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**Assemblée législative
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**Official Report
of Debates
(Hansard)**

Friday 15 June 2001

**Journal
des débats
(Hansard)**

Vendredi 15 juin 2001

**Standing committee on
finance and economic affairs**

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

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

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

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON
FINANCE AND ECONOMIC AFFAIRS**

Friday 15 June 2001

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

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

Vendredi 15 juin 2001

The committee met at 1000 in the Ramada Inn, London.

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): Good morning, everyone. I'd like to get your attention. We'll bring the committee to order. I'm going to depart from regular procedure. Instead of welcoming everyone, I'm going to let the member from Elgin-London-Middlesex do the greetings this morning.

Mr Steve Peters (Elgin-Middlesex-London): Thanks very much, Mr Chair. Welcome to the riding of Elgin-Middlesex-London. My riding is quite a diverse riding, a real urban-rural riding. This is certainly one of the urban parts of it. It takes in a large part of the London industrial area and a small part of London residential. But virtually the rest of my riding is a rural riding next to St Thomas, so it is diverse.

I want to officially welcome you. From the other side of the riding, I have some strawberries that were just picked this morning from a Ferguson strawberry farm, Ferguson Berries, located on Wellington Road.

Mr O'Toole is very good, I notice, in the Legislature, at promoting things within his own riding. I congratulate him. I have to send these people Hansard, just like you send people Hansard, Mr O'Toole.

There are 24 quarts of berries here for you. They're going to be in the cooler. I encourage you to take some home and have some strawberries and ice cream and shortcake. I'd ask too that whoever is here at the end of the day, at 4 o'clock, everybody please sample a bit of Elgin county.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr Peters. I don't know about the shortcake, who's going to bake it, but I'm sure we'll be able to get our hands on something somewhere.

REHOBOTH CHRISTIAN SCHOOL

The Chair: Let's start with the order of the day. Our first presentation this morning is from the Rehoboth Christian School. 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 this morning. Go ahead whenever you're ready.

Mr Martien Vanderspek: Thank you, Mr Chairman, and committee members. I thank you for the opportunity to comment, on behalf of my school community, on the government's proposal to implement a tax credit to parents who pay tuition to send their children to an independent school.

Let me briefly introduce myself and the school I work in. I received my training as an elementary teacher in the Netherlands, graduating in 1976, with a still-valid elementary teacher's certificate. I received government-funded Christian education from kindergarten, age 4, to teacher's certification, age 21. My wife had the same privilege. After graduating, I accepted a one-year teaching position at Rehoboth Christian School in Norwich, a school operated by a congregation of a sister denomination in North America, the Netherlands Reformed Congregations. By God's grace, that one-year position has stretched into a 25-year career, from elementary to secondary, to vice-principal, to principal. In the meantime, I added a BA degree to obtain my Ontario teacher's certificate and followed additional basic qualification training to stay up-to-date and properly qualified.

Rehoboth Christian School opened its doors in 1975. In the years I have worked at Rehoboth, I have seen it grow from more than 160 students in 1976 to the current enrolment of more than 525, from more than 190 families. We offer a comprehensive program from kindergarten to grade 10. Most students finish their high school education in local public high schools. A few follow an independent study program leading to a secondary school diploma.

Presently we have, beside myself, 19 full-time and eight part-time teachers, a librarian, two secretaries and

eight bus drivers employed. Custodial and maintenance work is contracted out. Our facilities include 25 classrooms, including two shops, home ec, resource and computer rooms, a library, a gym, a staff room and several offices.

Last school year it took \$1.4 million to cover the cost of the school operation. About 66% was spent on teachers' salaries, 11% on transportation, 8% on textbooks, supplies and materials, 7% on principal, vice-principal and secretarial wages, 6% on janitorial services and maintenance.

Our school has a wide range of students. Just to give you some facts, we presently have two students enrolled who are legally blind. We have 12 students who receive or have received occupational, physio and speech pathology therapy through the recent health funding initiative. This health funding initiative will probably make it possible to allow enrolment of our first severely handicapped student in the coming year or two. We have a half-time teacher who helps individual students with physical and learning problems cope in the classroom. We have another almost full-time teacher who teaches individualized reading and math programs to a number of students with learning disabilities. We have usually two or three families a year emigrating from the Netherlands who need ESL programs.

All this has not come without great sacrifices. Parents have had to pay tuition, from about \$70 a month in the early 1970s to \$475 a month per family presently. Obviously, this would never cover the cost of \$1.4 million a year. To keep tuition as low as possible, and to make it possible for all church members to send their children to our school, extra collections and special fundraising activities provide close to 40% of the cost of the school operation. We draw students from four closely related and more or less supporting reformed denominations. Even our sister denomination in the Netherlands annually supports financially the 11 denominational schools in North America. The churches try to help those who cannot afford the monthly tuition payments.

In general, our parents are not very well-to-do. Since most of the families are young when they start sending children to our school, they face house, car and school payments. Many of our young people plan consciously for the sacrifices they will face once they get married and have children. Most of them are employed in the trades, in agriculture or in the service sector. A few have started their own business or are working toward doing so. As young people, they are not nearly at the peak of their income potential.

My wife and I know from personal experience what this means. Teachers' wages in a private school are considerably lower than in the public system, and there are no benefits such as pensions etc. Fortunately, my wife was able to supplement my income with part-time teaching. We tried to have her stay home as much as possible while our children were at home. Add to that part-time studies for a BA degree for me and a degree in music for my wife. It meant a simple home, an older car,

few holidays, careful and restrained spending and a summer job if at all possible. Yet by the grace of God we found it possible to meet our obligations and support church and school during the years our four daughters were in the school. Truly, it has been one of the most humbling and comforting experiences to see how each year God makes the means available to provide Christian education in our family and also in our community. To see over \$1 million come in and go out is no small matter.

You may ask, why did you go through all this trouble? Why not have our children go through the public system? To my surprise, a number of people do not understand or don't want to acknowledge what motivates people to desire denominational education. The fact is that people who are truly committed to a religious world view cannot separate education and religion. Too much of what is taught, and too much of life and living in general, is driven by beliefs and values to leave education to neutral educators. For a school to have a chance to be effective, it needs the full support of the parents. That support will only be there if the parents, the staff and the school as a whole form one real community. If religion truly plays a part in the family, it is only natural that parents want to see an agreement in world and life view between family, church and school. Historically this has always been an important aspect; think of the Jewish community with the synagogue school, the Roman Catholic church and monastic schools, or the Reformation and the push for general public education.

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I trust you know that in the Netherlands public funding of denominational schools, in addition to the funding of a public system, has been an accepted thing for many generations. In my opinion, it has been for the good of the Dutch. My wife and I are still very thankful for the privilege of attending schools where there was a close agreement in world view and religious principles between home, church and school. This way we were introduced to the world in a manner that kept family, church and school as part of a strong community in the world. It also gave us a sense of duty and calling and helped us understand our task in passing on our heritage and sense of community to future generations.

Whenever I discuss this issue here in Ontario, I always hear of the fear of fragmentation. This is a curious fear to me. In the Netherlands, different schools formed different communities. From my observation in Ontario, different schools within the public system also form separate communities. In fact the school spirit, so strongly stressed in different schools, gives as much rise to fragmentation as different denominational schools would in the eyes of younger and older students. We tend to identify with "ours" and look at others as "the others" as we grow up. Only as we mature do we realize that the others belong as much to our society as we do and that we need them as much as they need us if we are to enjoy mutual benefits.

The recent stories about violence in schools shows that there is fragmentation within public schools. It appears

that, in the minds of quite a number of people, the idea is set that religion leads to intolerance, so that denominational schools cause fragmentation, while all other efforts and means of community fostering are more or less considered benign and acceptable. A number of people think that denominational schools will lead to intolerance, bigotry, racism etc. Now, I will not deny that this may happen in individual cases. However, the question may well be considered whether these bigots found religion as a good way to express their nature and character or whether religion caused it. Bigotry is not limited to religion; you'll find it in any setting.

When on the way to the post office and I see the students of our local public school fan out across town after school, at times I am horrified to hear what is yelled and to see the spitting at each other and the fighting with each other that takes place between students of this school. My children have been addressed as Dutchies on numerous occasions on their paper route, while they are true Canadians by birth and proud of it. My wife and I are thankful for our Dutch Christian heritage, and we understand that our children need to value their Canadian Dutch Christian heritage.

At the same time, I know that some of our students are not dealing properly with others whom they consider different when on their own. I am convinced that good religion teaches the true virtues of life. God's word teaches that people are naturally inclined to wickedness. It also teaches that human nature needs to be changed by grace to become compassionate, considerate, helpful, merciful etc.

I am convinced that a person who grows up and is taught within his or her own religious community, and has learned not only the superficial aspects of his or her religion but has also seen and experienced the force of the life and meaning of his or her religion, is much more likely to be compassionate, understanding and appreciative of other people with different convictions, because he or she knows the importance of religious convictions and experiences. He or she may not agree with the other's religion, just like people do not agree on a wide variety of issues, but he or she will understand why others feel passionately about their beliefs. I am also convinced that superficial, neutral or compartmentalized religious instruction will tend to produce the very bigotry it is supposed to prevent, because it will be an intellectual and pseudo-emotional introduction, not a true way of life, particularly if it is not taught by someone who knows and understands.

For example, I would never do justice to Buddhism if I were to teach it, because I do not grasp the motivating principles of it beyond some generalities. Just making a lot of different kinds of people mix in one comprehensive setting will not automatically bring about mutual understanding and compassion. It is just not naturally in people. It needs to be learned in a small, compassionate, involved community where family, church and school interact at all levels of human interaction, and correct and steer each other as each member develops and grows.

As far as funding of denominational schools is concerned, our Reform tradition has always held the civic government responsible for providing the means for good religious education. This is still found in the present Education Act of Ontario, section 264(c). What bothers me in particular is the studious ignoring or denying of the merits of denominational education beside the separate system. Making denominational education a formal, but distinct, part of the educational system by recognizing the existence and validity of it would be significant in correcting the present inequities. To withhold such basic services from students as speech therapy, various kinds of testing, remedial services, educational expertise etc because they happen to be enrolled in a denominational private system is to me direct discrimination against citizens in the province.

To withhold such things as support services, documents, educational software, professional consultations etc from teachers because they happen to be employed in a denominational system would appear to be a good way to foster intolerance. To read in the paper, or in ministry correspondence, that something is extended to all students in the province, and to find out soon that it is restricted to students enrolled in publicly funded schools, helps to foster intolerance. The fact that tuition payments and direct donations made to a denominational school in which my children are enrolled cannot be considered fully tax deductible, while expecting everyone to pay all taxes, is also a good way to foster intolerance, not directly because of the financial cost, but because of the expressed attitude toward the merits of denominational schools.

There is the worry about the cost of funding. I can see that point. If this coming school year all students presently home-schooled or educated in private schools were sent to the public or separate system, this would mean a huge increase in educational expenditure. Helping independent schools would not cost nearly as much, because they generally are run much more efficiently. Parents and teachers are expected to make extra sacrifices, and they will continue to do so, even under the proposed tax credit system. I think that is OK.

The real issue is, of course, less money than control. Lots of people who oppose home schooling, charter schools, denominational schools etc resent the fact that they will have less control over that part of the youth of our province. Yet, this is exactly what motivates a good number of people to consider alternatives. They do not trust the big public system. They want a community they can more or less entrust their children to, not because they are in the first place worried about the academic skills and knowledge that are taught, but they are worried about what the educators and bureaucrats want to do with and to their children.

Now, independent schools can be chosen. Public schools have to be taken the way they happen to be in your neighbourhood. I think parents should have a fairer choice. When I see how our sister schools in Alberta and British Columbia are operating within the general educa-

tion system, I expect no alarming prospect for Ontario in starting to help with the financial burden parents face when they send, according to their careful choice, their children to a denominational school. Is there presently no control over what happens in independent schools? I beg to disagree. There is parental control. If independent schools do not provide their students with the generally accepted levels of skills and knowledge, or present a setting that does not agree with the vision of the community they serve, parents will soon vote with their feet. We have our students from grade 2 through grade 10 tested each year, using the Canadian Achievement Test, to make sure we get a good indication of the growth of the individual student's basic skills and to find school-wide areas of weakness in our program.

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Our grade 9 and 10 courses taught for credit toward a secondary school diploma are inspected by the Ministry of Education inspectors. Our grade 10 students have to pass the grade 10 literacy test also. All this happens already without funding. However, I want to stress that extending all the particular policies, methodologies and expectations of the public and separate system to the independent schools will doom our schools to stop functioning the way they presently do. Such a move will weaken the close unity in vision between family, church and school. It will also diminish the variety and specialization in education that presently answers an obvious need for parents who cannot find satisfaction with what is offered in their local public schools.

Therefore it is important that independent schools have the right to decide how, when and what is taught within a generally accepted framework of expected skills and abilities. I sincerely hope that our public and separate systems will do well in our province and provide their students a worthwhile and adequate education. They should set the level and the tone of educational achievement in the province. They should be adequately funded to fulfill this task properly. I heartily welcome the tax credit as originally proposed. I think it is fair to the parents who exercise their natural right to choose the education they feel is best for their children. I think it is also a concrete step in the recognition of the place and value of alternative forms of education and training within the overall education system. It is my hope that it will help make Ontario a more compassionate society not only in word but also in deed. Thank you.

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

ONTARIO SECONDARY SCHOOL
TEACHERS' FEDERATION,
DISTRICT 11, THAMES VALLEY

The Chair: The next presentation is from the OSSTF, District 11, Thames Valley. I would ask the presenter or presenters to come forward please and state your name

for the record. On behalf the committee, welcome. You have 20 minutes for your presentation this morning.

Mr Dalton McGuinty (Leader of the Opposition): Mr Chair, if I may, while they are settling themselves, through you, I would invite presenters to bear in mind that they have in its entirety 20 minutes to make a presentation. I'm sure I speak on behalf of all committee members in saying that we would appreciate the opportunity if you could in some way curtail your presentation if at all possible so we might have an opportunity for a bit of an exchange. I find that personally very helpful. Thank you, Mr Chair.

The Chair: Go ahead, whenever you're ready.

Ms Marilyn Norman: Good morning. My name is Marilyn Norman. I am a district officer with the Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation.

Since coming to power in 1995, the present government has been siphoning dollars out of public education. An example from one of our Thames Valley high schools will demonstrate the impact of these cuts over the past seven years in terms of staffing. In the school year 1994-95, just prior to the election, Strathroy Collegiate had an enrolment of 1,225.75. Its staff complement was 84.67. For the upcoming 2001-02 school year, the projected enrolment is very much the same, at 1,220 students. The staff allocation to service almost the same number of students today is set at 68.15, a drop of 16.52 teachers. Consider the implications for the district and the province of this very drastic reduction in available teachers at just one school.

In addition to the impact of this long-term underfunding of the public system, we in the public system appear to have lost significant additional dollars to the Catholic school system. Obvious inequities between the public and the separate school system are demonstrated in the table, which is appended. It details a comparison of funding across the province. In every jurisdiction, separate schools are receiving more dollars. Locally, where we are serving the very same demographic, the difference last year and for the coming year is in the range of \$134.84 per student. This translates into a loss of \$3,661,715 to the public system.

The impact of the introduction of the proposed educational tax credits on the public system can only be fully understood and appreciated in the context of the current underfunding and inequities between the public and separate school boards. The inequitable distribution of tax dollars might be justified if the Catholic system were providing a wider range of services. Clearly, they are not. In fact, it is the public system which historically has provided the full range of educational programs and services, and welcomed all students on that basis, including many Catholic ones.

One of the unique aspects of Thames Valley is that London is a major medical centre of national and international repute. Families with children requiring expensive, specialized services are drawn to the area for easier access to medical facilities and services. Their children place an additional demand on our educational services

in the area of special education. This pressure is reflected in board budgeting for special education. According to the compliance report for 2000-01, which I've also supplied in your package, the local board last year spent \$1,749,891 over the specific allocation for special education by moving moneys from other funding lines. Based on their recently approved budget, the Thames Valley board intends to spend in excess of \$3 million over the actual envelope allocation in the coming year. The current funding model does not address these most pressing of needs.

In addition to the heavy and expensive demand for special education services, the social demographics of Thames Valley translate into a heavy demand for ESL and related services. The learning opportunities grant attempts to address related risk factors in this particular area. I noted that London has been for some time a major resettlement area for immigration. This has a lot of application for us locally. It's supposed to address such needs as low family income, low parental education, recent immigration and aboriginal status. I refer you now to the table included, "Student-focused Funding—Learning Opportunities Grant," which breaks out the data for our local area. Last year, the local Catholic school board received \$76.97 per student more than the public system; next year the difference is similar, \$76.35. Given that we service the same communities, it's difficult to explain or justify this discrepancy.

The point to underline is that while the public system continues to provide the broadest range of educational services, it has been financially disadvantaged in its ability to deliver these most essential services. The potential impact of educational tax credits is to provide an incentive to parents to move their children from the public to the private system. The Lang polling, which I'm sure you're familiar with, as well as the experience in Milwaukee, is that 15% are prepared to make that move. For our local system, this represents a potential loss of 4,162.5 secondary students or \$29,003,883.75 to the system. In elementary, 15% translates to 7,990.05 students, a funding loss of \$47,976,095.42. In total, a 15% loss means an extraction of \$76,979,979.17 from the Thames Valley system. Our Thames Valley system is hurting now. We cannot maintain the already reduced level of service with these further devastating financial losses.

Will they leave? In the Thames Valley region we have identified 35 different private independent schools currently in operation. They are open for business now, ready, willing and eager to take our students. I've supplied a list of them in the appendices as well.

