the school councils in each and every school. The government has also extended the choice of a public school to parents.

It is alleged that the tax credit will benefit the rich and wealthy parents who send their kids to elite schools such as Upper Canada College. 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 demands nothing less. They forgo many other worthwhile uses for the money, such as RRSPs, vacations or paying off mortgages or loans.

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

Since the announcement of the tax credit there has been a constant barrage of criticism from different quarters. The criticism has revolved around a few important issues. I would like to deal with two of them: that the tax credit will lead to a mass exodus of children from the public system to the private schools; and that school choice will fragment society, and will lead to segregation. Let me deal with these points one by one.

(1) The notion that the tax credit will lead to an exodus of children from the public system is not supported by actual experience. In Alberta and British Columbia, for example, over 90% of all families choose the public system in spite of government funding for a variety of alternatives. This percentage has stayed relatively constant over the last many years. The vast majority of families are not getting away from something as much as they are seeking a pedagogical or religious framework for the education of their children.

Establishing a school which meets the standards of literacy, numeracy and civic-mindedness is no small task. This tax credit will be given to the parent after the parent has already spent the money. Most of the parents who send their kids to private schools have a hard time to come up with the money up front.

(2) The argument that school choice will fragment the society is not supported by any facts. It has not happened in all the jurisdictions that have provided any funding to independent schools.

Let me give you the story of my own family. My wife and I have four children. The first Islamic school was established in 1983 by ISNA in Mississauga. At that time, my first two children were going to a public school in grades 3 and 2. I realized that what we were teaching them at home was not reinforced at school. My wife and I made the decision to transfer the kids to the Islamic school with a substantial financial commitment which would span the next 15 years.

My children participated in all sorts of sports in the community, such as soccer, skating and swimming. When they were participating in these sports, they were not exclusive to the children from their own school. Our oldest boy graduated from the Islamic school after finishing grade 8 and went to Oakville Trafalgar High School for his high school, since our community could not afford a high school of our own. The other three children followed in his footsteps. Our children had absolutely no difficulty in relating to other children in the public school. They had no identity crisis. By high-school age they were well-grounded in their faith and culture. Our oldest boy is now in third year medicine. My daughter just finished teachers' college and is going to be a math and science teacher in a public high school. She wants to be a mentor and a role model for all kids in general, and Muslim children in particular. Our second boy has just finished first-year university at the University of Toronto, and our second daughter is in grade 12.

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The cost of sending our kids to non-funded school is that we won't have the retirement others will, we could not take the vacations others have and our kids have not been able to keep up materially with others. Is this fair in Ontario? My story, by the way, is not unique. There are countless stories of the same nature.

The children who graduated from our school have gone into many professions, such as law, pharmacy, engineering, communication, high tech, journalism and teaching, and are becoming productive members of

society. Think about the children from the Jewish, Christian and Sikh schools. Where do they go after graduation? They are in all sorts of professions and doing rather well. Are there any studies that show that these children had difficulty getting along with the graduates from the public system? These are pure myths, may I add, perpetuated by the opponents of the tax credit.

It is noteworthy that the honourable Leader of the Opposition is a product of the religious-based Catholic school system, and he is a productive member of society and has not fragmented society. The Catholic system has been in place for more than 150 years, and it has not fragmented society. It is ironic that the Leader of the Opposition got his education and his children's education through a religious-based system, fully paid for by the state, and he is vehemently opposing the same right to other religious minorities. For him, "justice" is spelled "just us." What would you call this stance?

In closing, the equity in education tax credit recognizes that the status quo is no longer tenable, because it gives parental choice to only those who want secular public schools and those who want Catholic schools. A single, publicly funded system of common schools was never tenable in Ontario. The equity in education tax credit recognizes that such a system is even less tenable in the future, because it would not adequately accommodate parental choice in the education of children.

Ms Deena Thakib: Mr Chairman and committee members, I thank you for allowing me the opportunity to address you today about my personal experience in an Islamic school.

At the young age of six, my parents felt that I, as their daughter, was not thriving in the public school system. My parents, who were active in my education, were in and out of the school on a daily basis, meeting with teachers, parents and the principal. I simply was not thriving. Then they heard of an Islamic school that opened in Mississauga. We lived in Toronto at the time, but my parents insisted that they pay a visit to the school. Soon enough, they decided to pull me out of public school. To my teachers' and my principal's disappointment, my parents insisted that they knew their daughter better than any education official and that this would be something different and something new for me to try.

In the first couple of months at Isna Islamic School, I was far behind my classmates academically. I didn't go out for recess because I had to catch up, and my teachers, who were and still are embarrassingly underpaid and overworked, dedicated every school day to ensuring that I progressed.

Being a first generation Canadian and growing up in an Egyptian household, for the first time I felt less different from my classmates. I felt comfortable. My mom no longer had to pack me a separate lunch on hot-dog days for fear that I would eat pork, and my parents, who were struggling to make ends meet as new Canadians, could finally relax.

My education was further enriched at Isna by the fact that my classmates were from all over the world. They

were from Pakistan, India, Sudan, the United Kingdom and so on. In fact, my two best friends today are Pakistani Canadians, and we met at Isna.

What brought us together was that we knew we were all young Canadians—young Canadians who needed to be in an environment where household values were strengthened at school. Together we were able to figure out what being a Canadian Muslim meant, what my duty to my country was and what my country owed me in return.

Despite our differences at Isna, despite our diversity as Canadians or our multiculturalism, we all generally lived by the same laws, ideas, knowledge, symbols, customs, goals and aspirations. I could excel academically without having to worry about fitting in or explaining my bizarre behaviour to others. I confirmed this when, after grade 8, my parents found no Islamic high school to place me in and decided to put me in Holy Name of Mary, an all-girls Catholic school. I used my strong foundation at Holy Name to educate others about Islam and about my private school while I learned about Catholicism. At Holy Name, teachers and students always respected my religion and were impressed that I was educated about Islam, and I took a very active role in the school. Today, I know my identity as a Muslim Canadian was built in a full-time Islamic environment and by parents who never believed that God should be taken out of the curriculum.

As we grew older and I got myself into more trouble at Isna Islamic School, I remember asking my father to pull me out because it was costing him too much money anyway. Until this day, I will never forget his response: "If I have to sell everything I own, including the shirt that I am wearing, to keep you where you are, I will do so." Thank God my dad didn't have to sell his shirt, because every year at Isna Islamic School I lost classmates whose parents were no longer able to afford rising fees.

Despite our limited resources at Isna, namely, we didn't have a library until the end of my term, or a science lab, today all of my classmates, without exception, have gone on to pursue post-secondary education. They have gone on to the best graduate schools in this country. I can't stand before you and state that they would not have gone on to law schools, med schools or teachers' colleges without a private school education, but I can guarantee you this: if we were isolated or unable to integrate into mainstream society, we would not have succeeded in our higher level education. Speaking with many of them, I know they entered the public education system with confidence of who they were. A strong foundation with a strong sense of identity meant that we could focus on our similarities with others as opposed to our differences.

As a future journalist and as an Isna Islamic School graduate, I ask this province to allow parents like my parents to make choices that will ensure everyone is an equal partner in a truly pluralistic, multicultural and democratic society.

Thank you for taking the time to listen to me.

The Chair: Thank you very much. There's no time for questions, but on behalf of the committee I certainly

would like to thank you for your presentation this afternoon.

SHARON BAR-DAVID

The Chair: Our next presenter is Sharon Bar-David. I would ask the presenter to step forward and state your name for the record. On behalf of the committee, welcome. You have 20 minutes.

Ms Sharon Bar-David: I'm just having my support group coming to sit next to me: my husband and my friend. First of all, thank you so much for inviting me. I was thinking how blessed I am to live in this country, where a regular, ordinary citizen like myself can be invited, albeit with less than 48 hours' notice, to speak about my experiences. I'm not here to represent anyone; I'm just a parent and a person. I don't have extensive written notes like everyone else. I'm going to talk sort of from points. I guess I'm here to support the proposed change to the state of affairs and in fact ask, if there's any room for more, to actually do it faster, more, whatever.

I'm a Jew. I'm married to a Jew. I have a six-and-three-quarter-year-old daughter, and she goes to the Toronto Heschel School. I don't know if any of you saw on Monday a program on The National on education. Did anyone see it? It was her school that was featured. I didn't see it, but I heard that the telltale head coverings were there.

For the last three years, which is the amount of time my daughter has been in the Jewish system, since she was in JK, I've had this ongoing, increasing sense of discomfort, of upset, of rage, of disappointment at basically looking around me and seeing Catholics who are my friends being able to have access to public education, people who speak French, and I, who also pay, just as anyone else, for the public system, when it comes to actually enjoying the fruits of my taxes or anything of that sort, am excluded. Then the UN decision came, and I just felt, exactly. There's something wrong here. There's something discriminatory about the fact that because, in my case, I am Jewish, because I prefer to send my daughter to a faith-based school, I cannot get what comes by right to others, namely Catholics. In no way do I say they shouldn't get it, but I think everyone should be included.

1230

To me, we all have prejudices internally, we all have biases internally, we all have pictures that we carry. I'm sure the minute I said, "I'm a Jew," a picture comes forth. It might be multi-dimensional, it might be fantastic, it might be negative—we all have these things that we ongoingly struggle with internally. But when the discrimination is right there in the legislation, that's wrong; that's shameful. It's one thing if we do it, if we struggle not to be discriminating, if we struggle not to be discriminated against, but this is the legislation, currently, that to me discriminates against me personally. That has been my experience. As I've looked around since the UN decision, I'm saying, "Where is this government?" Great, it's being done now, but how come whenever that deci-

sion was made, the change wasn't made immediately, or before?

Let me tell you more about me and my husband. We're both social workers. So in a way, just like anyone around this table, we're trying to change the world. We're trying to make this world a better place. I think that probably everyone around this table—my friend is also a social worker; woman abuse is her field. So I think we're all trying to do the same thing. Unfortunately, in the case of social workers, that's not highly paid, especially, in our society. I've been trying to not work full-time, to have flexibility, so I have three or four different things I do to bring in a modest income.

When our daughter went into the Toronto Heschel School, the first thing we did was rent out our basement. The second thing we then had to do was that my husband had to give up the office he was renting part-time, one evening a week, for his small private practice. Now our clients come through the back of the house, through a few stairs, and they use one of our three bedrooms, which we make look professional. The clients come in there, so my husband can make a few dollars that way. The leak that we had in our dining room, that left a very interesting ceiling and wall, has not been fixed for three years now, so we've come to accept it as a form of art.

We don't have more children, partly because of our age but certainly by asking, "Can we afford it? Can we afford to give what we want for our kids?" What we want for our kids is not trips abroad, summer vacations etc, it's just this: we pay \$9,300 a year for our daughter. That's about, net, a quarter of our income. That's a lot. We also have a mortgage; we also have all the rest of the expenses. He has professional insurance; I have professional insurance. Last year, when we finally sold our old rusted car, I netted \$50 for my car. My husband did much better: he got \$200 for his. So we're paying inside-out to have what we consider a tremendous privilege to do this. Every year we ask ourselves, "Can we do this one more year? Is it worth it? Wouldn't a family vacation, to go away somewhere for a month, just be a family, give us the same kind of values and so on that we want?" But every year, so far, for three years, we've been pulling through.

At the same time, I have been volunteering for the last three years through the Learning Partnership. Is anyone familiar with it? The Learning Partnership is the organization that organizes Take Our Kids to Work Day and other programs. I've been giving my time to this organization to bring women who are successful in their careers to talk in the schools—in the public schools, but also in the Catholic schools—and inspire young girls especially, but also boys, to see what's possible for women nowadays. I've been involved for the last three years with the Learning Partnership, giving about a day a month, consulting to schools, creating a partnership between people from the private sector who consult to schools. So I am a great believer in a very strong public system, and I think I walk the walk; I don't just talk the talk. As opposed to saying, "Yes, it's great to have a

good public system,” I do it; I give my time and my expertise. So I guess the question then is asked, why don’t I send my kid there? If I do it and everything, why don’t I send my kid to the public system? For me, the answer is simple. I don’t because—

Interruption.

Ms Bar-David: What’s happening here? It has to be multi-dimensional.

The Chair: You’ll have to ignore the distraction and continue with your presentation.

Ms Bar-David: For me, the reason why I send—and forgive me; for the next couple of moments I’m going to be somewhat dramatic, I hope not melodramatic. But I’m here as a parent, and I can talk from my heart and I don’t have to worry about how it’s going to come across. I’m just going to say what I feel and think, and I’m not going to do that kind of yelling; I’m just going to talk.

The Chair: Go ahead.