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What are they like? What level of service do they provide? Earlier this week we made some random telephone inquiries to find out more about them. They were not eager to talk. While it is not possible to generalize on such a small sample, the schools which shared information with us raised serious concerns. They were, for example, not wheelchair accessible. Some that we talked to required that parents be married and that the child bear

the name of the father. They charge a hefty fee for assessing eligibility according to restricted admission criteria. It is interesting to note that information on curriculum and tuition fees, which was previously available on Web sites for many of the Christian schools, is no longer posted for public access.

The New Democratic Party yesterday released results of a telephone survey of 60 Ontario private schools, also selected at random. Their findings corroborate what we find locally: 80% did not have a single learning-disabled student attending. Quoting from their press release, "A clear majority of the secular and denominational schools surveyed have academic entrance requirements that serve as barriers to admitting students with special needs, Hampton said." Specifically, 70% of the schools surveyed had entrance requirements including transcripts, testing and English-language proficiency assessments which are designed to segregate their student population.

Unlike the public schools in the province of Ontario, they are not open to all. They exclude. They segregate. How we structure ourselves sends a powerful social message. We of the Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation do not think that it is in our collective best interest to funnel tax dollars to encouraging the further segregation and segmentation of society. It is rather our contention that segregation from an early age builds fear and mistrust of those who are different. We suggest that students learn tolerance and mutual respect from pursuing common goals, working together in terms of a common curriculum, playing together at recess and noon hour. Canada is surely the great social experiment, and it's one that is in progress. So far we have succeeded remarkably well in assimilating and integrating people from every part of the world. Our success is largely attributable to the quality of the public education system, which is in so much jeopardy, as I have been demonstrating.

Dr Jean Hewitt, in a recent public forum address at the London Public Library, reminded her audience that Ontario has maintained the highest proportion of its students in the public education system of any jurisdiction in the world. When the Tories came to office, it was 97%. Today the number has fallen to 95%. Only the Scandinavian countries approach this record. Why abandon a social course that has served our province and country so well?

The present government has no election mandate to change public policy so dramatically. In fact, they are on public record as holding quite the opposite position on the issue of funding for private schools. During the election campaign, the Premier made promises to the citizens of Ontario that his government was committed to a strong public education system. When the United Nations declared Ontario's funding for education discriminatory, the Minister of Education reaffirmed the provincial government's commitment to support a strong publicly funded education system for all of Ontario's students and their families. At the time, the government stated—and I have provided some correspondence in your package—"Extending funding to private religious schools would

result in fragmentation of the education system in Ontario and would undermine the goal of universal access to education.” We could not agree more. Ontario’s system of universal education has served effectively as an instrument of public policy in pursuit of democratic and humanitarian goals. Now is not the time to abandon this commitment, particularly as the recent polls clearly indicate that the majority do not favour the tax credit approach.

Independent and private schools view the world quite differently. To illustrate, I refer to a Nexus newsletter, February 2000: “The Christian sees the world differently from the non-Christian world exemplified in ministry curriculum perspectives.” Other comments from Christian schools are equally revealing: “Support ... must be given in a way that respects the autonomy and integrity of independent schools.... There should be no government intrusion into the educational programs offered by schools of choice.” In a democracy, people are clearly entitled to hold differing beliefs, but we submit that the wider social interest should and must take priority in the area of public policy and the related distribution of tax dollars.

Our recommendations:

Those sections of Bill 45 dealing with tax credits for parents of private school students should be withdrawn.

The \$300 million in the Ontario budget for the tax credits should be reallocated to the budget for public elementary and secondary education.

The government should hold a province-wide referendum asking the following question: “Do you support a single school system where all children, regardless of their religious education, attend the same schools, where opportunities for religious education and observances are provided?”

If, after proper consultation and an election mandate, legislation subsidizing private schools is enacted, the government of Ontario should specify what, if any protections, will be put in place to prevent public schools from being fragmented and weakened.

The Chair: That completes your presentation?

Ms Norman: Yes.

The Chair: We have approximately a minute and a half per caucus, and I’ll start with the government side.

Mr Frank Mazzilli (London-Fanshawe): I welcome everyone to London. I will comment, in the minute and a half, on what I’ve heard so far in this committee. The first thing we hear is that denominational schools do not accept children with disabilities. We’ve heard contrary, that they do. But let’s look at some of the changes to the medical policies and so on. In the past and present, they haven’t been able to get the services of speech-language pathologists and other services into the schools, so parents certainly didn’t have the ability to get those children into those schools.

The other thing is, this is a tax policy. We heard from Mr Vanderspek about families paying \$5,700 a year—that was my calculation, at \$475 a month. With a 10% tax credit, that would be \$510. How we can object, as a

society, to a \$500 tax credit to those hard-working families is beyond my realm of understanding. How we can accept the rich to own businesses, own Mercedes-Benzes and allow them to capital depreciate those Mercedes-Benzes year after year—and that’s OK at the federal and provincial levels. That’s fine. But hard-working families that choose to pay for some sort of denominational school—and also, let’s just say those hard-working families are paying public school taxes; I just want to get that on the record—somehow this tax policy is the end of the world.

The Chair: With that, Mr Mazzilli, you’ve used your time.

Mr Gerard Kennedy (Parkdale-High Park): Mr Mazzilli talks about the difference, and there is a difference in this particular proposal. In fact, most of the money goes to private secular schools. The average benefit for religious schools may be \$700 or \$900 per family, and \$3,500 per family is going to private sector schools. In addition to the schools you’ve contacted, you may wish to know that the government intends for new private schools, quite probably run by private companies, to come in and compete in this area.

Mr Mazzilli mentions \$500; \$522 is our calculation—I’d be happy to give you a copy of this; it corresponds very closely to some of the numbers you’ve released—of the money missing per student in the Thames Valley area. We don’t have anybody on the government side arguing for more money for the Thames Valley students. It’s really a bit of a shame—and that includes \$124 lost in the last year. I’d just like to say the loss is in both boards. While the Catholic board had a little bit more last year, now they have lost \$224 per student this year and it just bespeaks the fact that the government says there is money, but it’s not coming to your students.

I wonder if you could tell us, and any specifics you could share very quickly, about what’s missing that your members need to do a good job in their classroom.

Ms Norman: I just refer to my colleague, who represents a different bargaining unit, who might talk about some of the cuts that our board has been contemplating.

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Ms Arnette Gardiner: Most recently the Thames Valley board had prepared a balanced budget, as they are required to do. In that balanced budget there were many job losses. These job losses would be for educational assistants, paraprofessionals for speech and language, attendance counsellors and social workers as well as custodial and secretarial.

The people I mentioned first are the people who are working with our special-needs children, who are the ones we feel are going to be losing out with these cuts. Each year the board has to take a look at its budget, of course, and figure out how it’s going to spread the money around. Unfortunately, it seems the special-needs kids as well as all of the kids—there’s a little less for them each year.

The board has taken another look at its budget and is trying to make the cuts not so severe for those kids. But

to me, when you have to decide whether you're going to pay the utility bills or the gasoline or whatever and take it away from the kids, it's a really tragic situation for them.

Mr Rosario Marchese (Trinity-Spadina): Thank you both for your presentation. Just to share with you that Hugh MacKenzie, an economist, did a study—this is the second time he's doing it—that reveals that \$2.4 billion has been taken out of the education system. They continue to deny it. Parents who are involved continue to say, "We see shortages." Boards of education say, "Here are the facts," and they deny. Eventually the public will catch up, so there's no point in discussing it too much except to say that point, but also to say that New Democrats are opposed to any public dollars for private schools, be they religious or non-denomination. We just think the public system serves people well, and when it doesn't, we should put the money and attention to do so.

Ms Norman: Precisely.

Mr Marchese: If it's religion the people want, or some different teaching methodology, God bless them, they need to go and find that somewhere else. But where a school system can provide different religious readings to people to reflect our diversity and provide for the education as a course of learning for people, in my view that's more than adequate. If people want more than that, that's another choice they make.

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

STRATFORD DISTRICT CHRISTIAN SCHOOL

The Chair: Our next presentation this morning is from the Stratford District Christian School. I would ask the presenter or presenters to come forward, please. If you could state your name for the record, and on behalf of the committee, welcome. You have 20 minutes for your presentation this morning.

Mr Ed Petrusma: My name is Ed Petrusma. I'm the principal of the Stratford District Christian School and I have some information packages. I was of the understanding that there were nine of you here. I don't know if I have enough for everybody, but since I'll be chatting for a while, I thought maybe I could pass these out and you could have chance to look at them, about a specific school.

I've been the principal at the Stratford District Christian School for five years. I've taught in three different Christian schools in this province and spent 21 years in the teaching profession, all within Christian schools. Before that I had the privilege as a student of attending a Christian high school and a Christian grade school.

There, in those places of learning, I was deeply impacted by the values of Christian charity and service to others. I heard about these values from competent, sincere, caring teachers, including my own father. My father always had a very high regard for education,

especially an education that saw this world as God's creation and that God has called us to take care of it.

My wife, Teresa, and I have four children, three of whom attend at the Stratford District Christian School, and we have made a conscious choice to have Christian education and have done so recognizing that we are sacrificing financially to send them. We pay for the public school system and also for the Christian school.

Last year, since our school could not offer junior kindergarten because we do not have the funds for that, we had our third daughter enrolled in junior kindergarten at our local public school. We appreciated the academic part that she received in her first year of education; however, the values of our Christian home could not be included by her very sincere public schoolteacher. The public system can no longer speak to many Christian values and beliefs, since it might offend other faiths. My wife and I understand this, but we know for our children to receive an instruction in values in our home, we need the help of the local Christian school.

My brief will be based on three principles that I'll be referring to. I hope to give you a sense of our cause and our own specific school community, Stratford District Christian School.

The first one is, every child in the province of Ontario deserves the support of the government; second, parental involvement helps the education of all children; and third, we support a strong and vibrant public school system.

For the first point: Many of us know that around two million students are being educated in this province every year. Just under two million are receiving full funding from this provincial government. This includes approximately 600,000 Roman Catholic school students. We have over 100,000 students who are being educated outside these two fully funded systems, and many of them are in faith-based independent schools like the Stratford District Christian School.

Our school has 97 students and 43 families and is a member of the Ontario Alliance of Christian Schools. Our school was set up in 1977 and, the Lord willing, this coming September we hope to celebrate our 25th year of operation. All this was done without a cent of provincial government money. Just to give an example of how our school functions and how we go about doing this, I've included in the promotion packages, the information you've received, the breakdown of our tuition. We charge \$6,800 for each family, whether you have one child or five. We do that to keep the costs as affordable as possible for our families.

Certain parents, because of the distance away from the school, also pay another \$1,200 just to use a bus, even though the publicly funded bus goes by their house and they aren't able to go on it. The majority of our families, 30 of them, drive in every day or they carpool. Ten per cent of our families are helped by a tuition assistance committee so that they are able to have Christian education even though their income may be low.

We fundraise, on top of tuition, to the tune of over \$1,200 per family every year just to keep the costs as affordable as possible. We collect and crush pop cans, gather grocery tapes, sell grocery vouchers, save Canadian Tire money for our sports fund, have a volunteer catering group, hold auctions and fundraising dinners, set up softball tournaments, have an annual walkathon and bazaar, we sell cheese, we collect Campbell's Soup labels, sell flowers and apple pies, we seek membership donations and—well, I think you get the idea.

Our educational cost for each child at our school is just under \$3,000. The total cost of our school budget for next year on a per-child basis is \$3,764. As I said before, we try to keep the education as affordable as possible to make it open to as many families as possible who seek a Christ-centred education.

What kind of community do we have? Well, I did some looking around and did some checking of jobs and circumstances. Fifty per cent of our members are from the farm, from the rural area, and 50% are from small towns, in and surrounding Stratford. Some of the jobs represented in our families you might want to note: general labourers in factories, offices, restaurants and different industries. Some are farm labourers working on big collective farms, some are small independent businesspeople, and we do have a few professionals as well as part of our families.

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We support the broader community in and around Stratford as well. We've participated in Jump Rope for Heart. Our local food bank in Stratford has been well supported every Thanksgiving by our student body. We have a World Vision child who we support and have supported for the past five years. We collect \$30 a month from a class that takes a month at a time to raise some funds to help support someone outside of ourselves. We supported the multiple sclerosis walk in Stratford and Operation Christmas Child, which sends presents to children in other countries.

As a final note, we are pleased that this provincial government was bold enough to propose the refundable tax credit for parents of independent faith-based schools. Our parents would certainly benefit, over time, from that 50% refundable tax credit. The United Nations ruling in 1999 stated that the present system of education in Ontario, which allows for one publicly funded faith-based school system, should provide monetary support to all parents of students who attend faith-based schools. We feel this would allow our children to be more equally treated with the fully funded students of this province.

My second point: Parental involvement helps the education of our children. In Stratford District Christian School, we have an army of volunteers that includes parents, grandparents and, yes, even some members of the surrounding community who know we have a good school and they want to help support the partnership we have between parents and teachers. This is being done so that we can more effectively help all students of various academic abilities. We do have them in our school and

we look for ways to help them. We have parent volunteers who come in every week to run our school library, who are reading partners with children who struggle; they help prepare material in our kindergarten class, they tutor small groups of students and, of course, go on class trips.

This may sound very similar or very familiar within the public school environment. We do have one other aspect of this volunteerism that's a part of our school that may be unique to some of you in hearing this. I don't know what your backgrounds are so I can't comment on that. We have parents who meet in the evenings to work on one of the various committees that help run our school. We have five parents on the education committee, two parents who run the transportation committee, two parents involved on the 25th anniversary committee, four parents on the finance and fundraising committee, four parents on the promotion and membership committee, five parents on the building committee and five parents on a long-range planning committee.

In addition to these committees, we have a nine-member local school board that serves to oversee the whole operation of the school and give me the daily responsibility to run it. The board is elected out of the entire Stratford District Christian School society, that consists of all those who can abide and wish to follow the constitution of our school. If some of you are wondering how many parents this represents, that's 25 out of 43 families. We have parental involvement because we know we need parents in our school to help sustain what we do.

Third, we support a strong, vibrant public school system. Independent school supporters like us do realize we need a strong public school system. Anything that helps improve education in this province, we support. We're glad to see that the proposed budget has a \$360-million increase in the \$13.5-billion budget for the public and Catholic school systems. We're also very pleased to see that \$300 million will be going to independent faith-based schools within five years. We're grateful that this provincial government is willing to extend a tax credit to parents interested in sending their children to a faith-based school such as ours.

I have looked at other provinces in Canada. Many of you may have heard these facts already. But I've also noted that in any region that I've ever seen, over 90% of all students still attend the public school system. Obviously, most of these parents have chosen to send their children to the public school of their choice. We support the idea of choice even within the public system, so long as parents can make decisions well in advance of the next school year. Choice has not been considered a bad thing in our society. We appreciate choice as citizens of Ontario and strict monopolies have a hard time improving situations for people looking for products or services.

I want to thank you for that.

Mr Dennis Goforth: Thank you, panel, for allowing me to address you with my concerns today. My name is Dennis Goforth. I send my children to the Stratford

District Christian School in Sebringville, where I volunteer on the school board and various committees. I am also a graduate of the Ontario public school system, from an era when Christianity was an everyday part of the public school system. That was then; this is now.

The public school system does not resemble the system I adored as a child. Twenty years ago, like opponents to independent faith-based schools, I too did not see a need for these independent schools. However, as time marches on, things change. Now as a parent I have sought a school system that reflects my childhood school experience and also my family's current needs. That system is not the public school system.

My wife and I have made a choice to send our children to the Christian school in Sebringville because this school reinforces the same moral Christian values that we teach at home. We believe this consistency is a very important part of raising our children to be good members of society. Do not get me wrong: I am not against the public school system. I believe this province should look at ways of educating all children in this province to the best of its ability. However, I do believe that it should ultimately be the parents' choice which school best meets the needs of their children. I believe the government should support parental choice.

We are by no means a wealthy family, and neither are the majority of the families that send to our school. It is offensive to hear misinformed critics say this funding will support a bunch of rich people sending to independent schools. Besides, wealthy parents send to the public system also. It is their choice.

I believe this province needs to remove the two-tier system that already exists in this province. By providing some funding to families who send to independent schools, this province will offer parental choice to more low- to middle-income families and I applaud this on behalf of parents.

Another point I would like to make is the fact that the United Nations human rights committee in 1999 ruled that in Canada, specifically Ontario's funding of Catholic schools was discriminatory and that Canada was violating article 26 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. Funding of religious schools is not new, it is just selective and discriminating. This is offensive to non-Catholics and Catholics alike, because it is unfair and unjust.

Let me talk about our school for a moment, and what tremendous sacrifices people make to keep our school running and keep it as affordable as possible. I will start with our situation. Between my wife and myself, we spend an average of five to 10 volunteer hours a week supporting various school activities. This week alone I had a four-hour board meeting Tuesday night, plus the prep time, a one-and-a-half-hour fundraising meeting Wednesday night and a two-hour fundraising meeting Thursday night, and here I am again today—and the week is not over.

In order to send to a Christian school, our family had to make choices. We own a 1993 Pontiac instead of a

2001 model. Our family vacations are not extravagant, they are simple and cost-effective. Before we began paying tuition, we were able to save money annually and invest it for our retirement. We do not eat at restaurants very often; we live a simple lifestyle. This is a necessity if we hope to have the \$650 a month for tuition. This amount of money does not include transportation. We have to drive our children to school, because busing is not available for us.

Let me close by commending the government of Ontario for taking a giant step toward education equity in this province. Thank you.

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

1100

ELEMENTARY TEACHERS'
FEDERATION OF ONTARIO
THAMES VALLEY LOCAL

The Chair: Our next presentation is from the Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario, the Thames Valley local. I would ask the presenter or presenters to come forward, please, and state your name for the record. On behalf of the committee, welcome. You have 20 minutes for your presentation. Go ahead whenever you are ready.

Ms Nancy McCracken: Good morning. My name is Nancy McCracken. I'm the president of the Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario, Thames Valley local. I do have a brief that's being distributed right now. Just before I start, I'd like to commend my secondary colleague who presented a few moments ago. I don't believe our information will overlap very much but we are both talking from the perspective of Thames Valley District School Board in which we both work.

The Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario, Thames Valley local, represents 3,000 elementary teachers who work in 160 schools in Thames Valley. We believe that public taxes should be used for public education.

We would defend vigorously the right of independent and private schools to exist and believe that parents have the right to send their children to independent or private schools. However, this is an individual and discretionary choice that should not be funded from public tax dollars.

Public education is the fundamental building block of Canadian society and was first envisioned and brought to reality in Ontario. Public education means that all children, regardless of their racial background, religious beliefs or economic status, attend schools which instill in us common principles and a common view of the world. Public education means that not only parents but every citizen has an interest in ensuring that our schools are working to maximize the potential of each student. Public education means that every child, no matter how handicapped or disabled, is admitted to school and educated. This common education and common understanding

which is promoted and developed in public schools, and nowhere else, is the glue that binds Canadian society together.

Independent and private schools by their own definitions are selective about which children may enter and participate, whether it is an economic, religious or cultural selectivity. This withdrawal of small but select groups of children, and by extension, their families, from participation in the most fundamental community activity of the public schools diminishes the entire community as well as the school. The focus on differences takes away our sense of community and deliberately, although without malice, creates a series of parallel communities based on religion, culture or socio-economic status. These independent and insular communities no longer have an interest in promoting quality education in our public schools.

The deliberate fragmentation of education through tax credits or school vouchers creates a class system based on divisions and the inevitable conclusion is competition for students. Independent and private schools are under no obligation, as public schools are, to accept students with special needs or who require extra resources in order to succeed. Public schools are inclusive. Everyone is welcomed; everyone receives a common education; everyone is treated equally. Independent and private schools may accept only the best and brightest, leaving the public system responsible for the rest of our students. The spiral of dwindling resources in our public schools and students who require more attention and resources is inevitable.

The illusion of choice is largely an urban phenomenon. Families in large cities may in fact have several schools from which to select. Although many small towns have independent, usually religious-based schools, citizens in rural and remote areas of our province have no choices. Only the public education system has built a school near them for their children and offers transportation to and from that school on a daily basis.

Our smallest schools are often, but not exclusively, in rural areas. Allow me to describe what happens to a small school of, for example, 200 students, if even a few students are removed from the community to a private school. Let us call it ABC Public School. The current classroom staffing for ABC Public School, if it were in the elementary system in Thames Valley, would be 9.6 teachers, including preparation time. The allocation for a teacher-librarian would be 0.35 and for a special education 0.9, for a total of 10.85 teachers. The funding formula does not allow enough leeway for the Thames Valley board to round this up to 11 full-time teachers. These teachers cover the full range of curriculum expectations in every grade, and meet the needs of all of the special-education students.

If 10 students move to an independent school, the calculation changes. For 190 students, only 9.1 teachers are generated, the teacher-librarian compliment falls to 0.3 and the special education compliment to 0.75, for a total of 10.05, which is nearly a full teacher less. Even at this level, the school is overstaffed, according to the strict

funding formula. The same curriculum must be covered, but there is one less classroom, creating combined grade classes throughout the school. There are fewer teachers to cover the same responsibilities, and in responsibilities I'm including committee work, health and safety inspectors, supervision of students, any number of activities that every teacher does on a regular basis. The costs of keeping ABC Public School open, however, remain basically unchanged. The heat and lighting bills must be paid, there must be a custodian, although likely the hours have been cut back so that the school is not as clean, a principal, a secretary, and the buses which pick up and deliver the students must travel the same miles over the same roads and generate the same costs. ABC Public School becomes a more and more difficult place in which to work for both students and teachers.

Private schools are not restrained by rigid staffing formulas nor are they required to cover the provincial curriculum or even to hire qualified teachers.

Currently, Thames Valley District School Board is in a budget crisis. The Thames Valley District School Board passed a budget on June 12, this week, which includes cuts to staff and programs of over \$4 million. In order to run the same school system as this current year, the board would need more than \$20 million in extra provincial funding. The funds are not there. Thames Valley is the third-largest board in the province. A proportional share of the estimated \$300 million earmarked for tax credits would cover that shortfall. It would mean that over 20 teaching positions, 30 educational assistant positions, seven teaching positions devoted to early literacy, lunch room supervisors, as well as clerical and custodial staff, would be available to our students, available to all students, not to a few families who choose segregated education for their children.

An investment in public education is an investment in the future well-being, stability and prosperity of our province and of our communities. As a citizen, it is my right and duty to demand complete support for public education. As an elected representative of our citizens, it is your responsibility to maintain and protect public education. The provision of tax credits to individuals who choose to send their children to independent or private schools is nothing less than a direct attack on the system you are supposed to protect. This is a fundamental change in direction for our society and our government. A government which is truly responsible and accountable would not divert public tax dollars into the hands of individuals, while at the same time choking off funds to our most important institution, public education.

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

Mr McGuinty: Thank you very much for your presentation. The government itself supports some of the argument that you made today. In making its presentation before the UN, the government prepared a very lengthy, sophisticated, detailed, thorough brief. In one of the passages from the brief presented before the UN, they said that funding of private schools "would have negative fis-

cal impacts” on public education. They said it would result in the “diminishment of the range of programs and services that the public system would be able to afford,” which is exactly what you said.

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Ms McCracken: Yes.

Mr McGuinty: We’ve been asking the government to produce any studies, reports of any nature that might allow us to better understand why they’ve made this dramatic shift in their public education policy, which came without warning, without invitation, as far as we can see.

Can you tell us, from the teacher’s perspective, from the child’s perspective, what is it the kids are missing today? What is it that they need today that they’re not getting? They’re telling us they’ve got \$500 million more for education. I’m saying, “Then put that into public education so we can meet the needs.” What is it they need today?

Ms McCracken: In Thames Valley, which I am most familiar with, since amalgamation we have half the number of teacher-librarians we had when we started, we have fewer educational assistants than we had a year ago, and certainly not enough, as my colleague in secondary said, to meet the high needs of special-education students in the Thames Valley area. We have higher class sizes. We have kindergarten classes with 27 and 28 students, which is appalling and unworkable. We have intermediate classes with well over 30 students in them, which is also unworkable. We have small schools with many combined grades. We have classrooms without enough textbooks. I could go on for a very long time about that on just about every point.

Mr Marchese: Ms McCracken, I won’t exhaust you or me with that list, because all the deputants who have come before us have talked about the losses we’ve had. There’s no point in reviewing that, because it’s just tiring.

It was good for you to have talked about how a mere loss of 10 students would cause so much chaos in a little school of 200 people, because people can’t understand: “Ten children out of a school system won’t affect the overall ratio very much, won’t affect teachers in any way.” But you broke it down very specifically: 10 students. In a rural community, that could very likely happen.

Ms McCracken: Yes.

Mr Marchese: The only people who have done studies in this regard are OSSTF, in conjunction with CUPE, where they, through the polling, have revealed that possibly 15% of the people might take this tax credit on, because it’s an incentive.

Ms McCracken: Yes.

Mr Marchese: If they do, this example of ABC is not a mythological kind of example; it’s a real thing. Should it be incumbent on the government to do such studies before they embark on such an initiative?

Ms McCracken: Absolutely. There needs to be very clear studies about how many families would be prepared

to move their children out of the public education system. Because of the way the funding formula operates—on paper; how it operates in reality in schools—is already squeezing our small schools into very difficult teaching circumstances for teachers. That means less than optimum conditions for students as well.

Mr Marchese: This is going to go ahead, you understand. They’re not listening to you or me in this regard. But if they are going to go through with it, as I think they are, shouldn’t they be guaranteeing that whatever we lose from the public system is put back in an equal amount? Shouldn’t they guarantee at least that?

Ms McCracken: Absolutely. Our public schools need stable, guaranteed funding to allow us to do the job that we know needs to be done every single day.

Mr Mazzilli: Thank you very much for your presentation. Certainly the one thing I noticed in the presentation was that the public school funding in Ontario is \$13.8 billion, compared to the tax credit for independent schools this year of \$15 million. Somehow in the debate we get this \$300 million that’s five years down the road. So I want to keep it in perspective as to what it is on a gradual basis.

I also heard from your presentation and from your counterpart’s presentation that if you split this \$300 million it would be \$20 million today, but, you see, that’s five years down the road, not today. Into that equation, conveniently, the separate schools were not included. So you split up this \$300 million without including separate schools as publicly funded schools. From that argument, I would gather that it’s your union’s position that separate schools should not take part in that funding, and this is from the arguments that I’m listening to here today.

I want to go back to how a publicly funded system at \$13.8 billion, when health care today is funded at \$22.5 billion, in a total provincial budget of approximately \$60 billion, how a tax credit this year of \$15 million somehow is going to threaten or jeopardize the whole system, or in five years.

I’m a parent with three children. If you take the maximum tuition that this tax credit allows of \$7,000, simple math would mean that’s \$21,000. Even at the maximum tax credit, that may be \$10,000. We heard parents say they made choices. That \$10,000 means that the parent you heard before is driving a 1993 Buick. That’s the choice he has made. As a fundamental tax policy, I’m asking you, how can you deny citizens of this province that choice?

Interruption.

The Chair: Before you reply, ma’am, I would ask the audience to refrain from clapping, because I cannot allow any demonstration. It only takes up the presenter’s time. If you would like to reply to this, please.

Ms McCracken: I would reply that the \$300 million obviously is a projection. So I used that as an example. The funds that have already been taken out of the public education system need to be put back in. Our public education system is deteriorating day by day, as I watch

it from a teacher's perspective—day by day, budget by budget. Every school board in this province has had to cut back and cut back and cut back. It has reached a point where we are now cutting into essential services. Our class sizes are larger, and students are not receiving the education they deserve.

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

1120

GERARD CHARETTE

The Chair: Our next presentation is Gerard Charette. I would ask Mr Charette to step forward and state your name for the record, please. On behalf of the committee, welcome. You have 20 minutes for your presentation.

Mr Gerard Charette: Thank you, Mr Chairman. My name is Gerard Charette. Good day, ladies and gentlemen of the committee. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak to you this morning. I am going to try to organize my comments around the notes I've prepared.

I should perhaps first let you know that I am frequently a supporter of the government. I believe its policies, particularly its educational policies, are headed in the right direction. I have had the opportunity on many occasions to speak before legislative committees.

I would like to, if I may, organize the framework of my submission around a petition filed by the member for Nickel Belt on June 6 in the Legislative Assembly. That petition makes some rather startling and quite extreme comments. I'm here to address those issues; I've heard a little bit about them today. I must say that I do not personally know the member for Nickel Belt, and I assume that sometimes things are said quite quickly and written quite unintentionally, so I'm not assuming any bad will or ill motives on her part. Nonetheless, these statements must be addressed, and I intend to respond to them.

I would like to first talk to you a little bit about my qualifications to speak. I come from a family of educators. I have a brother who teaches economics at the University of Windsor, a sister who is a mathematics professor at a community college in Texas, a brother who teaches in Ontario's publicly funded system and another one who has just retired from teaching. As well, my wife teaches autistic children. Perhaps most significantly, my mother and my father founded the first Montessori school in Windsor. I assume all of you have at least some passing familiarity with that system of education, so I'll not belabour that point.

The school was founded some time in about 1965, and throughout the years many children have gone through this school, which is an independent, non-denominational school. Although my family no longer has a financial interest in the school, it does continue today with my former sister-in-law as its head mistress. She, by the way, tells me to please let you know of her full support of the bill.

After 22 years of practising law, I told my partners last fall that I was intent on becoming a high school teacher. Since that time I have begun preparation and I have been accepted into the fall 2001 program of the faculty of education at the University of Windsor. In a little over eight weeks, I expect to be standing in front of a classroom in high school. My desire to teach is borne out of a long-standing desire to do what I can to help improve education in our province, and I know I'm not the only one in that regard. I know there are legitimate differences about this bill, but I really believe that it is important for the growth of education and the well-being of society that this bill go forward as it is put forth by the government.

Let me deal with one segment of the member's comments in her petition. She has a recital in the petition which says, "Whereas tax credits for private schools will encourage the growth of a segregated society of narrowly focused interests." I heard a little bit of those types of comments this morning. I think they are egregiously wrong, they are outrageous, and I'd like to tell you why I think that's the case.

I have already been in contact with people who teach in school, and I have done voluntary teaching in Windsor's publicly funded high schools for the last two or three years. I give slide presentations on art history, particularly art history as it relates to Western culture's sacred art. I have recently turned my sights on the sacred art of the Far East, particularly the art associated with the Buddhist and Hindu traditions. I can say that, without exception, the students of the publicly funded system whom I have encountered are bright and eager to learn. Good things are happening in both of our publicly supported systems. Moreover, the teachers of the systems I have encountered are serious about their work. They have been helpful and generous to me. So my support of the bill is not founded so much on a negative critique of our two systems—no doubt it does need improvement, as all businesses and institutions do—rather, my support of the bill is founded on the principles of diversity, equality and choice for parents.

This summer I am writing my thesis in satisfaction of my degree requirements for a master's degree in religious education at Assumption University. In the course of doing research for my thesis, I quite unexpectedly got a major book publisher interested in a proposal for a high school text on sacred art. The acquisitions editor of this company asked me to write a proposal. I had hoped to include it, but it's not attached to the paper. I would like to show you just a few slides of some of the things I show students when I go into the high schools, to show you that when I teach in school—I may indeed teach in an independent school—I will present material that is not ghettoized, is not part of a segregated structure or narrowly focused; it is a set of curriculum surrounding religion that is open to the entire universe.

If I may, I'm going to turn on the slide and we're going to go. I apologize if it's going to be a little bit inconvenient for you. I'll just run through a few slides very quickly, if I may.

Here we have a lovely piece. It's an early Renaissance, single-point perspective. This piece is unique because it is thought that there were two artists who created this piece, Leonardo Da Vinci, whom most of us are familiar with, and a great artist by the name of Lorenzo Credi. The piece deals with the Annunciation, where Gabriel announced to the Virgin Mary that she would become the mother of Christ. It's a very gentle, very soft piece, and it has a nice meditative quality. The students enjoy looking at this piece very much, and they enjoy talking about it.

This is another lovely piece. This comes out of the Anglican tradition of the Anglican Church of England. It's British 19th century. It's an autobiographical piece about a poor artist whose lady friend, to whom he was deeply devoted, decided to tell him one day that she was intent on becoming an Anglican nun. The poor man nearly fell apart. He had started the piece as a little recitation about a lady in the secular framework tending a garden, and he subsequently finished it, for the sake of honour, with her clothed as a novice. I'd ask you to note she's holding a flower in her hand. It's thought by art historians that the flower is a visual metaphor for her soul. It's quite a delightful image, because it demonstrates someone who's having a deep ecstatic experience, the sort of out-of-body experience that one gets when one is in deep ecstasy. The kids that I speak to really enjoy looking at this image as well, and they see how art like this can relate to their own inner experience. It's a very nice piece.

The next piece comes out of the Jewish tradition. Actually, it's not by a Jewish artist but by a Baroque artist by the name of Tiepolo. This is the adoration or the prayer of Abraham when he was visited by three angelic spirits. It's a very delightful piece to look at, brightly coloured. The students always enjoy getting into and understanding the religious framework within which these pieces are derived, and it is quite delightful for them to see these things.

This is the last one. This is out of the Buddhist tradition, a very nice piece. It's 12th century Tibetan—northern Indian, actually. I'll ask you to note—it may be hard for some of our audience to see—two small elephants that are in the lower right-hand corner. This is the Buddha preaching a sermon to his own ego. It is thought that the two elephants represent his ego; one is rearing and is rather unruly, sort of like a football player who does a dance in the end zone after scoring a touchdown. You'll see the second one, perhaps, is prostrate. This is literally an idea of someone who has entered contemplation and who is now seeking to master his own ego.

The children enjoy looking at these pieces, and I do little meditation exercises with them involving thoughts of self-control and mastery of themselves. They enjoy it very much.

Really, the point of all of this is to make clear that many of us in private education, or who are intent on going into private education, are not narrowly focused. It

was an egregious comment by the member for Nickel Belt to claim we are ghettoized, not open to the world. I've heard the same type of thing this morning, and I find them very, very distasteful and very untrue.

I'd like to next talk about the fact that at my parent's Montessori school they always welcomed children who had disabilities.

You could put the lights up for a minute. I'll go back to another slide in a few minutes.

In most years, there would be one or two children with Down's syndrome, some with educational development problems. The Montessori school was open to all religions. By no stretch of the imagination was it a narrowly focused basis for education, and I would hope we would all disencumber ourselves of that view.

At the bottom of page 8 of my submission, the assumption by the member for Nickel Belt that independent schools will foster segregation and promote the growth of narrowly focused interests is totally unfounded. Such a sweeping negative view is spectacularly uninformed. Moreover, it only serves to promote prejudice against those who operate independent schools or who seek to exercise freedom of choice in education. Worse than this, it only confirms that it is the member for Nickel Belt and her supporters who seek themselves to promote segregation and narrow ideology. They seek to force everyone into the same monolithic view of life, and it's not healthy for society. They require everyone to adhere to a single monolithic approach to education and to thought.

Also, please recall the recent decision by the Supreme Court of Canada in the Trinity College case. It reminded us very, very strongly that neither public institutions nor anyone in society ought to presuppose that just because someone is a Christian or Buddhist, or an atheist for that matter, they have any necessary predilection to being prejudicial.