Ms Bar-David: To me, the reason why I don’t send my one and only daughter to public school is because for me, that’s my past, that’s my present and that’s my future. As one of the posters for the state of Israel says, “Our future is where our past is.” I find that fundamentally true for me, because I want somehow to have cultural continuity. There are a lot of other things, activities, that I do and so on and so forth, but for me—and again, I have to say this—six million of my people were put in gas chambers, then their teeth were taken and the gold was used for something else, and their bodies were used for soaps. For me, those souls are crying, and I feel that I owe a personal obligation for the continuity of these people, my Jewish people, just like the Islamic group that was here before felt the same obligation to continue that, just in the same way I feel an obligation to maintain this country, Canada, as a democracy, as an enlightened place to give leadership in the world. It’s all part of the same parcel for me.

What my daughter gets by going to a Jewish day school, beyond what I bring—there’s so much that happens. She gets, to me, a strong Jewish identity. It doesn’t matter if it’s a strong Islamic identity, a strong Catholic identity; it doesn’t matter. Nowadays, the forces of society, the tidal wave of TV, are such that you can drown. You can’t hear your inner voice. Most of the children today, unless they have a strong foundation at home or a strong foundation somewhere, can’t hear an inner voice, can’t hear right from wrong, can’t hear one thing from another. What I see is that this education that’s available to me is the best that I can have to enhance what I give at home. I’m not delegating my responsibilities to a school. My husband and I do everything we can. My poor daughter, the lectures she hears every time about how blessed we are to live in this country. My husband thinks it’s overkill, but I believe you punch it into them when it’s early.

Interjection: She doesn’t really punch it into her.

Ms Bar-David: Right. But I do believe that the fundamental things of values come early; they come from mother’s breast milk. That’s where it starts, and it’s never

early enough. As much as I would send her to get a public education, where she would learn about—in fact, I’m losing out on stuff when I don’t send her to get a public education. I’m losing out on her learning intensively enough about Islam and about Sikhs and about other cultures, because that’s what you do get in the public education system. It’s not that I’m so happy with the solution that I have that I think it’s the only solution, but it’s the best solution that’s available to me. The rest I have to make up otherwise. The rest I talk to my neighbours and I ask about things, because I don’t live in a Jewish-only neighbourhood. So I talk to my Chinese neighbour about, “What’s this?” and “What’s that?” That’s the kind of thing that I try doing. It’s all compromises. But this is the best compromise that I can come to, and it’s not compromisable.

It was interesting, what this girl before me said—this young woman—about her father selling his shirt. That’s pretty much how I feel, and I think that as we raise these kids who are not TV kids, who have a strong base of values, what we’re going to have is a society that has a discourse that’s value-based. The discourse that happens here in Parliament, the discourse that happens between people over parties is going to be a value-based discourse. I think that’s what we do. We’re not going to bring dichotomies. I think we’re going to bring together the values that people share. I often feel much more comfortable talking to a strong Christian because when we talk about how to make a decision, we talk the same language, even though I come from one perspective—

Mr Spina: Christianity was based on Judaism.

1240

Ms Bar-David: So I hear, so I hear.

Certainly the Toronto Heschel School is named after Abraham Joshua Heschel, a rabbi and a doctor, who believed in changing this world. He walked with Martin Luther King. He was an activist with Martin Luther King. That’s what it’s all about.

The four fundamentals of the school are changing the world, healing the world; the second is peace in the home and peace in the community; the third is they try to develop a personal relationship with God; and the fourth is respect and honour for what is and what was.

I want my kid to come out of this Jewish school—she’s already making lunch for the homeless as part of Out of the Cold. We make weekly lunches for the homeless and we take them down to the church; it’s a multi-faith place. So all those things.

I just want to—how long do I have?

The Chair: You still have approximately four minutes.

Ms Bar-David: I discovered just now that my daughter for the last year and a half has been saying, every Monday in school when they go to the synagogue, a blessing for her aunt who has cancer. I had no clue that this child was given this tool in school to do this, to give a special Jewish blessing for that. She’s rooting for her aunt. I don’t know that she would have gotten this in the public system.

We who keep the Sabbath, keep everything—TV, everything—out. She would be the outsider in a public school where the parties happen on Shabbat, on Saturday. She'd be the odd one out. Yes, bringing everyone together makes so much sense, and yet bringing everyone together can also make someone feel like an outsider.

I have a lot more to say but I'll just say one more thing, and I do want to leave three minutes for questions. I meant to leave more. We are here in a political discussion and this all of course has a political dimension. I did want to say that although you gentlemen seem quite lovely, I fundamentally disagree with the Harris government on everything. I never voted for you. I'm certainly squarely centre or left of centre and my vote went to both of these parties on this side, I believe.

Mr Marchese: We're right here.

Ms Bar-David: You're right here, and I hope you continue to be here. But I think, with all due respect, if liberalism and socialism are about self-actualization of citizens, if they're about inclusion, if they're about community, if they're about access, then I think that with the position you're taking you're betraying those principles. That's how I feel. I feel that you should have been cheer-leading this. That's what I feel. How can I vote for you when you're doing this that keeps me out, that keeps me discriminated against? When a panel of the UN said that, how can you do that? I don't believe the government is doing this for the right reasons. I don't believe they're doing it the right way. But you know what? I have a different look now. So I hope this goes through. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much. We have approximately one minute for questions per caucus.

Mr Marchese: I appreciate your personal story and it's most moving. As I hear your story and the previous speaker, one is moved by those personal stories.

I believe very much in issues of justice and there are many questions I would like to ask you, and others as well. It doesn't permit me to do that. But I really do believe in a public system that is inclusive, that reflects our diversity, not just homogenizes our diversity but reflects it and respects it and shows it in every which way.

But I know that our public system will simply not be able to go far enough for you, or at least for the Jewish community in general, in terms of your faith-based kind of education. I understand that. That's where our differences lie. As much as I appreciate your story and your feelings around this issue, I simply believe that we need to reflect that diversity strongly in a public system. International languages do that because they teach language and culture. But it doesn't go far enough in terms of the faith, I understand that. Reflecting on diversity in terms of religious readings, I think that's important. We didn't do that before. The Toronto board does: black culture, we do that; native studies, we do that. So there are a lot of things that we can do, but I'm not quite sure that we can go as far as you want and that's where I stop in terms of our irreconcilable differences.

Ms Bar-David: Make me an offer. Give me a public school that goes much farther than it does and I might join. As I said, I think I'm losing out on something.

The Chair: The government side. Mr Spina.

Mr Spina: Thank you, folks, for coming. We fully respect your political decisions that you've made in the past. I just want to remind you that nobody knows where you put your X in the ballot box.

Ms Bar-David: Exactly.

Mr Spina: I have only been in government a short time, six years, and these gentlemen have been here much longer than me. I have never seen a single issue that seems to have united the Arabs, the Islamic community, the Sikh community, the Jewish community and the Christian community like this one has. I really never have.

The critics paint the picture that the only place that children can experience cultural and religious tolerance is in a public school system. You have demonstrated from your heart, madam, that it is clearly a larger society and the will of the individuals that create and learn that tolerance, that respect, that understanding and that learning of all the different faiths. Thank you for bringing your comments forward.

The Chair: The official opposition. Mr Phillips.

Mr Phillips: That you for a very articulate presentation and deeply held views, clearly.

Just by way of comment, the one piece of research we've got from the government is this, and I would say it to the previous presenter, of whom I didn't have a chance to ask a question. Read what Harris said two years ago. You made comments about positions, but then he argued strongly and cogently against extending the funding. So it isn't the bad opposition that have argued against it. I would urge you to get that.

I've had some prolonged discussions with people, dare I say, in leadership positions in the Jewish community about this issue, and clearly they feel strongly. My good colleague here feels strongly about it. But it is a matter of principle with them, and that is, as one said yesterday, I think, "I live next door to someone Roman Catholic who gets full funding; we get nothing. So this is a good first step, but on matters of principle you can't go half way."

As a matter of principle, they feel that it requires equal funding because you are discriminating, to quote the United Nations. As we step down this road, I believe, logic tells me, that many in the community, in all the communities, will forever say, "Until we get full funding, justice is not served. We appreciate this first step and we're thankful for it, but as a matter of principle we cannot," and I understand this, "be satisfied until we have full funding." You talked a little bit about that in your remarks.

Do you see that as we start down this road that the logical end of it must be that religious schools, regardless of denomination, have equal funding?

Ms Bar-David: I think you're asking me about forces much greater than my scope of vision, but I think, yes, if you're dealing with discrimination, it is a matter of prin-

ciple. Ultimately to remove discrimination, you remove it.

Having said that, this \$700—even this plan, I’m drowning here. Seven hundred? Thank you. In principle, of course it should be removed. How can it not be removed?

Will I have the energy to go and continue and fight? I don’t know. But right now, I just put my name forth and I got invited. So I think that in principle, yes, discrimination—as I said before, we all have discrimination. In my heart, I still believe it and I still try to fight. Discrimination is just biases, opinions. I still try to fight it internally, anything that I have in me. I think the legislation should be such that it’s non-discriminatory. We’ve moved on gay and lesbian things, we’ve moved on so many areas to say, “This is wrong,” then why not on this one?

The Chair: On behalf of the committee, thank you very much for your presentation.

This committee is recessed until 4 o’clock this afternoon.

The committee recessed from 1250 to 1600.

FRASER INSTITUTE

The Chair: Good afternoon, everyone. It’s 4 o’clock. We’ll bring the committee back to order.

The first presentation this afternoon is from the Fraser Institute. I would ask the presenter or presenters to come forward and state your name for the record. On behalf of the committee, welcome. You have 20 minutes for your presentation.

Mr Phillips: Chair, I don’t want to interrupt the presentation. I just want to make sure the letter went off to—

The Chair: I just signed it.

Clerk of the Committee (Ms Susan Sourial): It’s being photocopied and I’ll distribute it.

Mr Phillips: That’s great. I appreciate it. Thank you.

Ms Claudia Hepburn: My name is Claudia Hepburn. I’m the director of education policy with the Fraser Institute here in Toronto. As most of you are aware, the Fraser Institute is a non-partisan, independent research organization whose goal is to draw the attention of Canadians to the role that markets play in providing for our well-being. We do research on public policy issues ourselves and we collect and disseminate the findings of other well-known and respected researchers on issues that are of importance to Canadians.

As director of education policy, I have spent the last several years doing research on education policy, specifically in the area that is under consideration today. That issue is school choice.

The Acting Chair (Mr John O’Toole): Excuse me. If I could interrupt for a moment, some of the members of the committee are wondering if you have a formal presentation, a printed—

Ms Hepburn: No, I didn’t bring a printed presentation with me. It’s just a verbal presentation.

The issue under consideration today is school choice, and more specifically, government subsidization of private school choice for Ontario’s families. I hope that by presenting the facts about publicly subsidized school choice you will be better able to make an informed decision about how it is likely to affect Ontario children, their families and their schools.

Public funding of private schools is commonplace in many countries and cultures around the world. In Denmark, for instance, it has been available to children for as long as publicly funded education has existed. Like many people in Ontario, the Danes believe that a parent’s right to determine their children’s education is a fundamental human right. They can’t understand our acceptance of the government telling us where and how our children are to be educated. In Canada, in provinces such as British Columbia, Alberta, Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Quebec, public funding of private schools is taken for granted as a fundamental part of what public education does.

The equity in education tax credit is going to function just like an education voucher does. An education voucher is an education tool that has been widely used in the United States to defray the cost of tuition at independent schools. Since vouchers have been well studied, we don’t need to guess or theorize about what effect the tax credit might have here in Ontario. We just need to look at the research to answer the essential questions about what effect they would have in Ontario. Those questions are:

First, do low-income parents want school choice, and if they are given it, will they use it? Or is school choice just something that interests upper-middle-class families?

Second, how does choice affect the achievement of students who use it?

Third, how does competition from private schools affect the rest of the public school system?

Fourth, how does school choice affect civic values?

We’ll start with the first question, do low-income families want school choice? Critics argue that only the wealthy want to send their children to private schools so the education tax credit will only benefit them. Evidence from all the American voucher programs, as well as those in New Zealand and Britain, show without equivocation that low-income families love school choice. They line up to take part in voucher programs in which either private individuals or the public subsidize the private schools and they are overwhelmingly satisfied with them when they are allowed to take part. This is true even when low-income families are stretched to pay a portion of the tuition themselves, as will be the case with this tax credit.

Evidence from Ontario corroborates this. Even without the tax credit, the average income of private school families is lower here than the average income of public school families. Wealthier families in this province pay more for their housing to live near better public schools. Lower-income families can’t compete for the expensive real estate but they can make financial sacrifices on a

smaller scale to put their children in reasonably priced but effective private schools.