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The next part of my presentation deals with the social utility of diversity in education on page 9. The members of my family have carried on an intergenerational discussion about education for over 40 years. My father led this discussion. More importantly, he led the discussion in Windsor's community of parents and educators. My father, on behalf of the Montessori school of education, attended and spoke at countless public assemblies of parents and educators, all in the name of the creative development of educational methods, including especially the Montessori method. He was a regular guest lecturer at the University of Windsor's faculty of education. The faculty, in fact, established a small library of books in memory of my father.

I can safely say that the Montessori school of Windsor has contributed to the education of countless teachers. The school always permitted anyone who was interested to come in and observe students at work. In fact, my father set up a portable two-way mirror at the edge of the classroom so that parents could unobtrusively observe their children. Every year, the school would welcome and help train student teachers. If anyone needed help writing

a research paper on early childhood education, my father would, as the saying goes, talk their ears off.

The point of all of this is that independent education serves the needs of society by serving children, parents and educators. Those parents who choose to send their children to an independent school ought to be permitted to put their tax dollars at work in the manner contemplated by the bill. In the end, these parents help everyone in society. Diversity in education is socially useful. Everyone in society benefits from this ongoing discourse about education and, more importantly, everyone benefits from the delivery of diverse educational programs offered by independent schools. Such schools help improve everyone's performance.

The next point I make on page 10 is the fact that the person who loves deeply is the most expert. For that I draw on my teaching and I quote from Dr Burton White, who was a child psychologist and the author of a best-seller called *The First Three Years of Life*. He was, as well, the former director of the Harvard University preschool project. His quote is at the bottom of page 10:

"I have been embroiled in controversy ... ever since 1979, when I remarked to a newspaper reporter that I felt the trend toward transferring primary responsibility for raising a child from the family to others was probably not in the best interests of most children.

"Controversy notwithstanding, I remain totally convinced that, to get off to the best start in life, what new humans need is a great deal of waking time ... with people who love them deeply."

What Dr Burton is saying is that love is a source of expertise and it is the parents who have undivided loyalty to their children, by and large—and of course there are exceptions, but when we give parents the choice, our school institutions, including public institutions, all get better. It's love that makes us all experts and it's something that we must recognize, I believe, in society where we give those who are most expert the legitimate and real authority over educational decisions.

I'll skip over the next few pages and go, perhaps if I may, to the next slide—I know I have only a few minutes—down near the middle of page 14. The member from Nickel Belt says the following: "Whereas tax credits for private schools will steal"—that's a crime—"money from an already cash-starved public system and deliver public money to special interests who do not have to account for its use...." I'd like to examine that assumption.

First, the bill will have no measurable impact on the level of financing of our two publicly funded systems. I think that has already come out this morning. But more to the point, I'd like the member to consider my next slide, and let me put it up. This is a very telling piece. It's from a study by a US economist which shows the ongoing increase in public funding over the decades—

Mr Kennedy: Not in Ontario, sir.

Mr Charette: I know it's not Ontario—and the flat-line on educational results. It's really the same in our province. The 2000 report of the Education Quality and

Accountability Office says the following about changes in reading proficiency over the last year: "In both grade 3 and grade 6, student achievement in reading has shown some improvement. This year, 49%"—that's a whopping 49%—"of grade 3 students achieved at or above the provincial standard, a 3% improvement since the new Ontario curriculum was introduced three years ago. In grade 6, 50% of students achieved at or above the provincial standard, a 2% improvement."

I am glad that the EQAO is measuring levels of performance, but we're not supposed to be impressed. Consider the possibility of Chrysler Corp putting out the following press release: "Chrysler Corp of Canada proudly announces that it has released 100,000 new minivans into its dealer showrooms. Only 48% of these vehicles failed to meet our own quality standards as tested at our factory. We remind our customers that last year over 52% of our minivans failed to meet the same standards. This means that we've had an improvement of over 3%. Please run down to your local Chrysler dealer and test drive a minivan."

I'm happy to say that this press release is not true. The fact is that the workers and managers and investors of Chrysler Corp do produce fine vehicles, but our public system, frankly, does need improvement.

The last point I'm going to make is this: another irrefutable fact is that diversity in the field of education improves everyone's performance. I'm on page 16. A recent study about educational diversity confirms that public sector educational institutions improve significantly as a consequence of parental choice. I refer you to a study of educational productivity by a well-regarded economist from Harvard University, Caroline Hoxby, who has determined that school choice for parents, whether in the form of vouchers, charter schools or whatever else, improved the performance of students in both the schools of choice and in publicly funded schools. Most studies have just taken a superficial approach by discussing allocation of dollars. What Professor Hoxby undertook was a more penetrating analysis. She examined educational profitability defined as performance per dollar spent.

What she found is this: in every case she studied, Ms Hoxby found that the performance of public schools improved when they were required to compete for students with schools of choice. Publicly funded schools can compete very nicely, thank you. We already heard this morning about rigid staff formulas. Those things have to go. I quote from Professor Hoxby as follows—

The Chair: You have one minute to wrap up.

Mr Charette: "The schools that faced the most potential competition from vouchers had the best"—the best—"productivity response. In fact, the schools that were most treated to competition had dramatic productivity improvements."

Mr Chairman, I apologize for the rapidity of my little session here, but thank you for the time to let me speak to you.

The Chair: On behalf of the committee, thank you very much for your presentation, but there's no time for questions.

Mr Marchese: Just as a clarification, or a point of order, if you want to take it that way. I didn't want to interrupt the speaker, but he constantly said, "The member from Nickel Belt said." The member from Nickel Belt was reading a petition which she, in the end, supported—the same petition I read into the record, which thousands of people have signed. So we don't say it; we support them at the end because the petition is given to us by Ontarians, just so he is aware of that.

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THAMES VALLEY DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD

The Chair: Our next presentation this morning is from the Thames Valley District School Board. I would ask the representatives or a representative to come forward, please, and state your name for the record. On behalf of the committee, welcome. You have 20 minutes for the presentation.

Ms Jan Hunter: My name is Jan Hunter. I'm a trustee with the Thames Valley District School Board. Thank you for the opportunity to present to you today on this extremely important issue. This is an issue which the Thames Valley District School Board community believes has profound implications on the future of public education in our society. As I said, I'm a trustee with the Thames Valley District School Board, which has over 90 schools serving the counties of Elgin, Middlesex and Oxford, as well as the city of London. I hope my fellow trustee, Graham Hart, will be joining me. He was supposed to be here, but I presume he's caught in traffic right now.

As one of the largest school boards in Ontario, we wish to express our opposition to this government's proposal to fund private schools with public money. Our comments will be focussed around five key areas of concern. In our view, this proposed legislation further erodes funding for public education at a time when provincial support has already been substantially cut and boards are already struggling to meet student needs. It circumvents the stringent accountability that a public school system must demonstrate to the government and the public. It compromises the responsibility we have as a society to ensure that the education we provide to our students today prepares them well for tomorrow. It minimizes the values of diversity and tolerance that have been the foundation of our society. And it represents a fundamental challenge to our collective understanding of the role public education has in ensuring a strong, vibrant and prosperous society able to meet the challenges of the future.

I'll discuss these points each in turn. Before I do, however, I'd like to highlight for you some of the fundamental beliefs and values we share at Thames Valley. These were identified collaboratively among the Thames

Valley stakeholders following amalgamation of our four forming boards in 1998. They are fundamental to all we do and say as a school system.

At Thames Valley, we see our purpose as building a caring learning community that puts students first. We are a partnership of students, parents, employees and community committed to excellence as a leader in public education. Our focus is to enable students to acquire knowledge and to develop critical thinking skills and values that allow them to realize their potential and contribute positively to society. One of our key beliefs is that public education is an investment in people and the community. It's a belief that suitably prefaces our remarks concerning the impact this legislation will have on funding for public education.

Let me be very blunt. Provincial funding is already inadequate to meet the needs of our students and we are concerned that this legislation would further erode the government's support for public education. This is not just our view as trustees; it is also the view of the thousands of parents and members of the public who have called us frequently following the announcement of the government's plan to introduce a tax credit for parents of students in private schools.

Thames Valley and boards across the province are already struggling to cope with fiscal pressures that are beyond our control. Earlier this week, on June 12, our board approved the 2001-02 budget. While it was a balanced budget, it was also a budget in which we had to approve various cuts in services in order to cope with a potential projected shortfall of \$22 million that has resulted over three fiscal years. This shortfall has resulted not because we were irresponsible in how we were spending our resources; it has resulted because of unanticipated cost pressures that are beyond our board's control and which the current provincial funding model does not recognize.

Let us point out that the increase in provincial revenues Thames Valley will receive for the coming fiscal year amounts to \$4.6 million, or 0.9% over the previous year. Out of this, we will need to contend with the spiralling costs we face in transportation, utilities, benefits, inflation and growth in special education. In fact, our spending in special education for the coming fiscal year will be about \$62.5 million, or \$4 million more than what the province gives us for this special purpose. The high quality of medical services in our area translates into a proportionality higher number of high-needs students, something we are not recognized for under the current funding model.

The government has established that the private school tax credit will cost the province between \$350 million and \$700 million a year by the time it is fully implemented, an estimate that is seen by many as conservative. In our view, this represents \$350 million to \$700 million in potential provincial revenues that could be spent on public education to enable us to better meet the needs of our students.

We are already frustrated that provincial funding for public education has not kept pace with students' needs, and we are alarmed to see a proposal that will cause the situation to deteriorate even further. In short, we are concerned about the impact this legislation will have on funding for public education.

We are also concerned that the legislation would compromise the government's own vision for full accountability in education. Public school boards are, and need to be, accountable to the government, the parents and the trustees, as well as the public. Trustees are democratically elected and must answer to their constituents for the decisions they make and for how they spend tax dollars to support student needs. They are also responsible for ensuring that the provincial curriculum is delivered by certified teachers in each of the schools within their board. As well, public schools are required to participate in province-wide assessments. These are important mechanisms within our public education system. They serve to demonstrate accountability to government, parents and the public—and indeed, this government has over the past six years strengthened many of these mechanisms.

Private schools, however, are not bound by the same accountability standards that the public education system must abide by. At the elementary level, they can teach what they like. They are not required to hire certified teachers. The Ministry of Education has little control over their curriculum, management, hiring practices or outcomes. As well, they are exempt from provincial testing. Any move to strengthen support for private schools will, in essence, support an approach for a system that is far less accountable than the public education system is required to be. It is our view that this is an inherently contradictory and untenable position.

As much as we stress the need for an education system to demonstrate accountability to government and parents, we are even more concerned about the impact on students that results from a system that is less than fully accountable. The mechanisms in place in the public system help ensure that the learning opportunities we provide for our young people today represent the best possible education we can provide, given our resources, to help them meet the challenges of tomorrow. They serve to keep us focused on this fundamental responsibility of preparing students for the future. Where, one might ask, are the same checks within the private system?

The responsibility of preparing our young people for the challenges of tomorrow belongs not just to those who identify themselves as advocates for public education. It is as a society that we must bear this responsibility. In our view, this is best achieved in a system that demonstrates full accountability to the public—the public education system.

If we stop and think about the kind of world that we need to prepare our young people for, we will recognize that increased ethnic, racial and cultural diversity is an essential feature of that future. To date, the local public school has been one of our primary, if not the primary,

vehicle for preparing people to live in a society characterized by cultural diversity and alternative belief systems. Children from various ethnic and racial backgrounds, faiths and socio-economic circumstances are brought together in a safe and welcoming environment. Together, they learn not only to tolerate but to respect and celebrate their differences. Indeed, one of our key beliefs at Thames Valley is that our school system is strengthened by embracing diversity.

These are important life lessons. They are also lessons that are less likely to be learned in a private school that segregates, fragments and divides students on the basis of social backgrounds and cultural circumstances, where students have less opportunity to be exposed to individuals who are different.

The public school has an important role to play in building social cohesion. It is a role we discount only at the risk of endangering our future stability. In our view, the proposed legislation would severely minimize opportunities to promote the values of tolerance and respect for diversity that have proven essential to maintaining our social fabric.

Finally, we are concerned that this legislation challenges our collective understanding of the role of public education in a democratic society. Many commentators have pointed out, and it is a belief that we share, that public education is essential to a democratic society. We believe that in terms of ensuring vibrant communities with informed and involved citizens, public education has a critical role to play. It fulfills this role by how it enables young people to develop into contributing citizens who are accountable to themselves and others. It also fulfills this role by focusing the attention of parents, the community and the public at large on the collective responsibility we all share for educating our young people.

Only a public education system characterized by full accountability can foster this same sense of community and public engagement. A democratic society that is mindful recognizes public education not only as a collective responsibility, but as a collective enterprise that requires the participation and commitment of us all. A democratic society that is mindful recognizes that a strong public education system is essential to its own future health and prosperity.

As with a universal health care system, public education benefits all citizens and contributes to the collective good of society. As a society, we do not tolerate two-tier health care. We need to ask why we would tolerate two-tier education. While it is important that parents have choices in terms of selecting from among various educational opportunities available to their children, we believe that the future stability of our society is threatened when parents are in fact encouraged to exercise their choice by opting out of the public system. The more they are encouraged to opt out of the public system, the less likely they are to see any need to keep the public system strong so it can meet the needs of all students and of our collective future.

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Yes, parents should be entitled to choice, but we believe the solution lies in making more choices available to them from within the public system, rather than in promoting a disguised voucher system that encourages them to opt out of a public system that promotes the collective good.

As trustees, we are committed to making these choices available to parents across our district. Our system does include a number of schools that specialize in the arts, vocational schools, a school focused on technology, various French immersion schools and other schools that have specialized programs as well. It is important that we are able to provide these choices to parents.

As trustees, however, we are concerned that we do not have the funding to be able to continue to make these choices available to parents. The reality is that we are struggling to meet many of the more basic needs. Our children are our future. Help us to meet the needs of every one of them.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you on this important issue.

The Chair: We have approximately three minutes per caucus.

Ms Hunter: May I introduce my colleague, Graham Hart.

Mr Marchese: Thank you both for coming and thank you for your presentation. You touched, in your third-last paragraph, on a point I was going to ask about. One of the previous speakers talked about the fact that the public education system is monolithic and your point was that the public system has a great deal of variety. We have academic schools, schools whose focus is business, technical or, as you pointed out, French immersion, if that's what people want. We used to have more opportunities in music, before this government came in. They are now fewer but there's still a tremendous variety. Isn't that the case?

Ms Hunter: I believe that Graham would like to answer.

Mr Graham Hart: There is some variety but there are many school systems that have far more variety, and I'll use Edmonton as an example.

I think the other concern we have is that as we prepare students for the next century—and the school is no longer the only place where students learn; students now learn in different ways—from computers, from the Internet, from libraries, television, videos etc—we don't feel we have made the changes and that we're prepared to have the situations in effect in order to meet the needs of our students of the future. That's what concerns us. We need more of these special-interest schools and we don't have the funding to do that.

Just as an example of that, we've struggled to even have French immersion available throughout the Thames Valley area. It's an equity issue. We certainly want to have French immersion everywhere, but we don't have sufficient funding to do that kind of thing.

Mr Marchese: In Toronto, French immersion classes are overflowing. While there are fewer taking them, in Toronto it's a wonderful system in terms of people's interest in French immersion and the board's desire to promote and provide for them. But again, that is an option for which there is less funding. Core French obviously is provided in terms of funds, but there is less support for immersion. So there's not much provincial support. Unless we get it, it's hard, right?

Mr Hart: The other point to understand, though, is that Thames Valley is both a rural and an urban board, and in an urban area it's easier to deliver a program because the issue of transportation doesn't come up. We're presently still dealing with a transportation system which was designed in 1996 and does not allow us, in rural areas, to address those kinds of needs. So transportation is a significant part of the difficulty of offering a special-interest program like French immersion.

Mr Ernie Hardeman (Oxford): Thank you very much for your presentation. We much appreciate it. There are just a couple of points in the presentation that I'd like your comments on. The issue of accountability—I think in your presentation you make the point that we have been working diligently as a government and as a board in Thames Valley to make sure we are as accountable to the parents as we possibly can be. Aside from the tax credit, could we build that accountability into the independent system? Would that solve some of those concerns in your presentation, and what would we need to do to do that?

Mr Hart: Not could you, but will you, I guess is the issue. There are more questions here than there are answers. The reason we raised the issue is because there are no assurances as to what kind of accountability there is going to be. I don't know what's going to be in the proclamations and so on when those come out.

I guess the other issue, Ernie, that we're really addressing is that we're opening an issue here which doesn't involve fairness and equity. Somewhere the line has to be drawn as to what will be the new system, what will get taxpayers' dollars and what won't. What we're concerned about is that we're being asked to comment on something where we don't know those kinds of details.

Mr Hardeman: The reason I asked that is because I do believe—and the legislation as it is written requires the identification of tuition that would be eligible for a tax credit, and we really want the input of the people in the whole system to give us some advice on that.

On the issue of fairness to all, you mentioned transportation. I am a public school supporter. My children are in the Thames Valley system and it has bothered me that when the bus goes by the door, everyone in the province or anyone in Thames Valley pays for it, but if you don't go to the right school, you can't ride the bus. To me, there must be a way in the system that that could be corrected, that all children who are eligible for the public education system would have, in fairness, the right to utilize the services they need.

Mr Hart: Ernie, you certainly know that in the Woodstock area we have a good relationship with our co-terminous Catholic board and we share a lot of busing. I know that isn't true everywhere across the province. In the cases where we don't put students on the same bus, it's because the analysis would indicate that the schools are not in the same location, so the bus is going in an opposite direction. But we have a lot of commonality in our transportation system. Could we have more? Yes, we could, and in the future we would certainly like to have some of that. But also realize that there is no mechanism for John Knox or any of the Christian schools or non-public schools to be involved right now with our transportation system.

Mr McGuinty: Thank you for your presence here today and for the good work you're doing on behalf of public education.

Language is so important in our business, the business of politics, and the government would have this framed as an issue of both fairness and choice. I would argue that the greatest unfairness here is what has happened to public education during the course of the past six years and the continuing reduction in the quality and level of quality services available to our children.

As to the matter of choice, I know from travelling the province and speaking with parents in so many different communities that their overwhelming first choice when it comes to education is for a public system that is dynamic and vibrant and has both the moral and financial support of the government of the day. We have yet to deliver on that overwhelming first choice by the 95%, 96% of parents and families who endorse public education by sending their kids to those schools. You may want to comment.

Mr Hart: I certainly agree with you, and I appreciate the committee being in London. One of the major difficulties is the issue of equity. It's an easy word to say, but it is not a word that has been delivered on in terms of education.

The Thames Valley board receives no mitigation dollars to ease amalgamation, even though we were putting together four boards in a very complex kind of situation, whereas other boards in situations received that. I'm just using that as one issue of equity. So I think, Mr McGuinty, you are quite correct; the word is used a lot but we're very disturbed, in education, that we're not following it. I've already mentioned transportation. It's a major concern to us that there is not equity in the area of transportation.

Mr Kennedy: Mr Hardeman, I'll give you a copy of this, but it shows that the two boards here have lost over \$7 million against just inflation for transportation, and we don't have government MPPs arguing on behalf of your board. We don't hear it in the House and we don't hear it here today. Just last year we calculate you lost \$9 million against inflation. That's just straight-up inflation. The per capita loss is \$124 per student, and you've lost, in your board, \$70 million over the last six years. And the sav-

ings in administration are less than \$1 in \$5. So the money is coming from your students.

I think what people out there really want to know is—there are some choices you've had to make this year—what are the kinds of choices that are affecting children in your board that you would rather have the money for that they want to send into secular private schools as well as some of the religious schools?

Mr Hart: I think in the budget we just passed a week ago, the most difficult choice was in the energy sector, where we cannot control the cost of natural gas to heat a school or diesel fuel to go in a bus. The extra money we got last year only represented 40% of the increased cost. So to cover last year's deficit just in energy of \$4 million, we had to take money from administration and from special-needs areas in order to cover that shortfall. Yes, we are no longer able to fulfil the needs of students, so we have significantly reduced the number of staff that we have in areas of educational assistants, attendance counsellors, psychologists, psychometrists and things like this. So, yes, we are delivering a balanced budget, but at the expense of students.

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

This committee will recess until 1 o'clock this afternoon.

The committee recessed from 1202 to 1258.

The Chair: Good afternoon, everyone. It is 1 o'clock and I'd like to bring this committee back to order. Our first presentation this afternoon is from the University of Western Ontario. I would ask the presenter or presenters to please come forward and state your name for the record.

Is the representative from the OSSTF, District 9, in the audience?

Interjection: Open it up to the public.

The Chair: For your comment, there is a process we have to follow, and I think all the members know what the procedures are. If you need to be briefed, I'd certainly be glad to do so at the end of the meeting or if we have a recess this afternoon.

ISLAMIC SOCIETY OF NORTH AMERICA

The Chair: Is the representative from the ISNA group in the audience? Could you please step forward, sir, and state your name for the record. On behalf of the committee, welcome. Take a chair.

Dr Syed Ahmad: My name is Syed Imtiaz Ahmad.

The Chair: Your brief is being photocopied and will be distributed to the other members as soon as it's available, but you may proceed if you wish.

Dr Ahmad: Thank you very much, Mr Chairman and members of the parliamentary committee of the Ontario Legislature. It is my pleasure and honour to be here this afternoon to present to you some of my thoughts based on my own personal involvement in community work, both in Ontario and Canada at large.

I am currently the head of the Islamic Society of North America in Canada, although I have served previously as head of the Islamic Society of North America both in Canada and the United States. I am also chairman of the Canadian Islamic Trust Foundation. This foundation serves community centres throughout Canada, including Ontario. We operate several schools, and I have been personally involved with those schools as chairman of the board. So some of my thoughts that I will present to you reflect my personal involvement in educating the citizens of Canada as well as the residents of Ontario.

I arrived here in 1962 and have lived here ever since. I studied at an Ontario university and served Ontario universities at the highest academic levels. I've been involved in community work since the early 1970s and participated in education forums organized by national television media, in particular on the issue of ethics in education, that is, the place of values and mission in education in our society.

The Islamic Society of North America, as this brief, once you get a copy, will indicate, is a grassroots, umbrella organization. We have members at large and we also have members that are community centres. We work closely with other faith groups, so we are not isolated in our endeavours. We work closely with them on values we all espouse.

We started a pioneering private school in the Toronto area and we have encouraged the establishment of Islamic schools throughout Ontario. The Islamic Society of North America also offers a variety of human development programs—because we are aware of preparing the citizens of this country—and several forms of financial services, such as home buying, auto leasing and buying, and general investments. We are an active participant in serving the citizens of Ontario.

The announcement of the refundable equity in education tax credit was of course widely praised by us and many other groups. This is, we realize, something we have waited a long time for and worked hard to achieve, and finally it is beginning to be realized. We commend the government of Ontario, the Premier, the Minister of Finance, and we also commend all the members of the Legislature who are taking an active interest.

Obviously whatever solution is developed, we would like to see it best serve all citizens and not necessarily be exclusive. In that sense, we are not concerned about questions or issues being raised of whether or not this is the right thing to do. What we would like to request members of other political parties to do is to consider this issue more as human development as opposed to political inclinations. If we look at it from the point of view of human development rather than political inclination, we will come to the same conclusion. We are serving the same common purpose, and that is to educate students who will serve society at large and not isolate them from society.

The clients we serve through our schools are very limited in number. That is why some people may say we are serving what you call a “narrowly focused group.”

However, the graduates from our schools are being prepared for public service at large. We are not preparing them to say, “We serve this sector” or, “We serve in this particular way.” Our goal is not to isolate citizenry, but to prepare them for enriching the cultural mosaic in Ontario by adding a little hue and shine to this mosaic. That is our purpose, regardless of what may be viewed.

The fact that the tax credit is 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 the school. Our parents are no doubt driven by their religious convictions but they are also driven by values and what you call the mission of the citizenry in Ontario.

I have dealt with numerous students who attend our schools. We are not preparing an elitist group in any form. We are not giving them elitist thinking in any form. We are not inspiring in them isolationist tendencies in any form. What we are saying is that a value-based system, a mission-oriented educational system in the form of private schools, regardless of who runs them, is likely to prepare citizens who will complement those being educated by the public school system. We are not competing with the public school system, we are not criticizing the public school system, nor do we intend to harm the public school system in any way.

What we are saying is, the public school system is intended to serve the population at large. We would like to complement the role of the public school system by identifying people who would like to have something more; not take something away from the public school system, but offering everything the public school system has to offer and adding something of value that will contribute to preparing the citizens in this country.

We know the decision the government of Ontario has made. Although it is a very laudable decision and it's a budgetary proposal, it is not the first one. There are several provinces that have offered this kind of facility, in fact on a broader scale than what is being proposed in the current budget of the government of Ontario. The tax credit form is somewhat limited but it certainly will help in removing or alleviating the hardship of the parents who would like to send their children to our schools and either cannot send them or are making sacrifices beyond their ability to bear. Quite often, we have to find charitable donations for supporting these committed parents.

Our schools are not looked at as exclusivist, in the sense that we have been constantly approached by people who are not Muslims, who do not necessarily share all the values that we espouse, but they say, “We like the way you are preparing the citizens in Ontario and we would like our children, who are not Muslim, to attend your schools,” and we have been open to it. Our problem has been simply the numbers. We have not been able to handle the numbers who may come our way. These numbers are minuscule when you look at all the students. These are monumental numbers for us, for our community to bear, but you are looking at a small percentage of the Ontario student population, anyone with the tax

credit who might come. So in that sense we are not likely to dilute or have what we call a “minimizing impact” on the power or the ability of the public school system to continue to do what they have been doing and continue to do well as they have been doing.

One of the arguments that has been advanced is that school choice will fragment society. It is not supposed to bisect. All the students we have graduated over the years have not stood out as differing from the society agenda at large. They have participated in the society agenda at large and they have contributed.

We wanted to send our own children to Islamic schools and we could not because there were none when my children were growing up. In fact, I have a small story from my own personal experience. We lived in Ann Arbor in the United States. The public school system, as you can see, is a really public school system. But our family was very concerned about not being able to hold on to the values that we would like to impart to our children. So although I decided to serve a university in the United States, we moved back to Ontario to attend the public school system here. At that time, we did not have schools. So we are in a way willing to make sacrifices in order to support our children with values and missions that we cherish a great deal.

One of my grandchildren is going to an Islamic school and the other two are not, because Islamic schools are not available to them. I can see a tremendous difference, not in terms of their intellectual development—the intellectual development is not in doubt. What is in question and what we are trying to focus on through these private schools is to give them more of a mission in life, a human development that may be beyond the reach of an ordinary public school system.

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In closing, I would like the remaining time to be available for questions from the members of the Legislature. I don't know whether committee rules allow other questions to be raised.

The equity in education tax credit recognizes that the status quo is no longer viable. It has not proven viable in other provinces. It has been seriously questioned by the United Nations; nor is it being widely operated in this country—it is changing—or in the United States. It gives us, the parents of the children, a choice. The choice it gives them is an opportunity to study in an environment where they do not simply talk about their cherished values but they are able to practise them. For example, in our Islamic schools we have breaks whereby all the children gather and pray together. They're not praying together to say, “We are somewhat unique; very different.” They are taking a break from their regular activities and recognizing the fact that there's a greater mission in life. So they're able to come together as a collective endeavour and participate in recognizing the greater mission of a human being in life.

Whether or not we always do it well of course remains subject to question. I would not claim that all Islamic schools succeed in everything I'm saying. We are human

beings, we have our limitations and we have teachers who have limitations, but we are striving for a goal that we feel is in every way making a positive contribution to the general goals and ideals that this society at large espouses. What we are saying is, we would like to contribute. We would like our students to be able to contribute to society in a way that society will find them noticeable and will say, “Not only are they good professors, not only are they good engineers, but there is something in the way they deal with people.” They are not simply what I would call introverted, they are extroverted. They look at society at large as part of them. They do not isolate them. My own individual excellence should not supersede the excellence of the society around me.

Some of these issues we can convey through our school system, not by speeches, not by words, but by living through them. It's an environment we want to create. Obviously if we deliver speeches—and I used to give speeches to my children who were going to public school. They had an impact but a very limited impact. Children are not simply to be given words of wisdom; they have to live through those words of wisdom vividly applied. That is what we are proposing to offer through a private school system.

I would guarantee and assure that the funds that are going to be made available, regardless of the form, whether they go directly to the students, which is what is being proposed in the budget here, or directly to the school, we are very much in support of it, not just for our own personal interest, individual interest or community interest but for the interest of the larger society. Thank you very much.

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

Mr Mazzilli: Thank you very much for attending. I agree with you. Certainly the Islamic community in London has contributed to all levels. What you said about your leaders contributing to the community at large, not just to the Islamic community, that's apparent every day, and we see that.

You were not here this morning, but the Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation, whom the opposition have coziered up to, on the last page of their presentation said, “So far we have succeeded remarkably well in assimilating and integrating people....” Assimilating? Have we not stopped doing this in this wonderful country of ours? Do we not live together in spite of our diversity? We don't try to assimilate each other in our beliefs and our culture. I'm wondering if you can comment on this. It's a public document distributed to everybody. Is it this sort of thing that actually drives people away from public schools?

Dr Ahmad: I have been thinking about this issue from the very time I arrived in this country something like 40 years ago. I think a lot of times people have good intentions but the impact of what they say can be very serious. An assimilated populace is not going to be good for Ontario. This populace will be good for Ontario.

Certainly if the assimilation implies that we do not want to create people who would be at odds with society, I totally agree. None of us who have decided to live in Ontario should be at odds with society at large. In that sense, I should assimilate. I am living in harmony with society at large, but I don't want to be what you call "living off" society at large. I would like to contribute. Our students would like to contribute. In that sense, we see our role as a complementary role.

Mr McGuinty: Thank you very much, sir, for your presentation. You know, this tax credit policy, what we more properly call a voucher, came as a tremendous surprise to the people of Ontario.

There was a very extensive brief prepared by the Ontario government and submitted to the UN, 80 pages thick, considered, careful, thoughtful. A tremendous amount of work went into the preparation of that brief. Here's something that the Mike Harris government argued before the UN. They said, "Funding of private religious schools would result in the disruption and fragmentation of education in Ontario," and then they added, "Funding private religious schools would have a detrimental impact on the public schools and hence the fostering of a tolerant, multicultural, non-discriminatory society in the province." What do you think would have caused the government to do a 180-degree turn after making such compelling arguments before the UN? By the way, we received no studies, no reports whatsoever of any kind which would support their present position.

Dr Ahmad: Yes, I myself was surprised when the Ontario government presented a budget in which was this bill, but I was delighted. I read the statement they issued earlier. We all live in society. I work at a university; you live in the public. Quite often, we are bound by a goal, and once you define a goal—if the Ontario government decided at that particular juncture, "We will not support private schools," they have to rationalize their position to the United Nations. We all do it with good intentions. In that sense, the argument they have presented was more to say, "If we make a statement that we are not going to support funding of private schools, how do we rationalize it?" It is that. I would not say that the Ontario government has made a 180-degree turn in its thinking. I believe it has in fact made a very positive move to say, "We were not prepared two years earlier when we countered the argument of the United Nations, but we always felt an undercurrent of what's happening in other parts of the country. It's there. All we are doing is responding in kind."

Mr Marchese: Mr Ahmad, what I want to say to you—because we have an opportunity, at least a minute and a half, to respond, and to the other groups that represent Christian schools to whom we didn't have a chance to respond—is that I respect the work you do and the work they do. I am convinced the majority of people in your schools and in the Christian schools are people of modest means. We don't dispute that. They work hard and make tremendous sacrifices for what they do. I just

want to tell you that and I want to tell the other people who made a deputation earlier on.

My point, on a positive note, is to say that I support a public system. I believe the majority of our needs are accommodated in the public system, and can and ought to be, and when they are not, that means people are opting out of that public school system because there is something that cannot be provided, and it might be a faith-related issue. If that's the case, I say that's a choice people are making to opt out of the system. But I believe, generally, the public system ought to be the system that serves our needs. That's my view as a New Democrat.

Dr Ahmad: I would respond by saying that I personally would not negate the purpose. I would support the public school system, but I think that forced uniformity on all students in Ontario is not desirable. Forced uniformity has never worked. You must allow for the population that says, "We can excel somewhat differently. We cannot excel through forced uniformity." This is what I'm saying: do not force uniformity on the students or the children of the parents in Ontario.

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

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UNIVERSITY OF WESTERN ONTARIO

The Chair: We'll now go back to the regular schedule. I'll ask the representative from the University of Western Ontario to please come forward and state your name for the record. On behalf of the committee, welcome. You have 20 minutes for your presentation.

Dr Paul Davenport: My name is Paul Davenport. I am the president of the University of Western Ontario. Please forgive my late arrival.

I've distributed to all of you a set of three pages of slides—I'm going to refer to about five or six of those slides as I speak—and a cover sheet from our recent COU Council Highlights. The whole highlights are available on the Web but I want to refer briefly to a statement in there.

I'll try to be brief. My presentation will focus on two issues: one is our student loan system and the other is the quality of education at our universities. I'm going to focus, in each case, on Ontario issues generally but, where possible, on the impact of particular policies at Western.

To begin with, the student loan system: here I'm speaking to those first three or four slides that you have before you. At Western, we are concerned about debt levels at the university. I've got some data for you in the second slide down on the left-hand side. These are typical of Ontario universities and indeed typical of Canadian universities. About 30% of our students graduate with no debt, some 55% have some debt but debt less than \$35,000, and about 15% are over \$35,000. The average debt of all students graduating in the year 2000 was about \$16,000.

My pitch to you is that we need to focus in on those students at the tail end with the highest debts. We think, for the most part, our students can manage the debts. The default rate in Ontario now is less than 11% for universities generally; it's under 9% for the University of Western Ontario. I've got some practical suggestions to improve the student loan system and deal with that minority of students who may run into trouble.

You can see the four proposals I've got on the slide next to it, four steps toward improved student assistance and accessibility. Number one, let's really harmonize these two loan systems. For too long we've been demanding that students fill out two sets of forms with inconsistent regulations. We make the world very complicated for them. Let's have one set of forms, one set of standards, one set of requirements. Let's truly harmonize OSAP with the Canada student loan system.

Second, let's share the risk. We are asking students to borrow. The future is uncertain. For that minority of students who get into trouble through no fault of their own, who have incomes that are much less than the average of university graduates generally, let's step up and give them a hand. The easiest way to give them a hand is to have an income-contingent system that says, "At some point after graduation—year three, four, five or whenever it is—if you've really had a disappointing experience, society will step in, through the government, evaluate your situation and help you pay down the debt." I think that system can work very well as an add-on to what we currently have. We don't need a revolution in the whole system, but we need an addition.

I think there is some fine-tuning that we could do to our system. I'd like to see the amount of tuition that OSAP will cover in evaluating student need raised. I'd like to see our medical students who are in residence—we count them as students, by the way, in our university books, but they are not treated as students for OSAP purposes. I could give you a list of others, but there is some fine-tuning that we could do to make this system work better.

Finally, let's promote graduate studies. If we're going to meet the accessibility challenge, we're going to need more professors. This is largely directed at the federal government, which provides most of the graduate student scholarships, but we also need full funding for our graduate students from the provincial operating grant. Those are my remarks on the student loan system and the question of affordability.

Now let me turn to the other side of accessibility. Accessibility always has two aspects. There is affordability; the students have to be able to afford going to university. But we need the capacity, we need the faculty, we need the staff to be able to give a quality education.