The second question is, how will tax credits affect academic achievement of students who use them? Some people claim that because private schools are less regulated than public schools and don't have to use certified teachers, the education they offer is uneven and we can't be sure they'll teach students anything. Evidence from American voucher programs proves just the opposite. Students who take part in them learn more than students in regular public schools even when those private schools charge far less than the public schools cost. Research from voucher programs in Cleveland, New York, Washington, DC, and Dayton, Ohio, indicates that voucher students are making statistically significant gains over their peers in public schools. Some less rigorous research shows no statistically significant difference between voucher students and the control group. But no research that has been done by any team of researchers has shown that vouchers have harmed students academically, and all the research, by every group of researchers, who have squabbled among themselves—they have all agreed that the programs are all tremendously popular among low-income families who use them. This is about as close as you will ever get to academic agreement on any subject, as I'm sure you're aware.

Third, and perhaps most important of all, how will competition from private schools affect the public school system as a whole? Popular wisdom would have us believe that competition among schools will result in winner schools and loser schools. Nobody wants any child to have to attend a loser school, so this makes the sound of competition a little scary.

However, because we have good research evidence, we don't need to rely on scary conjectures for our public policy decisions. Scholars have studied the effects of competition on schools to see what happens to children's learning when schools have to compete with one another for students. Harvard professor Caroline Hoxby has recently published a monumental study that looks at public schools across the United States that faced competition, to a lesser or greater degree, from private schools or charter schools. She found that the more competition a school faced, the more that school improved.

This suggests that schools which children choose to leave, or even schools that children threaten to leave, are the very schools most likely to improve the most. Children attending the worst schools are likely to benefit the most from competition. The school's administrators, knowing their students are learning less than other kids, will pull out all the stops to see that the education they are offering improves, and they'll do that with just the same amount of funds and resources they had before. If they don't, the parents will be free to go shopping for a better school. Past research by Caroline Hoxby has shown that as more students use private schools, public schools start to react by improving the quality and diversity of programs they offer. This is exactly the kind

of evidence that makes the tax credit such a wonderful idea.

Hoxby's finding corroborates those of Ludgar Wasserman of the Kiel Institute in Germany. Wasserman recently published the results of the largest study on educational efficiency ever made, which looks at education in 39 countries around the world. That study found that competition from private schools was one of the four key factors that fostered high achievement among students. That study also found that the amount spent on education made no difference to educational achievement, but that the other factors that fostered high achievement were attention to test results, school control of staff and operations, and teacher discretion over teaching methods. But competition from private schools was a major, critical factor.

Lastly we come to the question of civic values. Do students who attend public schools learn to be more tolerant and better citizens in a democracy than those who attend private schools? If they do, as many opponents of the tax credit claim, it's a very powerful argument against private school education.

Two independent American studies—the Americans are great at doing research we can use to apply to Ontario—have addressed this very question. They studied public and private school students and graduates to determine if, as many people believe, public schools do a better job than private schools of promoting the kinds of values that we as citizens in a democracy hold to be so dear, values such as social involvement, tolerance of difference of opinion, political knowledge and voting activity. Both studies found that private schools are better than public schools at promoting these civic values, usually by statistically significant margins. It's not clear why this happens, but it's very clear that it does.

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This question can also be answered by considering two very different systems of education that developed at the same time in ancient Greece, one of the first cultures to spread education beyond a tiny ruling elite. As you are aware, Athens was the home of the world's first democracy, where mathematics, literacy and the arts flourished for centuries. In Athens, education was not a public responsibility but a private responsibility that was the sacred domain of the parents. Schools competed for students, and as the society developed the schools developed themselves, and for the first time in history, secondary schooling emerged. Also, the skills that were taught in schools developed from being solely teaching the students rhetoric and how to speak to teaching them mathematics and the arts and all the things that became valuable in society. Athens became renowned not only as the world's best-educated society but also as an unusually tolerant, democratic and civilized one.

Sparta, on the other hand, began by being a much more wealthy society than Athens, but in retrospect we all remember it as a very harsh, military society.

Mr Marchese: Better soldiers.

Ms Hepburn: Better soldiers, yes, but less literate ones.

Education was public and parents had no choice about the kind of education their children received. This was done for the good of the children, just as public education in Ontario is done for the good of the children, and also for the preservation of the values that society held so dear. Parents, the rulers believed, could not be trusted to educate their children properly. They couldn't be trusted to choose the schools their children should attend and they couldn't be trusted to have them taught with the proper methods of instruction and the proper skills. The students were referred to as cattle and the teachers referred to as boy herdsman. Martial skills were valuable for the defence of the state and they were taught at the expense of mathematics, literacy and the arts. Over the 200-year reign of Sparta, educational innovation was shunned or forbidden, as was intolerance of politically correct opinions and civic values that we in Ontario cherish.

As the ancient Greek examples illustrate, publicly controlled education does not have a glamorous beginning. As Balkanized states such as Yugoslavia and other Communist systems show, publicly funded education continues, in most if not all parts of the world, to be used by the majority at the expense of minority opinions.

To recap on school choice facts, many poor families welcome school choice even when they are asked to pay part of the tuition. Second, parents are overwhelmingly satisfied with school choice programs. Third, voucher students learn more or as much as they would have done without a voucher. Public schools improve the quality and variety of programs they offer when families have a choice of switching schools. Fourth, private schools are more likely to promote civic values than public schools are.

Finally, how does private school choice affect education in public schools? Competition from independent schools results in higher achievement of public school students in the same district. When school officials fear they will lose students, they have an incentive to employ the best teachers and offer the most sought-after programs in order to keep them, and also to use their resources the most wisely rather than spend their time bickering between school boards and the government so that the schools wind up being closed and the students wind up getting no education at all for months at a time. Providing parents with choice and public schools with competition improves the educational outcome of all students.

The opposition would have us believe that school choice is a right-wing policy that is supported by the rich and by fascist types or only radical free market types such as the Fraser Institute. In fact, if we look around the world at where school choice is supported, you'll notice that Denmark and Sweden are two popular countries where school choice has existed, which are not often thought of as being fascist or intolerant societies. Also, in the United States, support for school choice originated

among the blacks in inner-city United States, who are traditionally Democrat supporters but had been let down by the Democrats, who had implemented such terrible education policies as busing and other kinds of manipulative programs that don't trust that parents will do the best for their children.

Today in Denmark, vouchers hold the support of every political party, as they do in Sweden, including the Communist Party and the Social Democrats, who vowed when vouchers were implemented to get rid of them as soon as they regained power, just as the Liberals are doing here. Five years later, when they came to power, they actually increased the amount of funding that went to independent schools because it was such a popular policy and because they recognized that it was actually improving the education in public schools, not destroying it, as they had first feared. In the United States, support is strongest among African Americans, low-income families and people with school-aged children. It's supported by 75% of blacks under 35 with children. Although it has been traditionally supported by Republican politicians, as you well know, it is now supported by a growing number of prominent Democrats.

Those are my arguments why I think this tax credit is the best educational policy that's been suggested in the past hundred years anywhere in North America. I think we've really seen the bottom, the darkest point of education in this province if this policy is implemented as it has been suggested and it's not doctored up by too many amendments that water it down. I think we're really going to see an emphasis on improving education for children.

I'd like to welcome any questions that anyone has.

The Chair: Thank you very much. We have one minute per caucus, and I'll start with the government side. Sorry for that, but that's all the time we have.

Mr Hardeman: Thank you very much for your presentation. I think you did a very good job of pointing out all the benefits of giving parental choice. This is not, at least from my observation, an issue of the public education system. The tax credit is providing parental choice for parents, primarily for parents who have already made the choice of a different type of education for their children, for whatever culture, religious or teaching method reason they decided to take. I think this provides more parents with the ability to pay for that. We've heard a lot of presentations from supporters of the tax credit who have said their children would start in independent education but they had to drop out because they couldn't maintain that level of cost over and above the tax they were paying for the public education system.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr Hardeman. We've run out of time. I have to go to the official opposition.

Mr McGuinty: Thank you for your presentation. I appreciate your calling it the way you see it. You've labelled this tax credit, quite properly, a voucher, and that's exactly what it is. In your experience in looking at the experience of other jurisdictions, a voucher will

undoubtedly act as an incentive. It will incent behaviour that otherwise would not have taken place. Do you believe that the introduction of this voucher into Ontario will encourage still more parents to remove their children from public schools and to put them into private schools, or do you think it might—the government makes the assumption that it would have a neutral effect. Do you agree with that? What I submit is that in fact it will lead to a still growing number of parents leaving public education and going into private schools.

Ms Hepburn: It's not a question of what I believe but what the facts are. We have seen these policies be implemented in numerous places, and what has happened is that generally a few more people have left for private schooling. In Ontario we currently have 4% of students in private schools. In places that have public funding of private schools, that number is usually between 7% and 15%. I don't know anywhere where it goes higher than that.

Mr Phillips: New Zealand?

Ms Hepburn: I don't think it's any higher; I'm not sure of the specifics in New Zealand.

The power and the beauty of this voucher, or the tax credit—this is actually better than a voucher, in my mind—is that a few students will leave but the majority will stay, and it's the threat of students being able to leave that is what is going to really make schools improve. If a couple of students leave a school, the school is going to start getting scared and say, "We don't want to lose any more students, so what do we have to do to keep these students here and keep the parents happy?" Most students don't have to leave. Most will stay in the public system.

Mr Marchese: Claudia, sorry we don't have much time to debate, obviously; one minute I get to ask a quick question and then we're done. I'm going to try and be quick. What school did you go to?

Ms Hepburn: I went to four schools, two private and two public.

Mr Marchese: God bless.

1620

Ms Hepburn: Did I see that Gerard Kennedy was here? I understand he is against this voucher but that he attended the most elite private school in Winnipeg on a scholarship.

Mr Marchese: It's not my problem. Sorry. I didn't ask you that.

Ms Hepburn: As have a number of opponents of this credit.

Mr Marchese: God bless them too.

Do you know the difference between those who go to private non-denominational schools and those who go to religious schools?

Ms Hepburn: What do you mean do I know the difference?

Mr Marchese: Sorry, not do you know the difference but the numbers of young people who go to private non-denominational schools and those who go to denominational schools? Do you have that figure here?

Ms Hepburn: I do have that figure here. Let me find it.

Mr Marchese: Don't worry—

Ms Hepburn: If you don't want to hear it, why did you ask me?

Mr Marchese: I do, but you've got so much research in your head I thought you'd have a quick answer. The other quick question is, how many poor kids do you know go to Upper Canada College?

Ms Hepburn: I don't know the figures, but virtually all private schools offer some kind of tuition, bursary or scholarship. Upper Canada particularly takes students purely on academic merit, not on their ability to pay.

The Chair: On behalf of the committee, thank you very much for your presentation this afternoon.

Mr Marchese: You see what I mean? What kind of a debate is that?

Ms Hepburn: Thank you very much for having me.

Mr Phillips: Mr Chair, just before we move to the next presentation, the letter you sent does not include another important thing I thought I requested. If I didn't, I will request it through motion. We got the 80-page brief from the government when they were against extending funding, the two-year-old brief where they argued strenuously against it. What I'd like from the government is the research they've done that changed their mind. I thought I had asked for that this morning. It's not in this letter. If I need a motion, I would ask—

The Chair: No, I don't think we a motion.

Mr Phillips: Just if you would ask the minister to forward the research that has been done that led the government to change its mind on this. The presenter who just left us indicates the importance of research.

The Chair: We'll follow up on it.

Mr Phillips: Second, I think we asked earlier for education spending going back to 1995. Have we been able to get that yet?

Clerk of the Committee: It's right here. I haven't had a chance to distribute it.

Mr Phillips: Great. Thank you very much.

Mr Stewart: Chair, on a point of order: Could we get the name of the private school Mr Kennedy went to?

The Chair: No, that's not a point of order, Mr Stewart.

TORONTO DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD STUDENT SUPERCOUNCIL

The Chair: Our next presentation is the Super-Council. I would ask the representative or representatives to come forward and state your name for the record. On behalf of the committee, welcome. You have 20 minutes for your presentation.

Mr Anton Vidgen: Good afternoon, members of the committee. My name is Anton Vidgen. I'm the president-elect of the TDSB Student SuperCouncil. As the primary spokesman for secondary school students in Toronto, I represent over 100,000 youth who truly believe in the public education system. With that belief, these students

are shaping up to be fine democratic citizens in a society that should embrace choice.

On the surface, the government's proposed equity in education tax credit seems to do just that: offer choice. But any similarity ends there, for if you look a little deeper, things are not what they may seem.