If I can turn you to page 2, I want to focus on graphs on the upper part of the page, the two right at the top of the page. On the left-hand side you can see the very discouraging trend in public funding for public universities in Canada compared to the United States. We're talking only about the US state universities; there is nothing

private in the graph. You can see that in Canada, we've cut and cut public funding to our universities; in the United States they've done the opposite. At Western, our belief is that the US has it right, that investing in your public universities is one of the best investments you can make in this knowledge economy.

What's the result? The result shows up in the graph in the upper right-hand corner, that as these cuts go through, they lead to a growing student-faculty ratio. This is true throughout Canada, but in fact a gap has grown up between Ontario and the other nine provinces.

If I have one appeal for this committee it is to focus on that student-faculty ratio. When you look, when our government looks, when society looks at the issue of hospitals, you think about waiting lines—waits for operations, a waiting line in emergency—and you debate that in the Legislature and you've been doing it for 20 years. I'm not making a partisan statement here. This is one of the things we in Ontario debate. When you look at the public schools, you say, "What about class size?" and you debate class size in the Legislature. Is it going up? Is it going down? What's the average size? Could we please start to focus on that student-faculty ratio in the same way? Because it plays the same role in my world that the hospital waiting line plays in the hospitals or the average class size plays in the public schools. What has been happening is that the student-faculty ratio just goes up and up and up, and nobody notices. In Ontario, we are now 35% higher than the average student-faculty ratio in the public universities of the United States, and that gap is growing.

Let me take you down to the bottom right-hand corner of that page 2 and I'll show you the situation at Western. I think we're typical of the rest of the province. Our student-faculty ratio has increased over the last decade by 25%. That's an enormous change. What we need is the funding to turn that around. The May 9 budget provided an excellent investment in deferred maintenance—we're grateful for that, but it doesn't help us hire people—and \$220 million toward additional students and we're grateful for that. What we need now is the complement to that additional \$220 million to cover the inflationary costs everybody is going to face—I'm thinking of a modest number like 2% or 2.5%—and the additional funds necessary to bring this student-faculty ratio down. At my university, beyond inflation, over five years, we're probably talking something like \$16 million or \$17 million to bring us down to the average of the other nine provinces, not an enormous figure, but I don't think we'll ever get there unless we start to focus on that student-faculty ratio, and that's what I would urge you to do, if I may.

My last point is simply to direct you to the Council Highlights, where we have responded to the most recent budget and outlined the very positive aspects of it. I want you to read those, but I also want you to go down to the penultimate paragraph where again we address this quality issue. You can see two priorities there. We need the funding for inflationary cost increases, just whatever the average of society is. Choose it: 2%, 2.5%, the CPI.

Without that, some of the money that we should be hiring new professors with goes simply to pay increased costs.

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Secondly, we need to cover those students who are in the system and are not yet funded. That's one of the best ways to get that student-faculty ratio down. There are a large number of students in the Ontario system not yet funded. If we start to fund those students, we can start to bring our student-faculty ratio down to the average of the other nine provinces. I put it to you that's an appropriate goal for Canada's largest and most prosperous province, that we should at least be at the Canadian average for that student-faculty ratio, that very good measure of the quality of what we're giving our students.

Interruption.

The Chair: Excuse me, Dr Davenport. Cellphones are not allowed. I think Mr Kennedy, it may be—there's something beeping.

Mr Kennedy: I beg your pardon, Mr Chair?

The Chair: I'm sorry, I thought there was something beeping.

Mr Kennedy: It's the media table.

The Chair: To the media, I would ask that all the cellphones be turned off. Thank you. Sorry, Dr Davenport.

Dr Davenport: That's my conclusion, sir, that we should be aiming to bring the student-faculty ratio in Ontario and at Western down to the average of the other nine provinces within five years.

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

Mr Peters: Thanks very much, Dr Davenport, for coming. It's very interesting when you look at these charts that you've provided here, where you see the major shifts either up or down with ratios, they seem to start about 1995-96. I don't think there's any coincidence there. As often as we hear of increased funding for universities, it's very evident when you see these charts when the damage started in our university system—our public university system, that is.

Mr Davenport, on page 2, top left chart, you compare Canada versus the United States per student funding. Do you have a similar chart for Ontario, or could you tell me how Ontario may look as compared to that chart right there?

Dr Davenport: Yes. What you're seeing there is the average of the 10 Canadian provinces. Ontario would be below that average. I'll point out that it would be below that average for all of the 20 years. So I'm not making a partisan statement. We've had this problem a long time; we need to correct it.

Mr Peters: Recognizing that, you made that point and your graph shows that it has been ongoing, but when you look at it, it's starting in the 1990s and you start to see that downward trend. Is that trend continuing?

Dr Davenport: If we don't take steps to explicitly focus on the student-faculty ratio, stabilize it and bring it down, yes, that trend will continue.

Mr Peters: Could you provide a similar chart for tuition? As we've seen the funding per student drop, would that line be rising as far as tuitions?

Dr Davenport: Yes, tuition would have gone from about 10% of our operating revenues in 1990 to about one third today. So tuition has risen as a per cent of our operating levels.

Mr Peters: One last question—

The Chair: Make it quick, Mr Peters.

Mr Peters: Yes, I will. Today we're debating public-private education. There's a new initiative for private universities in Ontario. Do you have any opinion on what the effect is going to be on public universities with this new initiative toward private universities in Ontario?

Dr Davenport: Steve, you know I don't have a brief on that one. When I come to a group like this, I really like to think that I'm responding to questions that we've debated within the university. I think the best way to get university comment on that is to go to individual professors, because we don't have a university position on that issue.

Mr Peters: OK, I'll put it in writing to you.

Mr Marchese: Thank you for your frank comments you made in a variety of areas. I'm not sure I'm in agreement with the suggestions you make with respect to tuition fees. My point is governments, particularly in good times, should reduce tuition fees, not increase them. Your proposal for income contingency is something that many, including myself, reject, because those with lower incomes will have to pay forever. I don't see that as a solution, nor do I see raising the cap on allowable tuition as the way to go. The answer is to reduce tuition fees, especially if the economy is good. Yes or no?

Dr Davenport: I'm at a university trying to give a quality education with among the worst total funding in North America. That's the problem.

Mr Marchese: Yes, I'm agreeing with you.

Dr Davenport: I can't agree to reductions in tuition fees, because the short-run impact is I'm laying off people. That's what worries me.

Mr Marchese: OK. Mr Davenport—

Dr Davenport: Let me now say, though, with regard to the question of fees—

Mr Marchese: Quickly, because I want to ask you another question.

The Chair: Mr Marchese, I think you should let the—

Mr Marchese: No, I'm just saying if you can, quickly, because I have another question for you.

Dr Davenport: The fees are frozen at 2% for the next five years, so when I talk about income-contingent debt reduction, it's not about getting more fee revenue; it's about helping students who get into difficulty. I sure wish those who want to help students would get behind that idea. It's about giving money to people who have already borrowed and are now—

Mr Marchese: Mr Davenport, thank you. I need to move on a little bit to make another comment, if I can. These people have had a good economy. If I look at your chart, we were giving, as New Democrats, more to your

sector in a recessionary period than this government in a good economy. What I'm saying to you is, they should be giving you more money. You see, there aren't too many other places that we have money. These people are going to spend by next year \$12 billion on income tax cuts and corporate tax cuts. Are you willing, sir, to give up your individual income tax cut in order to be able to find some of these dollars to give to your sector?

Dr Davenport: My position as the university president is that we've got to correct the public underfunding of our universities. I'm not in a position—

Mr Marchese: And where are you going to get the money?

Mr John O'Toole (Durham): I've got four points and, sort of like Mr Marchese there, I'll try and have most of the time. At pre-budget, I was pleased. Your input was very important in that. I think it was addressed; however satisfactorily is perhaps another debate. But I think it was responded to. I think the double cohort issue has been around. I think at one point \$1.2 billion in the general capital part is important. The longer-term commitment on the operating side is, I think, a first good piece to address those 73,000-plus student spaces that are being created.

I hear closely what you're saying on the harmonization issue. There are discussions, as you know. The financial institutions have backed away. If there are some more specific things you can tell us that you haven't told Minister Cunningham or others, I'd be happy to argue in favour of that. I think eliminating red tape is one of our monikers, if you will.

I want to address the student-faculty ratio. I think it's a very good point. Sort of a little more complex question is the comparison with the US model versus the Canadian model. I'm not sure whether you're the Harvard of the north kind of thing. The Ivey business school is an important and well-respected institution, moving more toward the US model, I might say, of providing high-quality education at the graduate level. But there are a lot of private universities that, for a lot of reasons, are able to provide and sustain high-quality education in a model that some would say is competitive, and we don't have that in Canada. Some of the best universities are right here in Ontario. I just want to make sure that it's not a direct comparison. There's Columbia, and then I think Mr Hampton went to one of the private universities as a graduate student.

But I think the key is, the student-faculty ratio is a very important question because some classes—

Mr Marchese: There's a question coming. Hold on.

The Chair: Order.

Mr O'Toole: He approaches it differently than I do. With some classes, though, whether it's philosophy versus a chemistry lab, we need to work with those ratios and have real numbers, and we've differentiated the tuition fees to allow you to manage that, whether it's small class versus a large class. I want to understand, is technology part of that—

The Chair: You've got 15 seconds to pose the question, Mr O'Toole.

Mr O'Toole: How much teaching time does the average tenured professor have? I know they do a lot of research.

Dr Davenport: Indeed. The key point is that I'm not talking about Harvard of the north here. I'm comparing Ontario universities to the University of Arkansas, Ohio State, the public universities of the United States. There's not a private university in any of this. We're not keeping up with those public universities, and indeed, with some states that we used to make fun of, we're now well behind them.

Our average teaching loads would be about two and a half to three courses per term, depending on the faculty in the department and the research productivity and the professor, and you'd find that when our professors leave to go down to US state universities, it's often because they can show that we're making much greater demands on them in that respect than the state universities do. So we're in a competitive situation, and every time we jack up those teaching loads we risk losing people.

Mr O'Toole: I want to thank you. My daughter had a good four years at Western university.

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

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

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ONTARIO SECONDARY SCHOOL TEACHERS' FEDERATION, DISTRICT 9

The Chair: Our next presentation is from the OSSTF, District 9. I would ask the presenter to please come forward and state your name for the record. On behalf of the committee, welcome. You have 20 minutes for your presentation.

Mr Brad Bennet: My name is Brad Bennet. I'm the president of the Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation in Greater Essex.

I'd like to start by saying for the record that no members of the opposition have cozied up to me. I'm here speaking on behalf of my colleagues and on behalf of public education.

We're opposed to the direct or indirect funding of private or religious schools. All students need an equal opportunity to maximize their educational potential. Public education is the great equalizer, allowing students from different religions, cultural backgrounds, abilities and economic circumstances to come together. This greatly contributes to our diverse society and promotes tolerance of different groups at a young age.

Enticing people to leave public education and go to segregated schools is a step in the wrong direction for our society. How are children supposed to learn about people who are different from them if they have no contact with these people? Many students in Windsor and Essex county come from countries that promote segregation.

These students thrive on the diversity of public education.

Public schools have their doors open to all students, regardless of religion, wealth, culture or ability. That is why public education is worthy of public funding. Religious or private schools that do not welcome all children should not be funded by the public. Families choosing to opt out of public education should do so at their own expense.

Gross underfunding over the past several years has hurt public education. Funding cuts in the Greater Essex County District School Board have led to significant cuts in teaching and support staff, the loss of full-day kindergarten—in spite of the documented value of such programs—shortages of resource materials for students and the deterioration of many of our buildings.

Next year, our board is losing \$200,000 in funding for school bus fuel, \$600,000 in funding for utilities and will be shortchanged about \$250,000 for grade 11 textbooks. Additionally, our board is projecting a \$215,000 increase in spending for hydro. After these expenses are considered, the new money announced by the government will actually be about 1%, or about one third the rate of inflation.

In spite of chronic underfunding from the government, dedicated staff still deliver a good program to the students, although it is becoming more and more difficult. This resilience of public education shows the solid foundation of the system.

However, funding private schools with public money could, in fact, deal a death blow to public education. A recent Lang Research poll showed that 15% of parents with children in public schools are willing to consider private school options based on the tax credit scheme. For our board, that could mean the loss of nearly 5,500 students, resulting in a loss of over \$38 million in funding. I shudder to think what this would do to education in Greater Essex, what would be left for the students that remain.

The new level of underfunding in public education as a result of the migration would lead to further erosion of public education, causing more parents to move their children to the private system, if they could afford it, and the cycle would continue until public education is all but abandoned. School boards would be unable to defend themselves since the government has already taken away their ability to generate revenue through local taxes. Those left behind to pick up the crumbs would be the special-needs students and children from families of modest means. That's not what life in this province and this country is supposed to be about. That is why public education has been, and must continue to be, the cornerstone of our society.

It is ironic that the government has been pushing school boards into making more efficient use of space in the schools over the past several years, and we could now see a reduction of 15% of the students in those buildings. In a hypothetical school of 1,000 students, if 15% or 150 of them leave the system, are the heating, utilities and

maintenance costs of the school any lower? Of course they're not. But when the flawed funding formula is applied, the money disappears with the students. After painful school closings to maximize the space in our schools, it would seem that the tax credit scheme could push us back to square one. The point of all this is that if the government feels it has \$300 million to hand out, it should be given to cash-starved public education, not private and religious schools.

The argument that parents of private school students should not have to pay twice for education is ridiculous. The public education system is the most vital resource in the province, and it exists for the good of society as a whole. Therefore, all members of society should contribute to public education, and all public money spent on education should be spent on public education.

Private and religious schools exist to segregate students by religion, ethnic group, class or ability. They pick and choose only certain students and then decide whether they stay or leave. This does not serve the entire public and, therefore, should not be funded by the entire public.

Segregation leads to ignorance and intolerance of others. This is not something that should be promoted by any government of a multicultural society such as we have in Ontario, nor is it something that should be bankrolled with the public purse.

The recent advertising blitz funded by independent school supporters is certainly compelling evidence that they are not struggling financially and do not need a tax credit to support their choice of opting out of public education. It is disappointing to see the government proposing to cater to this special-interest group at the expense of the vast majority.

I have personally taught in schools with students from all types of backgrounds. These students work together, play together and learn from each other. Bringing students together from all corners of our society to become one cohesive group should be something we celebrate, not abandon.

What will the future of our Ontario look like if we move to a more segregated education model? When will the segregation end for our students? When they leave school, will they suddenly become enlightened about others who may be different from them in one way or another? I think not.

Public schools employ qualified staff and are required to deliver the provincial curriculum and testing requirements. Private and religious schools may or may not employ qualified staff and may or may not follow the provincial curriculum and testing requirements. Public school teachers are regulated by the Ontario College of Teachers. Many private and religious school teachers share no such obligations. Public schools are obliged to take any and all students who would like to attend. Private and religious schools can select students they want.

Ultimately, public schools are accountable to the public, while private schools are not. In an era of ever-increasing public accountability, how can the government

even contemplate providing public funding to schools that are not accountable to the public?

During the 1999 leaders' debate, Premier Harris assured citizens of Ontario that he had no intention of introducing charter schools or vouchers in Ontario. This tax proposal is a voucher system under another name and clearly lays the groundwork for two-tiered education.

Several members of the government have stated publicly that funding private and religious schools would deteriorate public education. This tax scheme would fund private and religious schools by reimbursing the families that choose these schools with public money. Why the sudden change of heart?

Obviously, for every student who is lured away from public education, the cost to the government goes from \$7,000 to \$3,500. If 15% of the students across the province migrate to private and religious schools, as the polls indicate, public education would lose \$2.1 billion, with \$1.4 billion being paid in tax subsidies and the government pocketing the difference. Stealing money like this from public education is extremely shortsighted.

A recent public opinion poll conducted by Lang Research shows that 67% of the people oppose the announced credits for private schools. Why would our government want to support something that the vast majority of the citizens oppose?

The government was not given a mandate in 1999 to dismantle Ontario's public education system. Tax credits for private schools is a Canadian Alliance policy. The government should be reminded that the Canadian Alliance was overwhelmingly rejected in Ontario.

1350

This government likes to use the phrase "promise made, promise kept." This promise was certainly never made prior to the 1999 election. If any promise was made it was a promise not to go down this road.

Because this proposal is such a radical shift in educational policy—in fact, a radical shift in our society—an election should be called immediately, and the party can run on the platform of funding private schools with public money. It is the only way to find out if the citizens of this province embrace or reject this position. Only if the government is given this kind of mandate from the citizens it represents should the tax credit receive serious consideration.

In closing, the removal of billions of dollars from public education is no simple amendment to Ontario's tax policy. It is a fundamental change in the nature of our province. It strikes at the very heart of the purpose of education and the character of our society. This shortsighted, divisive tax credit plan should be abandoned and the \$300 million earmarked for tax credits should be injected into the cash-starved public education system immediately.

I have copies of everything I have said. That concludes my remarks.

The Chair: Thank you very much. We have approximately two minutes per caucus.

Interruption.

The Chair: I would remind the audience that every time there's a demonstration, you're taking away from the time of the presenters.

Interruption.

The Chair: There is a procedure, sir, and we're following procedure.

Mr Marchese, you have two and a half minutes.

Mr Marchese: Mr Bennet, if by some miracle this government were to put back \$2.3 billion, would that change your view about public dollars for private schools?

Mr Bennet: I think there are two parts to it: there's the money being taken out of public education, and then there's the societal change, I guess, in the integration. I believe that in a society such as ours, every opportunity we have to bring young people together at an early age is advantageous.

Mr Marchese: What do you say to the point that you have a monopoly, and that's not good; that you are afraid of competition, and that's not good; and why are you against people having choice, which some argue is a human rights choice for them?