Here are the facts: this tax credit will eliminate \$6,500 from the Toronto District School Board's budget for every student who leaves for the private school system, or, in Conservative-talk, a net saving to the government of \$3,000 per student.

You are obviously mocking the public education system. By providing a financial incentive to parents to enrol their children in private schools, you are backtracking on one of the fundamental pillars of a democratic society: a free and open public education system. What's truly puzzling about this tax credit is that you are one step away from publicly funding a private system. Am I missing something, or is that just a waste of money?

Furthermore, parents who enrol their children in private schools have made a choice. This does not warrant taxpayer-funded assistance. These parents have chosen to leave the public school system for their own reasons. Will the tax credit now force these schools to conform to your rules for public schools? You are un-privatizing the private school system by making it meet public standards.

This Conservative government is leaning a little too far right concerning this issue, and if they continue using that right wing, they'll simply end up flying in circles.

It's a wonderful day outside and it's shaping up to be an enjoyable summer. Give all students a break, but not a tax break. Bring us back to an unbiased balance. Withdraw the proposed equity in education tax credit. Thank you.

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

Mr Phillips: Thank you for your presentation. We appreciate it. The thing that's caught many people in Ontario off guard on this is that it was just two years ago that the government argued strenuously against extending funding and prepared some language that was quite firm against it. I might add, we've once again asked for the research that caused them to change their mind, and we hope we are able to get it.

Two years ago, the Harris government said this in terms of why they were against extending funding:

"One of the strengths of a public system of education is it provides a venue where people of all colours, races, national and ethnic origins and religions interact and try to come to terms with one another's differences. In this way, the public schools build social cohesion, tolerance and understanding. Extending public school funding rights to private religious schools will undermine this ability ... may result in a significant increase in the number and kind of private schools. This would have an adverse effect on the viability of the public school system, which would become the system serving students

not found admissible by any other system ... would lead to increased school closings and a reduction in the range of programs and services a public system might offer ... would have a detrimental impact on the public schools and hence the fostering of a tolerant, multicultural, non-discriminatory society in this province, thus undermining the fundamental rights and freedoms of others."

That is what the government said two years ago. I'm wondering if on behalf of the Student SuperCouncil you're aware of any research the government has done or any evidence that would suggest some things have changed that would cause them to change their mind from that statement.

Mr Vidgen: I don't know if research is the best way to do. Statistics can only show so much. If the government actually came into the school system and saw what was going on, they could see it's a completely multicultural society. There's not much that only figures can represent. If you represent the true feelings and emotions of public school students, they really like it there. They really believe in the public education system. Giving a tax credit to parents of children who enrol them in private schools I don't think is going to make a difference. I don't know where the government is going with this issue. If anything, they're mocking both systems, both the public education system and the private school system. Again, I think they should withdraw it.

Mr McGuinty: Anton, thank you very much for your presentation and thank you, in passing, for the responsibility you've taken on in your capacity as president-elect.

We've calculated that we've got about \$1.8 billion less in funding for public education today in comparison to what we had in 1995 when you factor in inflation and growth in enrolment. I would argue that this government has brought public education to its knees. It's no wonder that parents are losing confidence in the public system. The most important thing we should be doing is investing in the public system to reinspire that confidence. We've proposed that we start with smaller classes.

From your perspective, the students' perspective, what are the needs today in public education?

Mr Vidgen: Above and beyond, it's funding. Although it sounds completely superficial, we really need the money to fund the basic necessities in schools, be it textbooks and basic resources such as that, be it teachers, with whom the Toronto District School Board recently reached a collective agreement which took more money out of their budget. There have been difficulties everywhere concerning funding and we really need the money to continue these programs.

To use your analogy of begging—that is unbelievable. We truly are begging the government to bring back a democratic freedom of public education. I don't see in any way that they're being accountable. We are doing all we can to bring some law and order and a proper education system, and the government is merely backing off and doing how they please.

1630

Mr Marchese: Anton, the other day there was a press conference here. Her name is Nadia Lambek from Harbord Collegiate.

Mr Vidgen: I know of her.

Mr Marchese: Her view was that holding these hearings at this time is particularly difficult for students, so she was decrying the fact that there wasn't more time. Secondly, the way they're doing it makes it very difficult, because it's limited, for them to come even if they wanted to. Even if they did want to, there are only so many spots because we choose three, they choose five and they choose eight. We suspect they wouldn't be choosing many students and, because there are limited spots, how many could you put in anyway?

Do you share that view? Do you know any other student who would have liked to have been here, or do you have an opinion about that?

Mr Vidgen: I know for a fact that every other member of next year's SuperCouncil executive would do anything to have a chance to come and speak to everyone here. I think any student in the public education system in Toronto would absolutely enjoy a chance to decry this. It's like saying to someone, "We're going to take something away from you and you have to remain completely quiet about that." That's totally ridiculous.

I do have to acknowledge that there is only so much that public hearings can accomplish. I don't think we could have every single student in Toronto coming here to say what they want to say.

Mr Marchese: You're quite right. I think we've heard the same things from most people with some variations. But at least the more people who come and express their views, the more an opportunity for them to say it and for these folks to see them.

One of the former directors of education said, "Usually a tax credit is introduced to encourage a particular action or behaviour. We cannot think of a tax credit that is designed to discourage activity." Quite clearly what he is saying is, if you're going to give a tax credit, it's designed for people to take advantage of it, and if they do take advantage of it, money will be taken out of our provincial coffers, because it's coming out of that sector. If they do take advantage of it, however many, it's taking it away from the public system because your funding is based on enrolment.

They argue that there is no evidence that anybody will leave the system; it's only for the people who are already there. You're a young guy. What do you think of that?

Mr Vidgen: It's completely illogical. A tax incentive is exactly that: an incentive for something that it's proposed to do. In this case, it's to move students to the private education system. It is beyond me how the government can say that this is some sort of choice. It is obvious where they are leaning. They are completely biased on this issue. That's what I truly mean, let's return to an unbiased balance because that is the key issue.

I know there are merits to the private system and the public system. I think they both have to be valued, but an equal balance; one should not be valued over the other.

Mr Marchese: The other thing the Conservative members say—M. Hardeman, M. O'Toole and all the others, day in and day out—it's tiring. You don't know how it feels to be here. Every teacher and organization representing teachers that has been here, including yourself and ordinary people like People for Education, is saying, "We love public education. We wouldn't dream of taking money out of public education," because they support it a lot. People for Education did a survey—which they don't trust, by the way—and this survey shows schools with ESL teachers down 9% under them; schools with design and technology teachers down 36%; schools with guidance teachers down 24%; schools with a regularly scheduled psychologist down 40%; schools with a regularly scheduled social worker down 32%; schools with a regularly scheduled speech pathologist down 18%; 28% reported general upgrades were needed but not approved; 15.4% reported needing renovations or additions, and on and on. A 71% increase in schools reporting user fees for after-school—

Mr Vidgen: That's the only increase in the entire list you mentioned.

Mr Marchese: It goes on and on. But to hear these guys, they've poured in billions. The fear that people like you and others have is we're already severely underfunded, by \$2.3 billion, and this idea of giving public dollars to private schools is only going to make it worse.

Mr Vidgen: That's correct. I agree.

The Chair: Mr O'Toole.

Mr O'Toole: Thank you, Anton. It is absolutely important to hear students and their views. I do appreciate and respect that. You're entering the world of public views and they are always challenged.

You speak for 100,000 students, it's my understanding. That's how you introduced yourself.

Mr Vidgen: That's correct.

Mr O'Toole: Have you done a survey with them? How would you know all their individual views? I draw the question—it's hard to get 100% of anything, so it would be wrong to imply you have 100% of anything.

Mr Vidgen: OK. I have to admit that—

Mr O'Toole: The other thing is, we've heard a number of very important presentations of a very mixed variety. I'm only reciting the ones from this morning. It is the views of B'nai Brith Canada in their presentation earlier this morning, very well respected, Simon Rosenfeldt and others. I'm just going to read one of the quotes, and this is on their second-last page: "Proponents of public education appear to be more interested in fighting to preserve an inequitable status quo than in fighting to create equity for all children."

Now, there's an organization respected in the world for their views. They've described themselves as 126 years of relentless defence of their culture, and respected around the world for doing it respectfully and democratically.

We also heard this morning from a wonderful young Islamic student who had graduated from an Islamic school, and she had expressed many of the same sentiments of having felt assimilated, which is her word. She said God should not be taken out of our schools because that satisfies someone else's purposes for a neutralized system. I think she's entitled. Religious freedom is a right.

There's another very important comment made by the Jewish education, and this was by Simon Epstein, a very insightful observation, much along the tone of preserving values, preserving the status quo, preserving the "just us"—justice—argument. What they said is, "Much has been written about the hidden curriculum in the past decade," the implication there that there really is an agenda, the no-God agenda kind of thing, in the secularized system. That's perfectly appropriate. It suits probably 95% of the students. These are the views of students who cherish and stand up, like you, to speak, and they are entitled to in a democracy. This really is providing choice and it's a choice where you spend the \$5,000, you spend the \$7,000, and then sometime later you get a credit for it.

So if you're fighting for democracy, are you opposed to the student or parent choice in this case, categorically opposed to it, to defend the status quo? That's how they've defined it, not me. Which way is it? Is it choice in democracy or is it "just us," one way?

Mr McGuinty: That's not a leading question.

Mr Vidgen: You're only mentioning religious schools.

Mr O'Toole: His answer would be there are two answers.

Mr Phillips: I'd like to hear from the witness.

Mr Vidgen: You're only mentioning cultural schools. There's nothing threatening them as it stands. By providing them with more funding, will it somehow decrease a non-existent threat? It doesn't make any sense.

As for your comment that they fear that they're going to be assimilated into the public education system, you could apply that argument to anything. You could apply that to a company. You could apply that to a country, ie, Canada, that they're going to be assimilated into a Canadian form or culture where they're not going to be allowed to worship their God or however they proceed with their cultural traditions.

I think every student has a chance to engage in their religious and cultural views in schools, although it's not encouraged by the Toronto District School Board. It's not something that is a pillar of it. It is something that is considered. I think all students feel they do have freedom in the public education system. I don't think anyone is being oppressed. If that was the case, we'd be talking a whole different story here.

Mr O'Toole: I think John had a question.

Mr John Hastings (Etobicoke North): Thank you for coming today, Anton. It would appear to me, in your consideration of education policy and what's going on at the Toronto district public board, that you'd have a pretty

good insight as to what occurred with the recent settlement involving the secondary school teachers across Toronto and the board and how they arrived at their 8%. Are you aware of that at all?

Mr Vidgen: Yes.

Mr Hastings: I may be off in my figures so I'll use a very minimalist number. From my understanding, there's at least 100 fewer teachers who will be teaching in the system as a result of that 8% settlement of last April.

Mr Vidgen: I believe that's correct.

Mr Hastings: It could be a little higher. Do you concur in that number, and what do you think of that number as to how the school trustees arrived at their 8% settlement?

Mr Vidgen: I believe that number is fairly accurate. That was the projected number. It may be much less; it may be more. I do not know. I can't give an exact number. But there is always give and take in negotiations. They got a substantial raise, I believe, in the negotiations. I believe they wanted even more. I don't want to denounce them; I believe they're completely entitled to negotiate for a settlement. But laying off 100 teachers is a direct by-product of the provincial funding model. If we had the money, there wouldn't have ever been a strike; there wouldn't have been these long midnight negotiations, because there would have been money to give them the adequate funding they needed to pay teachers' salaries.

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

Our next presentation is from the Morris Winchevsky School. Is the presenter in the audience? If not, I think the next presenter is here, and we can maybe switch spots.

1640

ORGANIZATION FOR QUALITY EDUCATION

The Chair: I think the representative for the Organization for Quality Education is in the audience, if you could please come forward and state your name for the record. On behalf of the committee, welcome. You have 20 minutes for your presentation.

Mr John Bachmann: Good afternoon. My name is John Bachmann. I'm president of the Organization for Quality Education, OQE for short. We're a group of parents, teachers, principals and taxpayers about 1,000 strong. We've been working for 10 years to try to improve the learning outcomes of all Ontario students.

Most of our members started out as parents or teachers with individual concerns about our children or our students. But invariably we have each come to the conclusion that the root causes of the problems we have individually experienced are systemic to Ontario's publicly funded school systems. We have also come to the conclusion that these systems cannot and will not change

from within; that if Ontario students are to benefit from responsive and effective public schools in our lifetimes, these systems will need to be forced to change. That is why the Organization for Quality Education strongly supports the proposed equity in education tax credit.

As OQE sees it, there are two major arguments for the tax credit: one is in the area of equity, and the other is resulting improvements to our public school system.

Providing public funding for only Catholic schools is patently unfair. We're sure, though, that the equity arguments for the tax credit have been and will continue to be presented very ably by representatives from religious schools, so today I'd like to focus OQE's comments on the impact tax credits will have on our public schools.

Some opponents of the tax credit concede the unfairness of the present system but argue that the solution is to do away with all religious and other publicly supported independent schools entirely. While such a move would seemingly resolve the equity issue, OQE strongly believes that the one big system that would result with the removal of public funding to Catholic and franco-phone schools would serve Ontario students, especially those from less affluent backgrounds, very poorly.

The "one good public system" argument assumes that our present public schools are doing the best job they can, given the resources they have available. Lack of funds, the education tax opponents tell us, is the problem. But our experience, working with schools in Ontario for 10 years, is that the real problems are underperformance, restricted choices and a lack of accountability.

As the EQAO, interprovincial and international tests continue to show, Ontario's publicly funded schools are not doing a very good job of preparing students for the next grade or life after high school. The reason for consistently poor performance is not a shortage of funds, but a long-standing unwillingness to abandon a natural learning philosophy that prevents the use of more effective teaching methods than those in fashion at our faculties of education, the Ministry of Education and school board offices. Unfortunately, again, the students who suffer most from this obsession with natural learning are those from lower socio-economic backgrounds.

Those in the education establishment get upset when test results are used to judge the performance of public schools. They point out that all these tests do is identify a positive correlation between test scores and income levels. But what they fail to admit is that these tests, including the widely misrepresented and unfairly vilified Fraser Institute report, identify schools in less affluent neighbourhoods that are achieving much better than local circumstances would lead us to expect. The educators in our public schools refuse to admit that there are lessons to be learned from these numbers—lessons that will help disadvantaged children more than their more affluent counterparts. Parents of such children should be given choices, not the excuses they are currently getting, if their neighbourhood schools aren't performing. The proposed tax credit will improve education equity by making

results-focused independent schools affordable for more parents.

Some opponents of the tuition tax credits argue that parents already have all the choices within the existing publicly funded boards that they could possibly want. They point to French immersion, arts schools and academy high schools. But the existing systems don't offer schools using true systematic phonics reading instruction instead of the so-called balanced approach; or a choice, for example, of semestered and non-semestered high schools. There are many other options that existing boards offer on only a limited basis, such as single-sex schools or classrooms, the International Baccalaureate program, magnet schools and schools catering to dyslexic students or students with other special instructional needs. In this age of diversity, the notion of a body such as a school board rendering judgment on the choices of schools available to parents in their jurisdiction sounds positively patronizing.

Members of OQE have spent and continue to spend a lot of time as members of various consultation groups. We've worked with the Education Improvement Commission, the College of Teachers, the Effective Schools Task Force and, currently, the Teacher Testing Project. Invariably, we find ourselves with very different views from some of the other parent representatives who support the present system and who, not surprisingly, oppose the tuition tax credit.

The premise that defines OQE and informs its activities is what we like to summarize as "confidence through competence." We believe that our best hope of having today's students become contributing and happy members of our society lies in having them master core knowledge, skills and habits. Confidence and self-esteem will, we believe, follow from this competence. And we fervently believe that virtually all students can acquire more competence than they currently do in our publicly funded schools.

The alternate premise that permeates our Ministry of Education and cascades down to the classroom is "competence through confidence." There are many parents, and I've met them personally in consultation meetings, who subscribe to this view—parents who see tests as an unnecessary source of stress for their children, who see any rote learning or repetition to mastery as impediments to creativity and the development of higher-order skills. Are they wrong? Our group thinks so, but does that give us the right to insist that these parents send their children to schools built on our premise? No, of course not. But neither should it give these parents and their allies in the education establishment the right to force us to send our children to schools built on their premise—schools where, on average, as EQAO tests indicate, half the students are not ready to advance to the next grade. And remember, these are tests that were set up by our education establishment; these aren't comparisons with students in Singapore or somewhere else that can be easily dismissed.

After a decade of education reform experience, we in OQE know that existing boards cannot and will not provide parents with schools that differ from those in the publicly funded systems on this very important dimension. And we know from opinion polls, comments from our members around the province and the experience of other jurisdictions around the world that enjoy public support for independent schools, that there are many parents who want “confidence through competence” schools.

One other critical choice unavailable to parents through the existing public systems are schools free from continual labour strife. Although opponents of the tax credit attribute recent strife to the actions of the Harris government, in fact, the teacher federations have been in strident opposition to every provincial government, whether PC, Liberal or NDP, for the past two decades. Opinion polls since at least 1986 have identified teacher union power and intransigence as consistent public concerns. Supporting parents who choose independent schools free of such strife will no doubt, in time, moderate the belligerent behaviour and attitudes of the federations and can do nothing but improve public schools as a result.

1650

Everyone agrees that parental involvement is critical to the success of our schools and of Ontario students. But today, in many Ontario publicly funded schools, parents are not welcome unless they show up to sell cookies or protest on the federation side of education issues. When there are problems in schools, especially at the elementary level, parents are afraid to speak up lest administrators and teachers retaliate through their children. I’ve had parents who are on the opposite side of this issue admit that very freely in our consultation sessions; this is not a partisan interpretation of what’s going on. Many highly capable parents who could contribute their professional skills to the schools have abandoned school councils and other volunteer activities because of the petty machinations and paternalism of administrators and teaching staff. Communications to school councils from outside organizations such as ours are routinely censored. Curiously, however, anti-government propaganda from the green ribbon crowd seems to have no trouble reaching parents.

Principals have been able to get away with such high-handed behaviour because there are no consequences to such actions. Affordable access to independent schools introduces such consequences to public schools. The evidence is in from Calgary, Minnesota and around the world. Whenever principals in public schools are faced with the prospect of having some of their students walk, they become much better listeners.

We’ve heard a lot of Chicken Little scenarios about what will happen if more parents choose independent schools. But the kind of school choice that will be facilitated by the proposed education tax credit has been available to parents around the world for a long time. Denmark has had independent schools for more than 150

years. In Sweden, a country not usually noted for being a bastion of market capitalism, independent schools have been funded for almost 10 years—funding which has the support of all major political parties across the left-right spectrum in that country. Closer to home, school choice is well established in Canada, particularly in Alberta, BC and Quebec, which, not coincidentally, consistently score well above Ontario in provincial and international tests.

One of the other lessons from other education jurisdictions, by the way, is that once choice is implemented it may be modified but it is never withdrawn.

One of the most frequently voiced objections to the tax credit is that it will weaken the public system’s ability to socialize and integrate students from different backgrounds. Critics of independent schools charge that they are bastions of intolerance and segregation and that, by encouraging parents to leave the mainstream, the tax credits will balkanize Canadian society. “Balkanize” is an interesting and ironic term. Yugoslavia had one state school system under the Communists for over five decades, yet the ethnic hatred there is worse than ever. In fact, most independent schools enroll students from many different religions and ethnicities, giving the lie to allegations that independent schools are intolerant. Furthermore, there is no evidence that Ontario’s Catholic schools, or religious schools in Alberta, Quebec, BC and Manitoba, are producing religiously intolerant or disconnected students.

I don’t want to use up all of my time reading, so I’ll go very quickly through the end.

There are conditions that have been suggested should be attached to the tax credits, conditions such as teacher certification. On that score, we are highly skeptical, given the natural-learning obsession of Ontario’s faculties of education, that certification equates to teaching effectiveness. We believe that there are many uncertified but very qualified individuals who should be able to teach in Ontario schools. We don’t think that requirement should be applied to independent schools.

With respect to curriculum, we believe that independent schools must cover the provincial curriculum. But auditing of these schools to confirm that this is being done must be done by a body independent of the Ministry of Education. We have had numerous reports of ministry officials harassing independent schools and home schoolers by evaluating them against standards so high that most public schools would fail if they were applied to them.

Testing: we believe very much as an organization in testing, but we have some concerns about the EQAO testing being used, for two reasons. It’s very costly, but the other thing is that it’s prescriptive in terms of forcing teachers to teach certain units a certain way—a way we don’t think is very effective. For that reason, we feel that independent schools should be given the option of picking other recognized tests, such as the Canadian Test of Basic Skills, as alternatives.

I’ll finish with a little note here about, will there be a mass exodus? Will independent schools bleed the public

schools dry? No. A mass exodus did not take place when other provinces began to fund independent schools. Even at 50% funding, the free, publicly funded schools enjoy a huge competitive advantage. With more money and resources than most independent schools, the publicly funded schools are well positioned to respond to the tax credit challenge and we believe they will. We believe that eventually somewhere between 15% and 30% of Ontario students will be in independent schools. But in that scenario, the public school around the corner will be a better school and all students, not just those who can afford it, will have access to the best education that Ontario can possibly give them.

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

Mr Marchese: Mr Bachmann, you and the Fraser Institute have said so much today that it would be lovely to be able to have more time. I respect your views and your activism in this field. I disagree most profoundly with your position.

On the issue of Sweden, just quickly, you probably might agree with me that Sweden is a totally different country. Here, unions are reviled by people like yourself, the Fraser Institute, the corporate sector, and that has trickled down to the population. In Sweden, the corporate sector and the unions work hand in hand. The cultural situation there is radically different.

You also say that in public schools parents are frightened. I was a trustee with the Toronto board of education for eight years. I've seen schools where principals were driven out because of parent activism, in some cases for good reasons. So we have it and we encourage that kind of activism.

Mr Bachmann: It's not widespread through the whole system. The number of schools where that is the case is a very small minority.

Mr Marchese: You're probably right. In a smaller school, it's probably easier. If you've got 98 in a school, it's probably easy for parents to have a greater say and a greater direction in terms of where they're going; in a bigger system, it's a little more complicated. But my commitment is to making sure that we work with parents and we work with the system to change it, rather than saying, "Ha, it's better in a private school. It's much easier to get a certain type of philosophy, a certain type of approach, a certain type of religion." I just don't support it.

Mr Bachmann: Mr Marchese, we have tried as an organization for 10 years to deal with principals in individual schools and have found them to be, on the whole, unresponsive to our pleas. So we believe we can only get their attention by giving parents alternatives.

Mr Hastings: Mr Bachmann, I'd like to pursue this subject of alternatives a little. From your own experience, your own membership organization's experience and that of other people you've probably dealt with, parents, grandparents etc, who have children in the system, why is it there is such a culture of intolerance or this fear factor of what may happen if this went through? To me, it's

comparable to what we heard from the opposition parties and the critics way back in 1995, that tax reductions wouldn't work at all, that they're totally useless, totally irrelevant, and in fact it grew the economy. Do you see comparisons there?

Mr Bachmann: I don't know if I necessarily see comparisons there. I'm sorry, the point about—

Mr Hastings: Why do you suspect there is such a cultural intolerance, in your viewpoint, about phasing in alternatives, whether it's school testing, home schooling—

Mr Bachmann: I've got it. What we have is really a monopoly, and you have in that monopoly people who have certain power. People in monopolies don't give up power voluntarily. That's really what it is: it's a power game. The federations don't want to lose their power; the school boards don't want to lose their power. That's really all it is. No more than Robert Milton is too happy about what's happening with his competitors.

Mr McGuinty: Thank you for your presentation, Mr Bachmann. Why do you think this government has been so unsuccessful in terms of bringing about improvements in learning in public education? By way of contrast, just one example, over the course of four years Tony Blair in England brought his student population from a success rate, when it comes to numeracy and literacy, at somewhere around the 50% level to 75% and 80%, respectively. Here in Ontario today, one half of our children are still failing to meet the basic standards in reading, writing and mathematics. Tony Blair increased funding every year. He has brought in 23 million new textbooks. He created leadership for head teachers so their principals can develop greater leadership capacity and lead learning in a better way. He supported teachers throughout and improved their capacity to teach in different ways. They have been on the job for six years now. Why have we been so unsuccessful in this province in bringing about improvements in learning in public education?

Mr Bachmann: To get back to Mr Marchese's point about different cultures, it's a very different situation in Britain. Being familiar with one of those schools that brought its students up from being near the bottom in the national rankings to near the top, the Calvert public school, the principal of that school did a lot of things that are totally unacceptable to the people in our system here. She brought in testing for every grade and she evaluated her teachers against those tests and said, "If your students aren't learning, why aren't they learning? Let's sit down and work together." She was allowed to use phonetics to teach her kids so they could read where before they couldn't. That is why Tony Blair is working. He's got a system there that's much more receptive to some of the things we want. We have tried for 10 years to get them into Ontario schools. We haven't succeeded. The only way it's going to happen is if parents have a choice outside the system.