Mr Bennet: We are not opposed, and I'm not opposed, to people having choice. I think people have that choice right now. As I said, I think public education benefits everyone in society, and therefore there's an obligation on everyone in society to contribute to it.

We are ultimately accountable to the public. The mandate comes down from the provincial government, and the government is elected by the people of the province. If we're not meeting the needs of society, then we certainly hear about it and changes have to be made. So I don't see it as a monopoly; I see it as an obligation, a two-way obligation.

The Chair: For the government side, Mr Hardeman.

Mr Hardeman: Thank you very much for your presentation. First of all, I want to say that I'm not going to debate or argue the issue of the adequacy or lack of adequacy of the education system. Listening very intently to your presentation, I have real concerns with your position that parents who make the choice to send their children to an education other than the one you and I support and send our children to—that somehow that breeds intolerance, that those choices cannot create a tolerant society, that somehow those children will not be as good citizens as my children. I take great exception to that, unless, of course, you can come up with some evidence that shows that.

Obviously we've had this going on. In my community we've had an independent school for 43 years. I would be hard-pressed to come up with any documentation to show that children who have gone through that system are not as tolerant and as acceptable citizens as the ones who have gone through your school, sir. I take great exception to that statement. I don't argue with your right to promote the qualities of the system you work in, but I take great exception to your thinking that somehow people in my community are substandard because they didn't decide to choose the system you work in.

Mr Bennet: Am I allowed to respond? Is this a lecture or a question?

Mr Hardeman: Your organization, sir—

Mr Bennet: May I respond?

The Chair: Mr Hardeman, let the presenter respond.

Mr Hardeman: I didn't ask a question.

Mr Bennet: I didn't come here to be lectured to by members of the government.

The Chair: If you could pose the question, because we're running out of time.

Mr Hardeman: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Go ahead and reply.

Mr Bennet: Thank you. I take great exception to words being put in my mouth. That's not what I said at all. What I said was that the more segregated society becomes, I think there's the potential for less tolerance. I think that if we look back through history, in a variety of ways—

Mr Hardeman: No, that's not what you said, sir.

The Chair: Order, please. Go ahead.

Mr Bennet: —segregated societies have led to difficulty. If a government encourages people to move to more segregation, then we're headed in the wrong direction. I did not say that anyone is less a citizen or less a person.

Mr Kennedy: Thank you for your presentation. By way of the point you're raising right now, I just want to make you aware, if you're not already, that this is the Ontario government's only piece of research on funding private schools. It's what they presented to the United Nations. It's a careful draft and what it says, for example, is that funding private schools "would undermine the ability of public schools to build social cohesion, tolerance and understanding," exactly what you just said. The member opposite may wish to dissociate himself from his own government's only research on this subject, but it's that kind of jumping back and forth that we've seen.

The other issue and the one that I think is very germane—

Interruption.

The Chair: Excuse me, Mr Kennedy.

To the gentleman in the blue shirt: if you insist on being removed from this room, I will do so. If there is one more demonstration from you, I will have you removed from the room, sir. Thank you.

Mr Kennedy.

Mr Kennedy: On this side table we have the figures, which I think everyone is now aware of, that there's been a deduction in funding from the schools that your members try to teach in. You have lost, just in the last year, some \$124 per student, which is a compounded loss of \$520. We don't hear about this in the Legislature. The members from the government side, at least, aren't talking about what your schools need, what it takes to get excellence for the kids in those schools. They would have us believe that all the money in the world, and more importantly all the resources, are there.

I wonder if you could touch on some of the things your members have to contend with that this is going to

deduct from as it draws more resources away from public education.

Mr Bennet: I think that ultimately it would lead to more closures of community schools, which is a real loss for the communities. We're struggling right now to get adequate resource materials for our students. We have beat-up old textbooks, in many cases, that are not even usable any more. The staffing levels have been cut to the bone, and it's already having a negative effect in the classrooms. Further funding reductions will obviously lead to further staff reductions. I just don't see anything good in there for the students. Yes, we sure have noticed over the past several years that there are fewer and fewer real dollars in public education. Otherwise, we wouldn't be closing schools and boards wouldn't be on the verge of running deficits all the time.

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

1400

ONTARIO SECONDARY SCHOOL TEACHERS' FEDERATION, DISTRICT 11

The Chair: The next presentation is from the OSSTF, District 11, political action committee. I would ask the presenter to please come forward and state your name for the record. On behalf of the committee, welcome. You have 20 minutes for your presentation.

Mr Brian Brown: Mr Chair and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to present to you today. My name is Brian Brown. I'm a Woodstock teacher and chair of the OSSTF's District 11—that's Thames Valley—political action committee. If you're wondering, yes, I'm one of those big bad union bosses we've heard about in the government ads. Please don't be afraid.

For the past six years, the government of Ontario has eroded Ontario's public education system. The government's latest budget includes a tax credit for private school tuition which will cost \$300 million, and perhaps \$700 million, a year. The government is attempting to perpetuate a massive transfer of hundreds of millions of dollars from the public education system to the private system. Half a billion dollars, maybe more, that should be invested in public education is being put into private schools. After attacking public education for six years, the Tories now want to pay people to leave public education for private schools.

This is an enormous reversal for the government. Education Minister Ecker and Premier Harris are both clearly on record—I know you've heard that repeatedly at these committee hearings—opposing the transfer of public money to private schools. During the televised leaders' debate in the 1999 provincial election, Premier Harris stated clearly that he was opposed to funding for private denominational schools. In a January 18, 2000, letter to Leader of the Opposition Dalton McGuinty, Premier Harris said such funding would cost between \$300 million

and \$700 million a year, and he added, "Obviously such an action would run directly counter to Ontario's long-standing commitment to public education."

The proposed tax credit is nothing more than a voucher plan by another name. It is a way for people to take public dollars intended for public schools and put them into private schools. Faith-based private schools have been exploited into thinking there's a fairness issue involved, while secular private schools are quietly waiting for a windfall. While OSSTF is sensitive to the sacrifices made by parents who choose to send their children to faith-based private schools, the failing health of our once proud public education system needs to be the public priority. OSSTF district 11 is firmly opposed to this voucher system.

Issues: the committee has heard already from groups opposed to the funding of private schools with public dollars and opponents have told you a number of things that concern them: the threat to Ontario's multicultural society; the idea that there's a proposal to fund private schools with public money at a cost of \$7,000 to the public system for every child who leaves public schooling. Bill 45 provides an incentive for families to remove their children from public schools, divides education according to income level, race or religion and flouts democracy by not providing real public consultation over 80 days or more of hearings, hearings that might unite faith-based and public supporters rather than divide.

District 11 OSSTF political action committee shares those concerns. In addition, PAC wishes to emphasize two others: accountability and empirical research.

Accountability: private schools are not held accountable in the same way public schools are. Anyone with \$250 and a half-page form can open a private school. Of 734 private schools in the province, only 27 participated in grade 3 or grade 6 testing last year, 604 did not hire certified teachers and only 90 were inspected by the Ministry of Education.

The \$3,500 tax credit per child per year proposed by the government is a subsidy of \$42,000 per child who attends private school from grades 1 to 12. Private school advocates have openly stated that they expect to be given money with no strings attached; that's public money, no strings attached. They refuse to be held accountable by the government for curriculum, teacher qualifications, student testing or any other standard which applies to the public system.

The Ontario Human Rights Commission exempts private schools from parts of the Human Rights Code, and private school budgets are not part of the public record.

Please don't misunderstand me. There are excellent faith-based schools. My concern is that they're being used as a smokescreen.

Empirical research: The government's lack of research before tabling Bill 45 is shocking. Does anyone else have the impression the government is making this up as it goes? Education Minister Ecker was, by all reports, not even included in the decision to include tax credits for private schools within Bill 45. On June 11, Finance

Minister Flaherty admitted to this very committee that he did not conduct any studies, any polls, any research to test whether or not parents would view the tax credit as an incentive to switch their children to private schools. Minister Flaherty also could not tell this committee what research, if any, Education Minister Ecker and Premier Harris used in January 2000, when both wrote letters stating that extending funding to religious schools would cost the province "at least \$300 million and possibly as much as \$700 million."

Empirical research is available in Edward Fiske's *When Schools Compete—A Cautionary Tale*. I hope you've all read it. If you have, please read it again. If you have not, please consider it a core text for your committee's work. As a teacher, that's the homework I'll assign. *When Schools Compete* is the first book to provide detailed quantitative and qualitative analysis of what happens to an entire school system when private schools are funded with public money.

The book documents 10 years of reform efforts in New Zealand, whose school system operates much like ours. In 1989, New Zealand's school boards were gutted and a strict one-size-fits-all defunding formula was imposed. Sound familiar? Money was taken out of poorly performing schools to punish them. The author concludes that the New Zealand experiment was ultimately detrimental to public schools. Lower-income and minority students were harmed. Teachers fled the country and the profession. International test scores fell. If Minister Flaherty had studied such data, surely he would not have included private school tax incentives in Bill 45.

Finally, I'd like to share five local examples of ways in which the government's policies in education are inflicting real harm. Each example bears witness that the systematic defunding of public education has done serious damage in Ontario and each begs the question: if there's not sufficient funding in public education, what planet is the government coming from by providing public funds for private schools?

I'll let you read item 1 for yourselves, which has to do with retirements.

Item 2 has to do with textbooks. My school, College Avenue Secondary School in Woodstock, received its grade 11 textbook budget yesterday. The school has \$16,496 to spend on next year's 175 grade 11 students, who will begin their third year as curriculum guinea pigs in September. That's \$94.24 per student. There are three books we must purchase: math, \$60; science, \$70; English, \$50.

Let's do that math: \$180 total. Now, if we can arrange the timetable to teach four classes of 22 students in each semester in each course, then the school will need to spend only \$90 per student—half of them in the first semester, half in the second; use the books twice—with a net saving of \$4.24 left over. What will we spend that on? Here's a partial list: tax, shipping, chemicals, test tubes, novels, paper, photocopying, Kleenex. What's missing? Each grade 11 student will take seven or eight courses. We have money for three. Geography text? No

money. History? No money. Bookkeeping, family studies, tech ed, computer texts? No money. Once again, how can the government justify taking tax money out of public education and giving it to private schools when students in the public system will go without such basic supplies as textbooks?

Library: Under the one-size-fits-all defunding formula, the Thames Valley District School Board cannot staff its libraries. Solution? Either close the libraries one period a day or move staff away from guidance to the libraries. In September, guidance departments will lose staff in order to keep libraries open. Again, if there's not sufficient funding to adequately staff both guidance and libraries, how can the government justify private school funding?

My last two examples are personal and tragic.

Stephanie Mason is a special student at my school. Stephanie is 18, deaf and blind. She has cerebral palsy and developmental delay. Before government cuts, she had a teacher of the deaf for 50% of each day. Two years ago she was cut to one period every other day. Today she gets a check-in visit once a month. I wonder what Stephanie could be doing right now had she had more support in her high school years. It makes me want to cry to see this sweet girl struggling to walk through our halls, knowing what a scary place school must be for someone who cannot see or hear what is going on around her. If there is no money for Stephanie, how can there be \$300 million for private schools?

1410

Deb Potter writes from her heart about her son Steven. Her letter is attached. Please deliver it to Premier Harris, to whom it's addressed. Steven is a 17-year-old bright kid who happens to be blind. To get ahead in his schooling, he hopes to attend summer school. There is no funding for Brailled materials, one-on-one instruction, an educational assistant or transportation. Steven's mom has enrolled him anyway. She'll sit with him and transcribe his lessons into Braille. She worries how he'll feel—a 17-year-old who takes his mom to school—but feels there is no other choice. She asks Premier Harris in her attached letter, "What exactly is being funded for children with special needs to assist them in keeping up with your curriculum?" She states at the end, "I do not understand how your government can afford to give families sending their children to private school a tax credit and not afford to give the children already enrolled in public education the funding they need. Please explain this to me."

OSSTF PAC has four recommendations:

(1) Those sections of Bill 45 dealing with tax credits for parents of private school students should be withdrawn.

(2) The \$300 million in the Ontario budget for the tax credits should be reallocated to the budget for public elementary and secondary education.

(3) Those sections of Bill 45 dealing with tax credits for parents of private school students should be dealt with as policy of the Ontario PC Party and brought before the people of Ontario in the next election, if you have the courage.

(4) Begin at once an honest dialogue with faith-based private schools, about 30% of them, to find ways to accommodate them within a fully inclusive, publicly funded and publicly accountable system.

I do have a fifth: elect that man sitting over there as the next Premier.

Thank you very much.

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

Mrs Dianne Cunningham (London North Centre): You mentioned that you had some research on schools in New Zealand.

Mr Brown: Yes.

Hon Mrs Cunningham: I'm just wondering, when you were doing that research, if you had looked at anything or if you can provide our committee with any information on schools in British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba or Quebec. I think you can see where I'm coming from. In spite of everything, the government does have an issue at hand, so if you could respond. If it's likewise in the other provinces, then we should really seriously consider this.

Mr Brown: I don't think it's likewise in the other provinces. I think that the funding of private and faith-based schools elsewhere is not given to the parents. It's not an incentive to take their children out of the public schools; it's public funding for publicly accountable private schools. That's quite a different thing from what's proposed in Bill 45. Yes, I do have that research and I'd be glad to supply you with a list.

Hon Mrs Cunningham: Could you just broadly, if you've got the research, say that there was any problem one way or the other?

Mr Brown: There are problems when public education is perceived to be underfunded. There are localities, and I think England is a good example, where the funding is starting to come back to what might be considered proper levels at 8% per year.

Mr McGuinty: Thank you for a very compelling presentation. We've talked about the impact of this government's defunding policies on children. I want to speak for a moment as a parent of four children. The single most important resource to me in the classroom is not the computer, it's not the textbook—those are valuable tools—it's not even a desk. It's the teacher. I am very worried about the corrosive impact this government's educational policies have had on the morale of our teachers. I wonder if you might speak to the impact that this particular policy will have. We've got a government that is saying to its teachers, "We are inviting parents to abandon public education and to go to private schools." What does it say to the 150,000 teachers who get up every morning and go to work and teach our kids?

Mr Brown: Thank you for the question. It says that we're not particularly valued. It says that we're demeaned. It says that we're unimportant. It says that we don't count. Certainly the evidence of the New Zealand experiment indicates that teachers are leaving. Teachers are leaving the profession. Teachers left the country.

I didn't read one paragraph of my presentation to you to allow time for questions, and that's item 1 under personal examples, local examples.

I attended a Thames Valley retirement dinner a week ago Monday. There were over 500 teachers present leaving Thames Valley, elementary and secondary together, and they're all ages. There's a two-year teacher at Glendale High School who said, "I've had enough. I can't take this any more." He's going back to law school and he'll be a darned good lawyer, as he's been a darned good teacher. He has that choice. At the other end of the spectrum we've got two principals who are going to Texas, where they hope to find enjoyment and value.

Mr Marchese: Thank you, Mr Brown. It was a good presentation. I found it very useful, and you raised some good points. You talk about under the one-size-fits-all defunding formula, which is curious, because I've used this before in committee.

Mr Brown: I've heard you use it.

Mr Marchese: They have no problem using that for the funding formula, but then I've heard Mr Hardeman and Mr O'Toole use that same expression, saying, "Why should we use the one-size-fits-all for all children?" Presumably everybody is different, they learn differently, they have different ideas about how they should be educated. So what's wrong with that?

Mr Brown: There's some essential hypocrisy there on the government side, I'm afraid to say. One size fits all: we have students who probably cost the public system \$1,200, maybe \$1,000 in terms of educating them. They're the brightest of the bright. A lot of people say about them, "You know, they'd get through in spite of their teachers." Then we have students I think of, like Stephanie and Steven, who aren't \$7,000-a-year students. They're probably \$25,000- or \$30,000- or maybe \$50,000-a-year students. So if we lose the \$7,000-a-year students and funding to the private system, then that's a chunk of cash we just can't live without.

Mr Marchese: You're quite right. By the way, your second example of Stephanie is something that other people have spoken about. They said that if they have the money they'll opt out; and if they don't, it means we have \$2.3 billion less now, and those whose needs are greater will have even less for the system to be able to deal with. That was raised by many too, by the way.

Thank you for your presentation.

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

ELIZABETH ANTUNES,
JEREMY McNAUGHTON,
HARMONY SPIVEY, PARIS MEILLEUR,
DAN HILTON, DAVID BLOCKER

The Chair: Our next presentation is from Paris Meilleur, if the individual could step forward. On behalf of the committee, welcome.

Ms Elizabeth Antunes: Unfortunately, Paris is not here yet. She got tied up in traffic. She's coming from school, so it's pretty difficult to get out here.

The Chair: If you could please state your name for the record and introduce you colleagues.

Ms Antunes: Yes, of course. My name is Elizabeth Antunes.

Ms Harmony Spivey: I'm Harmony Spivey.

Mr Dan Hilton: Dan Hilton.

Mr Jeremy McNaughton: My name is Jeremy McNaughton.

The Chair: Go ahead whenever you're ready.

1420

Mr McNaughton: I'm sorry we look a little disorganized. One of our presenters isn't here, so I'm just filling in at the last minute.

This group of students here on Friday, June 11, occupied Dianne Cunningham's office. I'm sure you all have heard about it in the news. They staged a sit-in and they presented a list of demands. I'll briefly list the demands.

They demanded that the private school tax credits part of Bill 45 be scrapped. They demanded that the \$300 million allocated for private school tax credits be invested into the ailing public system. Given the precedents set by Bill 160, Bill 74 and Bill 132, they called for an immediate halt to the unrelenting attack on public education. They demanded that the practice of fast-tracking legislation be stopped immediately, as it is contrary to the principles of a true participatory democracy. They demanded that extensive and accessible province-wide hearings be held for all future legislative changes with ramifications to the public education system. Finally, they demanded that the Ontario Conservative government issue a sincere apology to parents, teachers and students of Ontario for the harm they have done to the public education system.