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

1700

MORRIS WINCHEVSKY SCHOOL

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

Mr Howard Kaplan: First, I would like to thank the committee for giving me the opportunity to come up and speak.

My name is Howard Kaplan. I'm a board member of the Morris Winchevsky School—in fact I'm vice-president of the Morris Winchevsky School—which is a small Jewish school which holds after-school classes on Sundays. The shule, as we call the school in Yiddish, is associated with the Board of Jewish Education in Toronto. Our distinctive, contemporary, progressive, secular Jewish curriculum emphasizes Jewish history, humanism, social justice, relevance and cultural heritage. Students from kindergarten through grade 7 learn by studying Jewish historical milestones, literature, Yiddish, Hebrew, drama, music, arts and crafts, participation in community and family-oriented celebrations of the Jewish holidays. Many of the students are enrolled in the public school system during the week, and a number go to private schools as well.

My remarks here, I might add, are my own opinions. However, I have consulted with other members of the board, and I'm fully confident that what I have to say is shared by the entire board of the Morris Winchevsky School.

Back in 1984, the Bill Davis government extended full funding to Catholic separate schools in Ontario, thus bringing the Catholic high schools fully into the public education system. However, among the conditions the separate high schools had to meet were those of accountability and inclusiveness. They came fully under the auspices of the Ministry of Education, and the Catholic school boards agreed to admit non-Catholics into their high schools if the parents and children so wished.

In May 2001, the Mike Harris government, through the Minister of Finance, without any prior announcement, extended a form of public funding for all private schools in Ontario. However, this was done without any consultation at all within the education system as a whole. This money is not to go to the schools themselves but to the parents or guardians of the pupils of the private schools. This way, the private schools cannot say they are beholden in any way to the government, and they remain outside the auspices of the Ministry of Education. They remain, in many ways, exclusivist and unaccountable to the public in any way.

The government says they are bringing in this measure in order to provide choice for parents. Yet with the restrictive funding formulae imposed on the public education system—and here I mean both the public and

Catholic separate schools—this government has in fact restricted choice for the parents of this province.

Toronto has had up to 27 alternative schools operating within the public education system, and I give examples: the triangle program at Oasis Alternative School, serving the unique needs of gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender and questioning youth; the Nighana program, an Afro-centric transitional program; the First Nations school for aboriginal children; programs to assist children with learning and behavioural difficulties and much, much more. In the past, the Toronto school system was one of the best-known and admired school systems in North America. It was a school system that provided choice for the families of Toronto.

Since this government has taken office, however, it has turned the funding of public education on its head. The funding formula has resulted in less choice for the families of school-aged children. By restricting the amount of assistance for children with learning or behavioural difficulties, it is telling the parents of those children that their children have no place, and their parents have no choice, within the public school system.

I'm not just stating my own opinion. I know personally of two families who have had to remove their children from the public school system and place them in private schools because the public school did not have the resources to educate their children, who have learning difficulties. In one case, where the child has a mild form of autism called Asberger syndrome, the school authority actually advised the parents to do just this; the school could just not afford to teach their son. In both cases, the parents were fortunate in that they could afford the cost of private schooling. In both cases, the schools could not fulfill their mandate of inclusiveness. In both cases, the parents were denied the choice of having their children educated within the public school system, which they have been supporting with their taxes and which they all support with their hearts. They have in fact become refugees from the public education system.

The de-funding of the public education system, of which this tax measure is but a part, strikes at the most marginalized part of our children. The cutbacks in support for these children will lead to an increase in social failures, especially among those children whose parents cannot afford to pay for the help their children need, help which by right must be fully available within the public education system. This consequence can only result in increased social and personal costs to be borne by individuals and by society at large.

The public schools do not have enough textbooks and supplies for all their students. The school boards do not have the flexibility that comes with budget powers to negotiate fair contracts with their staff. One of my friends told me of the school to which his children go, a school badly in need of physical repairs—it's McMurrich public school, by the way—and these repairs are not within the budget of the Toronto District School Board. This includes repairs to the walls, repairs to the brickwork, repairs to the physical plant, repairs to the plumbing and

so on. Demoralization and frustration are growing in the schools. Programs are being cut back or eliminated. In short, the government has created the very crisis that John Snobelen talked about six years ago when he took over the ministry. No wonder parents are becoming disillusioned with the public education system.

By rewarding parents for removing their children from the public school system and punishing the public schools for failing to hold on to these children by \$7,000 per child, the government stands to make up to \$3,500 for each child taken out of the public school system and put into the private schools. It could be quite lucrative for the government if enough parents go this route, perhaps earning the government enough to finance their next tax giveaway to the wealthy. This measure only confirms what most observers have seen: that this government regards the education system not as an investment in the future of our society but as a great big cash cow—a boondoggle, if you will—for giveaways to those special interest groups who are their friends.

This government justifies this measure by calling it fair for all groups of people who opt for private and faith-based schools. Surely it should not be the burden of society as a whole to support schools which, by their nature, are exclusive in their admission and curriculum, serving a very narrow segment of society who wish to withdraw from the public education system. Surely it is the job of those segments of society that the private and faith-based schools serve to support those schools.

For example, the Board of Jewish Education has under its aegis 44 primary and secondary schools in the Toronto area. It is open to all Jewish children and provides subsidies to those parents who cannot afford to pay full tuition. It is funded by the Jewish community as a whole through funds set up for this very purpose. Thus, very few Jewish children are actually denied access to these schools because of lack of ability to pay. The parents of the children in these schools have chosen to take their children out of the public school system for a number of reasons, some of which I mentioned above. But other reasons are a desire to have their children taught apart from the general community at large and taught within the confines or within the parameters of the Jewish community in all its variants, from the secular to the orthodox. I do not believe that the parents of today's children should be rewarded for siloing their charges in private, non-accountable, faith- or ethnic-based schools, apart from the general mosaic, which is our Canada.

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I can remember when, as a pupil at Regal Road Public School in the mid-1950s, I participated in a multicultural event—although the word “multicultural” did not exist in our lexicon at that time—where we each presented individual projects on our own ethnic backgrounds. We had projects on England, Scotland, Ireland, Sweden, Poland, Israel, Russia, the West Indies, Africa and many other countries and regions. We were made aware of not just the uniqueness of each of us, but also of the many similarities we have. We came out of that project—

remember, it was over 45 years ago—with a greater understanding of who were not only as individuals, but also as Canadians, and with a greater respect for what each of us had to contribute to the Canadian mosaic.

The public school system is truly in dire straits. Surely it is the role of the government to ensure that the public education system continues to be fully funded in all its aspects, with long-term plans in hand to serve all the children in the province with the fully rounded, all-inclusive education system that was admired across the country and the continent.

I'm sorry; I did not include some information about myself. I can give you my e-mail address, which is shkaplan@sympatico.ca. I am a wage slave—I have a regular office job—so I was forced to do this in about one and a half evenings' work. I apologize for the errors, the typos, in this document. Thank you very much.

The Chair: We have approximately three and a half minutes per caucus, and I'll start with the government side. Mr Hastings.

Mr Hastings: Thank you very much for appearing today. When you talk in your last statement about the schools across Ontario being admired continent-wide, worldwide—

Mr Kaplan: Just continent-wide and country-wide. I can't speak for Europe or Africa or Asia.

Mr Hastings: As a teacher I know there were many groups of teachers, parents, educators and business organizations from Europe that used to come to Ontario—and still do, I suspect—to see what is going on in education and in other issues in our society. My concern and my question to you, centrally, is that you argue for more money in the public school system—elementary, secondary—and I suspect you would subscribe to the thesis that a limitless amount of more money—\$2 billion, \$3 billion, \$4 billion, \$5 billion—would essentially cure any of the ailments or any of the problems we may have in the system, that the school boards would get nicely rounded up, be nicely secure in their approach, and the world could go on. As one of our young people said, “Give us a break for the summer, and life will be marvelous,” I guess like Father Knows Best on television.

Do you subscribe to the general view that money is essentially the only problem in the public system, and if they had \$2 billion, \$3 billion or \$4 billion more, we'd be pretty well on the road to solving most of our problems?

Mr Kaplan: No, I do not.

Mr Hastings: You do not?

Mr Kaplan: No, I do not. The first thing they need is resources—not just money but resources—and an ability to do the long-term planning they were able to do when they had more control over their budgets. Right now, they do not have any control over the amount of money they can raise. Their budgets are fixed, not by them but by Queen's Park, by the government, by the ministry. As a result, they're saying, “Here's your pot of money. You must spend a certain amount of it in the classroom.” The school must also provide assistance for children with special needs. There is not enough money for them, as I

have cited in at least two cases where the parents could not get the help their children needed to become fully functional participants in our society.

The Chair: Thank you very much. I have to go to the official opposition. Mr Phillips.

Mr Phillips: Thank you, Mr Kaplan, and I apologize that we do not have more extended hearings. I saw you rush in from work—

Mr Kaplan: And I have to rush back. I've just been paged.

Mr Phillips: It's tragic. We tried to extend these hearings so that people like you wouldn't be treated this way.

I just want to make a couple of comments and then a question. The previous two presenters indicated that this is going to result in between 15% and 30% of students enrolling in private schools. He was one of the first presenters and had done a lot of research that indicates that's what's going to happen—and that's at 50% funding.

The National Citizens' Coalition has said this is the most important education public policy initiative going on in North America. The Fraser Institute said it's the biggest move in 100 years. This is going to fundamentally change education, in spite of what the government may say.

My question is this: two years ago Harris said these words in arguing against extending funding, and I'd like to get your impression of them. He said, "One of the strengths of the public system of education is to provide the venue where people of all colours, races, national and ethnic origins and religions interact and try to come to terms with one another's differences. In this way the public schools build social cohesion, tolerance and understanding. Extending public school funding rights to private religious schools will undermine this ability and result in a significant increase in the number and kind of private schools. This would have an adverse effect on the viability of the public school system which would become the system serving students not found admissible by other systems.... It would lead to increased public school closings and to the reduction of the range of programs and services."

Have you any indication from your experience in education why Mr Harris would have felt that way two years ago and then fundamentally changed his point of view today?

Mr Kaplan: I cannot speak for Mr Harris; he would have to speak for himself. My guess, however, just looking at the figures, is that for every child who is taken out of the public education system and put into a private school, that school loses approximately \$7,000, of which up to \$3,500 goes to the parents—not to the school, but to the parents. In many schools it won't even be that much. I've heard from the Islamic schools that their tuition is much lower than \$7,000, so the parents would get maybe \$2,000 of that if they're lucky. That would be a net profit of at least \$3,500 per student going into the general coffers.

The Chair: Thank you very much. Mr Marchese.

Mr Marchese: Thanks, Howard, for taking the time from work to come. Two quick questions. First, Mr Hastings asked you if putting \$2 billion back into the education system—it's almost \$2 billion that they took out—would cure the problems. You said no.

Mr Kaplan: Not by itself.

Mr Marchese: Would taking \$2 billion out help solve the problems? That's the other way to put it.

Mr Kaplan: Where would the money come from? Right now, many schools don't have enough textbooks or supplies for their students. Children have to share books. After-school activities are being cut back. Facilities are being closed, swimming pools are being closed, music programs are being closed down.

I could visualize classes being held under a tree out in the schoolyard, because there isn't enough room because they've had to pull down the portables.

Mr Marchese: But the point—we're agreeing, obviously. If you take \$2 billion out, then you've got fewer programs.

Mr Kaplan: That's right.

Mr Marchese: It may not solve problems, but by taking out you're certainly going to create problems.

Mr Kaplan: A lot more problems.

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Mr Marchese: That's the point. But you raise another point here having to do with young people with learning disabilities. You said the way they solved it, because they had the money, was to take them to a school where they could deal with their very individual concerns, which the public system couldn't do. The way Mr Hastings solves this problem is, "We underfund public education. Too bad if young people with learning disabilities can't get the help. But if you've got the money, now you've got choice, because we're going to help you to take them out and put them in a system where they might be able to help." That's what they're doing.

Mr Kaplan: I couldn't agree more. This is actually removing the choice within the publicly funded public school system. It's forcing parents to seek the private sector with their own funds, and only those parents who can afford it. I shudder to think what would happen with these two children if their parents were not doctors or city planners.

The Chair: With that, I must bring it to an end. On behalf of the committee, thank you very much for your presentation this afternoon.

ONTARIO HERITAGE FOUNDATION

The Chair: Our next presentation is from the Ontario Heritage Foundation. I would ask the presenter or presenters to come forward and state your name for the record. On behalf of the committee, welcome. You have 20 minutes for your presentation this afternoon.

Mr Allan Gotlieb: Allan Gotlieb, chairman of the board of the Ontario Heritage Foundation. This is my colleague, Beth Hanna, from the foundation. I appreciate the opportunity you're providing me to speak to you

about the provisions in the Ontario budget to protect heritage resources.

As the lead provincial heritage agency, the Ontario Heritage Foundation is concerned that renewed efforts be made to ensure the preservation and celebration of the province's heritage for the benefit of Ontarians, now and for the future. The foundation believes that a vibrant heritage preservation strategy can lead to significant economic development and a strong sense of civic pride in communities across our province.

I would like to congratulate this government on making a place for heritage preservation in the Ontario budget, 2001. The budget announces that "To encourage the restoration and preservation of heritage properties, the government proposes to give municipalities the ability to provide property tax relief to owners of buildings that are designated under the Ontario Heritage Act as being of architectural or historical value."

I know that many municipalities, heritage organizations and individuals have asked for this provision. For some time the board of the heritage foundation has encouraged the government to amend the Assessment Act to allow for tax incentives for heritage preservation. Let me say how pleased I am that the government has seen fit to recognize this request. This initiative will, I'm confident, benefit communities right across Ontario.

I would encourage you, as you determine how best to implement this provision, to ensure the provision of tax relief to owners of property protected by heritage conservation easements—easements would be very important—and to owners of both commercial and residential properties designated under the Ontario Heritage Act in the province. It is important that the provision be inclusive and, from an economic standpoint, meaningful enough to serve as a significant incentive to the private sector.

I note in the budget that the government has made a commitment to consult with stakeholders on the new tax provision. The Ontario Heritage Foundation will be very pleased to participate in that consultation process, as we are to be here today.

I have long been concerned about the lack of economic incentives favouring preservation. Other jurisdictions have successfully used tax incentives to encourage downtown core development and revitalization. New York, Miami, Denver and smaller cities such as Savannah have achieved tremendous results through tax relief in revitalizing downtowns and neighbourhoods—these are just a few examples—as some Canadian cities have as well. Victoria is an example. Incentives ensure that developers and owners are rewarded for preserving heritage buildings rather than demolishing them.

Ontario is falling behind other jurisdictions in its recognition of the importance of heritage and culture in the economic life and vitality of our towns and cities. Heritage preservation has been a vital element in the rebirth and renaissance of many American cities, but in Ontario we continue to suffer lax heritage preservation

laws and neglect our downtowns, our central parks and our waterfronts.

In Ontario we have, I believe, an unfortunate situation. The owner of a designated property can tear it down within six months. It cannot be prevented. The weakness of our heritage legislation makes it doubly important that we create new tools to support preservation.

Heritage preservation, as I said, should be seen as a major economic development strategy. The government has committed, in the budget, to invest in strategic infrastructure to support Smart Growth. This investment in infrastructure must include heritage infrastructure. In other jurisdictions implementing Smart Growth strategies, a strong commitment has been made to the protection of natural areas and cultural heritage, to building healthy communities, as well as to transportation and housing. Chicago, Atlanta and Cleveland can be cited as examples.

In Ontario there has, in recent times, been an increasing groundswell of public support for heritage preservation, as evidenced by participation in events like Toronto's Doors Open last weekend and the response to the Ontario heritage challenge fund community program. Some 73,000 people explored more than 90 heritage buildings across Toronto during the Doors Open weekend in May.

The foundation has been pleased to administer, with the province, the Ontario heritage challenge fund community program. The \$5 million provided by the government has been matched by communities. It has resulted in an investment of well over \$10 million in community capital work on heritage across the province. This program has been a wonderful success. The number of applications for the program for marvellous buildings greatly exceeded the funding available and the board was disappointed that we could not fund more projects. This program proved itself to be a positive tool for community development as new partnerships are developed with the private sector. More matching funding of this type is clearly needed and I hope the government will provide it.

In spite of the tremendous public support, heritage buildings in Ontario continue to be at risk. Canadians have lost between one fifth and one quarter of our built heritage in the last 30 years. A survey conducted in 2000 for the Heritage Canada Foundation shows that Canadians are concerned about conservation of heritage and that fully nine in 10 Canadians consider conservation to be important to Canadian culture and identity.

The desire to preserve our heritage is now increasingly reflected in the work of some of our more far-sighted and imaginative developers. As they learn that historical architecture is valuable, heritage values are also gaining influence in the commercial real estate market. Where once they might have been bulldozed, they now more often want to integrate heritage into their plans, protecting natural and cultural features as valuable, even precious, assets. This they can do because they are beginning to sense that this is what their clients and the public

want. We are seeing marketers employ a heritage ethos to sell products.

In some places heritage has become the principal component of the package of attractions that draws tourists to a city. Heritage is the primary factor in much of tourism around the world. Whole regions can be, have been and are being revitalized by heritage tourism. And corporations increasingly recognize heritage as a vital aspect of the environment in which they operate and compete.

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The blossoming of heritage in the private sector does not mean that governments can ignore the field—far from it. Governments have power and authority that individuals and private commercial interests lack. It is the duty and responsibility of government to use their unique prerogatives to do the things that only they can do on behalf of all of us.

Taxation is one conservation tool that lies exclusively within the government domain. The leadership being shown by this government in introducing tax incentives for the preservation of heritage buildings is significant because within a sympathetic tax environment, market forces will work to save heritage buildings and could actually have a transforming effect.

I congratulate the government on taking this major step forward, but much work remains to be done if we are to preserve our built, cultural and natural heritage for the use and enjoyment of future generations of Ontarians.

The Chair: We have approximately three minutes per caucus and I'll start with Mr Phillips.

Mr Phillips: Thank you very much for being here. I might add you're a welcome interlude in what's been mainly a debate on the tax credit program, with strongly held views on many sides.

I appreciate the work your organization does. We live in a 160-year-old farmhouse so I have some interest. I very much, by the way, agree with you on the economic aspects of it. I think there is much tourism around the world that's really built on this.

The budget is not particularly specific on what's proposed and there are no funds provided for it in the budget that I can see, but that's fine. I gather whatever it is, it's supposed to take effect January 1, 2002.

I have a couple of questions, just in case we run out of time. One is, I think you mentioned that taxation policy is important, but have you any legislative advice for us on how we might do a better job in this area? Particularly, you used some examples of Cleveland, Atlanta, Chicago, and I think you mentioned New York. So a twofold question: what is the expectation of what may happen here in the budget, because it's just words—you must have had discussions—and secondly, have you any advice for us on things provincially, legislatively that we should be considering?

Mr Gotlieb: In terms of my expectation of what would come out, I am really not privy to any particular thoughts at this point other than that we regard this as a very significant commitment. What will be very important is that when the details are fleshed out, they are

meaningful and they provide incentives. As I said, it's very important that it includes not just commercial but residential property, because some of the glory of our province is in the domestic architecture where people live, these wonderful areas of Victorian, Edwardian and old houses, maybe like your own. Also, easements are very important, where people enter into agreements with the government to preserve their property. I hope people would be encouraged, through tax, to enter into these agreements.

What could be done by way of legislation? It's a big subject so I can make a big statement. I think the Ontario Heritage Act needs to be amended. It should have been amended a long time ago. It's 25 years ago that it was passed. I have to say in the greatest non-partisan spirit that we've had in this province governments that were NDP, Liberal and Conservative; this act has not been touched through all this time and it's overdue. It's out of date.

We have a very elaborate Ontario Heritage Act, but the centre of it, the core, is that you can tear down a building even if it's designated as historic or of national or regional importance. It can be torn down by the owner within six months. You can't stop him or her. That's unfortunate. There's got to be a better process and there's got to be a better balance between the interests of the community, the citizens and the owners.

I think this heritage act should be reviewed. There should be a full and complete review of the legislation. It's out of date; we've got to get it ready for the 21st century.

Mr Marchese: I thank you both for coming. It's good to have you there as a chair, Mr Gotlieb, because I think you're very helpful.

Mr Gotlieb: Thank you.

Mr Marchese: If only this government could be as radical with heritage as they are with tax credits for private schools—if only. The problem is that this is a different kind of political issue, and while this issue of heritage is so much easier to deal with, I'm not quite sure why they haven't moved on that front.

To be fair, New Democrats introduced the discussion on a new heritage act when we were there, and I must admit we failed too. We could have presented it because we did a lot of work during the consultations with all the various people in the heritage field. We didn't do it and I regret that.

On the other hand, I said to the minister, "Look, I'm prepared, as an opposition critic, to support you. Just bring it forward. Any modest thing is better than nothing." I put in a private member's bill that would say, "Give the power to the cities to prevent demolitions," because that's a very good power that the city could have. To give the city the power to give tax credits—isn't that a wonderful thing? Cities are broke. Why couldn't the province take this task on of saying, "We will offer the incentives," instead of saying to cities that are broke, "You have the power to give those incentives"? What do you think about that?

Mr Gottlieb: I think the incentives will be through the tax system generally. We don't know their design but, as I understand it, it won't necessarily be limited to a real property tax. We don't know what those incentives will be. I think this clause, this tax relief, has the makings of a radical step forward, depending on how it's defined, how significant it is in creating incentives. The payoff for municipalities is in economic development, in the impact, because it changes the economics of buildings.

For example, I was just reading very recently about Red River College in Manitoba. They used four marvellous old buildings in the centre of town and they gave them a 10-year tax holiday. I think that was done at the municipal level. That's going to transform that whole market area, which has been in the doldrums for years.

This is provincial legislation. They are responsible—and I am not a tax expert—under the Assessment Act for how properties are assessed. I think there is a real potential here to move in such a way through such assessments to have radical results.

Mr Hardeman: Thank you, sir, for your presentation. As Mr Phillips mentioned, it's somewhat of a change to be talking about some of the other things in the budget bill, particularly when someone as prominent as yourself comes to speak to us about it.

I was very pleased to hear all the positive comments about the budget and where it's going. Of course, you raised a little concern when you used the word "but" after you had given most of your presentation, but I agree with the "but," that much more needs to be done. I would also agree with you—and we're very pleased—that as a government we're able to work with our partners in funding programs to leverage more investment into the preservation of heritage. So I think we will be able to move forward and improve the heritage assets within our province.

I just wanted to talk quickly about the changes to heritage taxation. I know—and maybe you could correct me if you have a different vision of it—that the Oxford county courthouse, a building in my community, is publicly owned, so it doesn't really apply. If that was a privately owned building and was assessed for taxation, it would be worth about three times the value of a similar building with similar office space. So it's reasonable to assume, on a straight assessment, without any conditions for heritage, that it would pay for someone to tear it down just to have a lower level of taxation. To me, that doesn't make a lot of sense. It makes a lot more sense to have a different rate of taxation because of that heritage designation, so that it's an advantage, not a disadvantage, for someone to preserve a heritage building.

When I look at some of the other partner programs, I think if we work together to protect our heritage without spending—in this case, you don't have to spend extra dollars, you just have to make sure you don't have disincentives in place for people to preserve their heritage buildings. I would just put that to you.

Mr Gottlieb: I think this removes that disincentive. It creates a positive incentive and the money comes from

the private sector. It's their investment, but they have an incentive in that there's a tax advantage for them. What that tax advantage is, how it's spelled out, how significant, is the responsibility of the government and the hearings you will be having. I think it's very important. I can't flesh that out as an expert in any way, but we do know—and I think it would be very important to look at what other jurisdictions have done, because we can learn from others. We can learn from their mistakes, what worked and what didn't. We know that cities and areas have been transformed through the use of the tax system. It has a tremendous potential for us.

The Chair: On behalf of the committee, thank you very much for your presentation this afternoon.

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HALTON DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD

The Chair: Our next presentation is from the Halton District School Board. I would ask the presenter or presenters to come forward, please, and if you could state your name for the record. On behalf of the committee, welcome. You have 20 minutes for your presentation. Go ahead whenever you're ready.

Dr Dusty Papke: First of all, Mr Chair, I'd like to thank you for the opportunity of presenting at the committee. It wasn't easy to get here today, but we did manage. This is of very critical importance to our education system in this province.

My name is Dusty Papke, and I'm the director of education of the Halton District School Board. With me is the chair of the board, Ethel Gardiner, and trustee Debbie Downs from Burlington.

First of all, let me state that I have no political party affiliation, so my position on the matter before this committee is not politically motivated. However, let me admit freely that I'm a passionate supporter of public education and hold an unshakeable belief that a strong, publicly funded education system is the very underpinning of our democratic society. I also believe our public education system is under attack as part of an agenda that is ideologically driven and unresponsive to the wishes of the majority of Ontarians.

The mission and guiding principles of the Halton District School Board's strategic plan are prefaced with the following statement: "Public education has been one of the major cornerstones of a prosperous and democratic Canada. We believe its essential and critical role must continue."

Public schools are the foundation of a tolerant society. Students from all backgrounds and cultures who live and grow and learn together set the climate for social peace and understanding. We believe our public schools play a vital role in the reality that we in Canada live in a country relatively free of the strife and intolerance demonstrated in many other parts of the world. We believe funding private schools, directly or indirectly, will encourage fragmentation and segregation.

Government members have cited equity and choice as the rationale for the imposition of this tax credit proposal. For the record, we are not opposed to choice. We are opposed to the right to any choice at public expense. This is not affordable, any more than any personal choice of alternative health care at taxpayers' expense would be affordable, or the provision of tax credits for those who chose to not drive on our highways would be affordable.

However, this is not about choice. Choice already exists. Private schools already exist. This is about encouraging parents to withdraw their children from an already underfunded public system. It is about a further reduction in funding for the public school system. For every student who can be enticed from the public school system the government will grant up to \$3,500 in tax credits, but reduce funding to the public school system by almost \$7,000 under its student-focused funding model. To quote Clayton Ruby, "If people pull their children out of public schools, it is good economics for the government that doesn't want to fund schools and bad economics for kids."

The Halton District School Board believes, perhaps naively, that anyone who has seriously and objectively followed the happenings in public education over the past few years should be aware of two things: (1) the public school system has been in constant turmoil as it has attempted to deal with one useful crisis after another, and (2) the public school system is woefully underfunded.

While expectations have been increasingly raised, standards changed and accountability levels heightened, funding has not been provided for our school system to respond. Additionally, we are now faced with the prospect of tax credits for parents of children in private schools, in essence indirect funding to private schools—and it will be at the expense of the public school system.

Our position is very simple: the government of Ontario should not even consider funding to private schools, directly or indirectly, while the public school system, the only school system open to all children and charged with meeting the educational needs of all children, is clearly under-resourced. Despite claims that the government has substantially increased its support of public education this year, let's look at the actual funding provided to public school boards.

In the recently released general legislative grants, which arrived more than two months late, the government announced an increase in funding of \$100 per student to "allow boards flexibility to address local priorities." The reality is that much of this funding is simply restated dollars taken out of the system and re-announced.

The government withdrew the money provided in 2000-01 to deal with escalating fuel costs, both for transportation and heating. These costs are projected to continue to rise significantly and the deregulation of hydro is projected to raise those hydro costs by a minimum of 20%. We have been told that those can be covered from the \$100 per student for local initiatives.

There has been a 50% reduction in the grants for curriculum reform materials. This is to be taken from the \$100 per student for local priorities.

Boards will be required, by regulation, to fix the problem of the withdrawal of extracurricular activities from our secondary schools. This is not a problem caused by the school boards, but is to be dealt with from the \$100 per student for local priorities.

New standards have been mandated for the individual education plans for special-needs students, with no accompanying funding for development or implementation. It's to come from the \$100 per student for local priorities. In Halton, the cost of that initiative alone is estimated at approximately \$638,000.

A new process has also been mandated for the ISA claims that are required to access special education funding. The dollars for special education have been frozen, deceptively called "stable funding," despite an increase in the number of special-needs students. This expensive initiative is also to be funded from the \$100 per student for local priorities.

Technology continues to change rapidly and school boards are expected to keep pace, both in terms of instructional technology and the ministry's expectations for administration. Despite the expectations raised by the ministry this past year, in the end, there are no dollars to address these initiatives. They are to be funded from the \$100 per student for local priorities.

There is no recognition in the funding for the changes in construction costs that have been experienced since the student-focused funding model was implemented in 1998. Our costs have increased significantly, but the government still provides \$117 per square foot for elementary and \$126 per square foot for secondary construction. This is not realistic.

By May 2001, most school boards had two-year collective agreements in place with their teachers, and the government was well aware of that. However, there is no provision for salaries and wages in this year's funding. It's to come from the \$100 per student for local initiatives.

Finally, the increase provided to boards, once adjustments have been made for enrolment increases, is, according to the government's figures, 1.8%. The inflation rate for the year has been pegged anywhere from 2.8% to 3.2%. That's a significant shortfall. The \$100 per student does not even allow school boards to maintain the status quo, let alone any local priorities.

Much has been made of the \$360-million increase to funding of public education. It's a large number. However, as a proportion of the overall budget required for education, it does not cover the initiatives being mandated for publicly funded school systems—mandates which are not required of private schools.

The government has stated that it now spends more than ever before on education. I think the figure being tossed around is \$13.9 billion. However, what is included in that total? Certainly TVO is a nice resource for our

schools, but it should not be counted as part of the public education budget.

The costs of the Education Quality and Accountability Office and its province-wide tests are part of the public education budget. I'm not opposing the tests. Please don't misinterpret my remarks. But counting these costs, added by the government, as part of the public education budget means less money for school boards and schools to deliver their mandate.

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The burgeoning centralized bureaucracy required to manage the unbelievable accountability exercises implemented by the Ministry of Education further reduces the dollars available to provide service to students. As an example, we were recently informed that we are to be part of an audit, conducted this June, of the new IEP standards. The standards were released early in 2001. The ministry held their information session with boards on March 21 and the new IEPs are to be in place for September. Yet the ministry is conducting an audit in June, knowing that no board can possibly be in compliance. We will be in September. What is the cost of such audits? They do increase the amount that can be claimed as spent on public education, but they don't help serve children.

The cost of the ISA process to access special education funding requires school boards to pull teachers and administrators away from servicing children and to utilize them in fulfilling a paper exercise with ever-changing rules and no impact.

So, yes, while the government is able to point to numbers and claim increased spending on education, it would seem to be a result of redefining what is to be included in the public education envelope and spending on new provincial initiatives in the name of accountability. However, we all know there are fewer teachers in schools; we have lost librarians, guidance counsellors, music teachers, physical education teachers, special education teachers, educational assistants and other support staff, and our resources are dwindling.

In this environment, how can you even consider tax credits for those who send their children to private schools? The estimated costs of this initiative run from \$300 million per year to as high as \$700 million per year. I believe that was the Premier's number. Since the government obviously has the money, we would implore you to reinvest in public education and put the \$300 million to \$700 million into the GLGs now.

We support the call of People for Education to remove 30,000 children from waiting lists for special education; to maintain funding for gas and heating costs for buses and schools; to return extracurricular activities to secondary schools; to cover costs for textbooks for the new curriculum; to ensure that elementary schools have music teachers; to keep libraries open and staffed; to restore funding for English-as-a-second-language programs; and restore funding so that every elementary school has a principal.

I am tremendously proud of the trustees of the Halton District School Board who, as a corporate body, have chosen to speak out in opposition to the tax credit/voucher system proposed by the government. They are, after all, democratically elected to sit on a public school board. They must protect, defend and advocate for public education. They must be guardians of a proven system that has served our children well. They will continue to demand resources needed to have each child in Halton's public school system reach his or her full potential. Diverting money from public education will do nothing to help achieve that goal. It will do nothing to improve our schools or to enrich the lives of our children.

We know there are a number of members of this government who understand the impact of this proposal and privately do not support it. We would urge them to speak up before it's too late. The finance minister has admitted that no research was conducted on the impact of this proposal or the cost of this proposal prior to it being included in the budget. That's astounding. To further decimate the public school system with this hastily considered, ill-advised proposal is unconscionable and, at the end of the day, the people of Ontario will hold you accountable. Please remove the tax credits for indirect funding of private schools from Bill 45.

The Chair: Thank you. We have two minutes per caucus. Mr Marchese.

Mr Marchese: I want to thank all three of you for coming. Your information is vital for these discussions because, you see, when the opposition parties say they have taken out \$2.3 billion—and we rely on statistical evidence brought forth by an economist, Hugh MacKenzie, whom they scoff at. So they scoff at that. They scoff at People for Education because they say, "Their surveys are not really to be believed." The only thing people won't believe are the true testimonies of individuals very connected to the educational system. We've had parents here who know the kinds of cuts that have been made and how that affects them directly. So when you come with your evidence, which I suggest to you is damning to them, they get very nervous, as they should.

My point is, I support a public system. I believe we need to accommodate our differences in a public system. I also don't advocate for a homogenized system where we simply try to make them of one culture. I think we can reflect our diversity and we do it well. I don't know how it's done in Halton as much because I was a trustee with the Toronto board. I know what we did there to reflect the diversity. But that's the way to do it. If there are shortfalls, if we can't deal with some of the problems, like young people who have disabilities, then we need to help and we need to put money in it and not say, "Those who have the money can go to a private school, and if you don't, too bad, so sad. You're stuck with the public system, where there's no money."

I thank you for all the information you bring. It's important evidence to bring in front of these Conservative members. Who knows? Maybe they'll listen. Thank you.

Mr O'Toole: Thank you very much, Mr Papke and board members, for coming. Just to sort of legitimize, I was a trustee for a couple of terms and saw the frustration that I know is typical. My wife is a teacher and my daughter is a high school teacher, so I'm not unfriendly to the challenging environment you're in. I'm not just sure who's leading it. But I would put to you that as a trustee in 1980-82, these are exactly the same issues. If you're a director, you know that. The issues haven't changed that much. Special ed, full funding, it's all about the same argument. They toasted the Liberals in 1990 because of the teachers' pension and they toasted the NDP over the social contract and for David Cooke, because David Cooke started most of the reforms. The Royal Commission on Learning outlined a system that was failing, and if you don't know that, you don't deserve to be a director of education. You allowed the platitudes—

Mr Phillips: For heaven's sake, John, be a little courteous.

Interjections.

The Chair: Order.

Mr O'Toole: Please don't interrupt me, Mr Phillips. I've heard the same tirade—

Interjections.

The Chair: Order.

Mr O'Toole: You said you were non-political. Your closing statement was this, "The electorate will hold you accountable," and that's appropriate. You're paid to deliver and administer, but you're contradicting most of the things that are part of the public record. In fact, the funding for education is up. For you to leave on the public record that it's down, that is absolutely an error. If you disagree with that, that's another question—

Dr Papke: Mr O'Toole, with all due respect, that is not what I said.

Mr O'Toole: Are you receiving more funding this year than last year?

Dr Papke: That's not what I said. I said we got \$100 per pupil more than last year. I pointed out, Mr O'Toole, that that is less than the inflation rate.

Mr Marchese: John, give him a chance.

The Chair: Order.

Mr O'Toole: He had 20 minutes to make his pitch. He never had a positive thing to say—

The Chair: Then with that, Mr O'Toole, I must bring it to an end because we have run out of time.

Mr O'Toole: The final thing I want to put on the record—

The Chair: Order. Mr O'Toole, I must go to the official opposition. Mr Phillips.

Mr Phillips: Thank you for a professional presentation. I appreciate the work of you and the trustees. Before you leave today, you must get a copy of the information presented to the committee just about an hour ago showing spending down \$75 million in 2001-02. There it is, down \$75 million. The points you made, they've cut out the \$39 million for heating costs in last year's budget—gone. They have \$30 million for textbooks down to \$15 million. These are the government's figures.

The reason I raise this is because I thought your presentation was professional, factual, calm and designed to help us. I very much appreciate that. We've met now for four days here and one can only get more concerned about this issue in listening to the presentations.

I would also say that educators should look at what the Harris government said two years ago about this issue. They did a lot of research then and argued strenuously against proceeding with this. Something changed. I don't know what changed. We've seen no research on it, but suddenly they decided to head down this road.

My point really is to thank the Halton board. It takes some courage, frankly, for a director to speak up like you did today. The facts the government presented today support you. You should feel vindicated, not attacked.

I guess my question is—the directors and the trustees must have discussed this—have you any idea why the government has changed its mind so dramatically from the position it held two years ago? In the educational community, is there any rationale for it?

Dr Papke: Mr Phillips, I don't think we do have any answer for that, other than what we read in the papers, and everyone else has read that. I have no idea why the sudden change.

The Chair: With that, I must bring it to an end. On behalf of the committee, thank you.

Mr Marchese: Chair, did we receive their submission?

Dr Papke: Mr Chair, we were only notified yesterday that we would be allowed to present today. We weren't told to bring copies. But I would be more than happy to do that.

The Chair: If you have a copy, we can distribute it. On behalf of the committee, thank you very much for your presentation.

A couple of items before we break. The bus will be leaving at 7 o'clock tonight for London. I hope that every member who is travelling to Sudbury and Ottawa has received a package. If not, you should contact the clerk. This committee will reconvene tomorrow morning at 10 o'clock at the Ramada Inn on Exeter Road in London.

We are now adjourned.

The committee adjourned at 1800.

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