Each of us is going to present a little bit on each of our demands. To start off, the statement I would like to make is that this is a government, the Ontario Tory government, that has consistently attacked the poor as welfare bums. They've set up hotlines for welfare fraud, they've talked about getting people less dependent on welfare, and here they are, offering a free handout to the people who need it least, the people who can afford to send their kids to private school. I would like to see the government reverse that policy because they are creating a wealthy class that doesn't need to be dependent but all of a sudden is being given a free handout, a free discount to private schools that no one else can afford. I think that's ludicrous.

I know that part of this debate is about religious schools, but if this honestly was an initiative by the Harris government to address the problem of religious schools, then it would say that specifically in the bill. There is nothing in the bill that addresses that this is specifically for a religious alternative curriculum. That's my first statement.

Ms Spivey: My name is Harmony Spivey. I'm a grade 12 student at Central secondary school here in London. I speak today as a concerned student who has seen first hand the harm that Tory education cuts have done to the quality of education we receive here in Ontario. It was because of this first-hand knowledge that I chose to partake in the June 1 sit-in.

In May, when I initially heard about Bill 45, I was shocked and, frankly, confused. Had not this same government stated on record that financing a private system with public money was a bad idea? Indeed, I was correct. I know we've heard these quotes many times today but let's just hear them again to remind everyone what the Tories did say. In 1995, during the leadership debate, Premier Harris stated, "I've been asked, would I support private schools? ... I went to the Jewish Congress and I said no. My priority is public education."

The government's own Minister of Education, Janet Ecker, went even further to state, in a January 19, 2000, letter to Dalton McGuinty, "Complying with the UN's demands would remove from our public education system at least \$300 million per year, with some estimates as high as \$700 million."

Well, Mr Premier and Mrs Ecker, as a student among the 95% of those who are educated in the public system, I'd have to say I agree with you. With the vast majority of Ontario students in the public system, your first priority must obviously be to ensure that this system is adequately funded. However, this bill blatantly contradicts that assertion of priority toward the public system.

What, may I ask, Mr Premier and members of the committee here today, has caused this dramatic policy reversal? Perhaps if we students could conjure up \$175,000 in lobbying money, it would be our voices and interests represented in the legislation today; or perhaps we should just donate that money directly to our own Thames Valley board of education, which will be forced next year to cut 75 support staff positions as they are \$3.5 million short in funding because your government has told them there is no money. This would lead someone with any sort of your much-extolled common sense to believe that the cuts to public education are indeed financing this private education tax cut.

My second major concern, which has been echoed by many others, both present and absent from this hearing, is that this legislation is a voucher system disguised by the favourite Tory buzzwords of "choice" and "fairness." Mr Harris, you may deny this as vehemently as you wish, but the fact remains that a voucher system gives money directly to parents so they may opt out of the public education system and enter into the exclusive private sector. The \$3,500 personal tax credit does just this, resulting in the fragmentation of a strong universal public system which does not pick and choose its students according to their intellectual or economic status.

This government has made many reforms under the pretense of accountability and standardization within education. It is here again that we see another large contradiction. Private schools are subject to neither financial

accountability nor the rigorous standardized testing of both students and teachers that the public system is subject to under government regulation. This tax credit, disguised as a voucher system, is a dangerous step in the wrong direction. Even George Bush has been forced to scrap this idea after 35 states recently voted against it. The fact is that the Harris government is allocating public money directly to parents so they can opt out of an already underfunded and suffering public system and enrol in the private sector, which is not financially accountable nor subject to government standards or testing.

Government funding of a private system does encourage the fragmentation of our society according to wealth, ethnicity and intellectual ability; differences which the public system, by its nature, seeks to resolve. In doing this, the Tories will conveniently save \$3,500 for each student who leaves the public system for the private sector. What do you know? Our government is once again saving themselves money for corporate tax cuts by encouraging the division of our society.

This legislation should be stopped immediately, because even as Mike Harris himself has said, his priority is to public education. Some 95% of school-aged children in this province attend public schools, and as long as this system remains in the battered and bruised state it is currently in, I as a student will raise my voice in passionate opposition to this section of Bill 45.

The Chair: Could you state your name for the record, please, and your colleague to your left also.

Ms Paris Meilleur: My name is Paris Meilleur.

Mr David Blocker: David Blocker.

Ms Meilleur: Sorry I'm late. I was in school. I'm a grade 11 student at Central secondary school. Thank you for inviting me to speak at this public hearing. I was extremely surprised when I heard I was one of the few chosen to have our 20 minutes at the microphone since so many notable figures have not been given the same opportunity. Lisa Widdifield, for instance, Public Education Rights Coalition spokesman, has spearheaded numerous protests against Tory policy, including Bills 160, 74 and now Bill 45. She represents hundreds of concerned parents and citizens across the city but she was shut out of the process because she was not endorsed by a political party. And we call it democracy?

I also noticed that the name Jeremy McNaughton does not appear, although he too asked to have his 20 minutes. Luckily he is here. Jeremy, a graduate from Beal's broadcasting program, is a community activist and leader. He has appeared several times at inquiries, debating and discussing political issues, and would no doubt have been a speaker who could have cut to the heart of and exposed these PC atrocities. Luckily, he is here. Jeremy's experience in Windsor and Quebec City offer an insightful global perspective on Mike Harris's right-wing, neo-conservative agenda.

Nor was Elizabeth Antunes given a time if it wasn't for now. Elizabeth was instrumental in organizing the Canadian Federation of Students Access 2000 walk-out in London. It's no surprise that Liz's expertise was not

sought, as it is understood that Harris supporters show great disdain for the CFS and their ability to organize and mobilize students. I suspect she was not asked because these hearings aren't really intended to represent the people and our concerns. These glaring omissions, to refuse to include and consult with these key social activists who represent hundreds of Londoners, is indicative of the nature of these hearings.

I am convinced that my presence here has more to do with a public relations move on the part of Dianne Cunningham than this committee's true wish to hear the public outcry. On Friday, June 1, myself and four other students seated here staged a sit-in in Dianne Cunningham's office. I feel this is the reason for us being here. Fortunately, we do have Liz here and the three others present at the sit-in in Cunningham's office. We worked together on this, risking arrest and reputation in order to bring some attention to the public response against Bill 45. It is pathetic that in a democracy one has to stage a sit-in to have one's voice heard.

The good old days of calling your MPP and making an appointment to discuss legislation are evidently over. We had called prior to our sit-in and requested a meeting but were told there was a four-week waiting list. Again, in the good old days, when accountability to one's constituents was actually valued, we would have been able to wait four weeks. Legislation used to take months and months to debate. That's not so this time. But the teachers, parents and students whose lives will be drastically affected by this attack on public education couldn't wait four weeks. The bill was set to pass in three, and our future is far too important to let this one slip by. Therefore, I must insist that I'm happy they're here and have been allowed to speak, that we are here together to talk.

The issue I will talk about right now is public hearings. One of our demands to Dianne Cunningham when we did our sit-in was extensive and accessible province-wide hearings in all ridings for all future legislative changes with ramifications for the public education system, or any other public system for that matter.

1430

Fundamental to the core beliefs of Canadians and the workings of a participatory democracy is the idea of hearings and consultations. There have been reports and documentation citing that the Minister of Finance had secret meetings with special-interest groups. Key among them, there is a letter from the executive director of the Ontario Alliance of Christian Schools explaining that \$175,000 was spent to lobby the government for this tax credit legislation. There are also plans for more money to lobby, as Harmony mentioned. If every person in Ontario were given the same opportunity as the Christian alliance for their concerns to be heard, this would be a useless point, but the fact is that parents' groups, like Lisa Widdifield's PERC, are not allowed to speak to the flaw in the system and in your perception of a democracy.

Even former Ontario Premier Bill Davis held 80 days of public hearings across the province to debate and discuss full funding to the separate board. When millions,

even billions, of dollars are effectively being transferred out of the public system and into the private sector and those most affected by this are not consulted, there is a problem. So we suggest a solution to this government-created crisis: halt the legislation or scrap it and hold fair and comprehensive public hearings. We suggest that all MPPs go back to their ridings and truly act accountable to their constituents. These hearings must become accessible and inclusive. It's difficult to tell if pros and cons are being presented here or if the deck is stacked.

Public hearings are meant to serve a function. First, public input is gathered, then legislation is drafted, then more public hearings are held and only then does it start to get passed in the Legislature, not the other way around. When this government does this for Bill 45 and all subsequent attacks on the public system, then we'll know we're being heard, because this is what democracy looks like.

Ms Antunes: I'm sorry if you can't hear me. Before I present my third demand, I would like to say that this is very indicative as to why we need to host a sit-in. I noticed as I sat here that while Harmony and Paris were speaking, our Tory MPPs, quite rudely, as usual, were not listening to us. They were commenting and talking to themselves and giggling.

The Chair: If there's anybody that has to be the regulator, I'll do the regulating. I've heard that comment from many presenters and, let me tell you, I hear chit chat on both sides. I agree with you that it is disruptive, but if someone has to regulate the meeting, let me tell you that I will do that, OK? So I would strongly suggest that you proceed with your presentation.

Ms Antunes: Thank you very much.

The third demand here is that, given the precedents set by Bills 160, 74 and 132, we call for an immediate halt to the unrelenting attack on public education. These three bills have desecrated the public education system. Bill 45 will have similar ramifications and is the next step toward the privatization of our education system.

Bill 160 has transferred the control of the most important aspects of education from the locally elected school boards to the government and has removed \$1 billion from public education.

Bill 132 allows for-profit business to grant university degrees and has downloaded the responsibility of funding on to students in the private sector.

Bill 74 shifts the focus of accountability from the local community to the Minister of Education. The bill gives the cabinet and the minister sweeping powers to assume management on concerns that the government's agenda is not being implemented, and local needs will become secondary to provincial priorities to ensure the future of privatization of our education system.

Our public education system is not for sale and we demand that this government protect our education system. If you feel that the public education system is not worth investing in now, then imagine the cost of the ignorance of future students going through the system.

Mr Hilton: Mine's pretty quick, that the practice of fast-tracking legislation be stopped immediately as it is contrary to the principles of a true participatory democracy. I think we see that right here in this very so-called public hearing. As we've noted before, even previous Tory governments, which this one could learn from, did 80 days consultation under Bill Davis for a similar money transfer to give separate school boards full funding. That was a real consultation with the public.

Five days in five cities—you had to show up this morning to find out if you were even speaking. That's just not acceptable. Students right now who are most affected by this are preparing for exams. Teachers are working. Parents are working. Who gets in here? Groups with money, that's who gets in here. We had to take extreme measures to get on to this board, and no one's going to change my opinion that it took those strong measures for us just to speak here today. A very small percentage of students is represented here today. It's a shame that this is the style, the tactics that the government has taken on this and many other issues.

As a post-secondary student, I know that it's two weeks after school that the most amazing changes happen to post-secondary education, almost every year since the Tories have been in, making it incredibly difficult for the people most affected to even respond to it. And that has to stop. Thank you.

Mr Blocker: I'd just like to speak briefly about our second demand, that the \$300 million allocated for private school tax credits be invested in the ailing public system.

I'm a grade 11 student at Central secondary school and I know from experience that our education system needs money. This government has taken money out of the public education system and it's suffering as a result. Now they're just pouring salt into the wound by giving \$300 million into a private system which cannot be held accountable.

Therefore, I would just like to propose—demand, rather—that the Tory government reinvest this \$300 million into the public system. They could, for example, remove the 30,000 children on waiting lists for special education programs. They could deal with the fast-rising energy costs which have afflicted our own board here, the Thames Valley District School Board, which has had to fire 75 workers. They've had to let 75 workers go. Seventy-five support staff have had to be let go as a result of these energy costs and the fact that they don't have enough money in their budget.

You could perhaps train teachers on the new curriculum you've introduced. Maybe you could provide textbooks in this new curriculum. Maybe you could ensure that all elementary schools have music teachers, that all elementary schools have full-time principals, and restore funding to ESL—English as a second language—programs. You could return extracurricular activities to secondary schools.

All these things could be done with the \$300 million you have taken out of public education and transferred to an unaccountable, divisive private system. Thank you.

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

1440

BOB DILEMAN

The Chair: Our next presentation this afternoon is from Bob Dileman. On behalf of the committee, welcome. You have 20 minutes for your presentation. Could you please state your name for the record.

Mr Bob Dileman: My name is Bob Dileman. I would like to thank you for giving me the opportunity to make this presentation and I would like to thank the Harris government for doing the right thing and the fair thing by taking steps to provide equity in educational choice.

My name is Bob Dileman. I am, first, a parent of two elementary schoolchildren. Second, I am a chartered accountant with numerous clients who choose to send their children to independent schools. Third, I have personal experience with both the independent school system and the public school system. Fourth, I sit on the executive committee of two independent schools, John Knox Christian School in Woodstock and London District Christian Secondary School here in London.

I feel that these four areas make me uniquely qualified to address this committee.

I feel it's important that there be an open discussion and debate about the education tax credit, because education is an integral part of everyone's life. Throughout our lives, from birth onward, we are constantly learning. Learning is a continual process, whether it be discovering how to walk, as my one-year-old son has recently accomplished, or whether it be learning to use the Internet, as my 69-year-old mother has recently accomplished. Learning is a process of observance, listening, trying, practising and making mistakes. It impacts our lives on a daily basis. What we learn when we are young is most likely to stay with us when we are older. Many of my generation still have trouble visualizing the length of a centimetre, but we all know how long a foot is.

As parents, we have the right and the freedom to choose how to teach our preschool children. My wife and I are fortunate that she can usually stay home with our preschool child to make sure he gets the solid basis that the rest of his life will be built upon. Experts tell us that the preschool years are the most important years in developing a child's character and personality, but the next most important time in a child's development is in elementary school. It is here where parental rights and freedoms and choices start to diminish. Parents ought to have the freedom to choose education that conforms to their beliefs, values and traditions of their home. Education is a partnership between the home and the school. The more harmonious the two, the more effective will be

the raising of children to become productive, caring and giving members of society.

In an independent school, parents have more input into their child's education. In an independent school, parents are the backbone of the school community. They are directly involved in their child's education in many ways.

First, parents in an independent school volunteer their time in the classroom. Parents volunteer their time on the soccer field. Parents volunteer their time at the hockey rink. Parents volunteer their time on class trips. Through volunteering, parents see at first hand what happens in the classroom, on the playground and in extracurricular activities. They can make suggestions to the teachers, to the coaches and to the students.

Second, parents in an independent school volunteer their time in committees. Parents volunteer their time to maintain and set the educational standards of the school. Parents volunteer their time by sitting in on classrooms and doing an informal evaluation of the teacher. Parents volunteer their time to promote the school in the local and broader community.

Parents volunteer their time to arrange transportation of their children to the school of their choice. They volunteer their time to plan the bus routes. They volunteer their time to ensure that maintenance of the buses is kept up to date.

Parents volunteer their time to make sure the physical building and playground are safe. They volunteer their time to keep the building maintained. They volunteer their time to plan changes to the physical building and grounds. They even volunteer their time to make those changes, repairs and upgrades.

Parents volunteer their time to raise funds for the school, whether it be organizing a baseball tournament, selling bedding plants, organizing an auction, organizing a fundraising dinner, collecting soup can labels or through a variety of other activities.

Parents volunteer their time to plan the finances of the school. Parents volunteer their time by sitting on a partnership committee where staff salaries are discussed and consensus is reached—not negotiated, not bargained, but consensus.

Third, parents in an independent school volunteer their time to attend membership meetings. At a membership meeting, they can have a say on any matter that affects the school. At a membership meeting, they can vote on various matters that are brought to the floor, including the annual operating budget of the school.

Fourth, parents in an independent school volunteer their time to sit on the board of directors. There is no per diem rate for these directors. They attend monthly board meetings, plus they each chair one or more committees of the school.

Finally, parents in an independent school care for each other and for each other's children. Through our interaction with other parents, we trust and respect each other with our greatest God-given gift, our children.

Through the interaction and volunteering that the parents do, we have a strong desire for quality education.

In an independent school, we parents are able to have a direct influence on what happens, both inside and outside the classroom. We are involved and we take ownership.

As a chartered accountant, I have the privilege of serving many citizens of Oxford county as a professional tax adviser. These citizens include supporters of the public school system, the Roman Catholic school system and independent schools. I provide services to businesses, farmers, not-for-profit organizations and individuals. Through my professional contact with these various taxpayers, I have obtained a wide and varied wealth of financial information. Because of confidentiality, I am not able to discuss specific details. However, in general terms I can speak to certain matters.

My database of tax clients shows 208 families with children under age 19. Of these families, 35 have children in independent schools. If I remove the 13 farm families because they have special tax treatment, that leaves me with 22 non-farm families, 10% of the total. I believe the provincial average is also around 10% of families with schoolchildren attending independent schools.

My survey of these non-farm families shows the following statistics for the year 2000: eight families, or 36% of the total, earned under \$40,000—that's both parents, mom and dad, combined income under \$40,000, not elitist at all; five families, or 23% of the total, earned between \$40,000 and \$60,000; two families, or 9% of the total, earned between \$60,000 and \$80,000; four families, or 18%, earned between \$80,000 and \$100,000; and three families earned more than \$100,000.

I believe my survey, even though it's a small sample, is fairly representative of the majority of the supporters of independent schools. These families include tradespeople, service workers, educators, salespeople, management, health care workers and factory workers. Some of these families depend on a single wage-earner; others have a double income. Most of these families are hard-working people who make many sacrifices in order to afford their choice of education. Most of these families drive an older car. Most of these families cannot afford to set aside money into an RRSP. For most of these families, a family vacation is a camping vacation, with tents and trailers. They stretch their dollars in order to afford their choice of education. And the irony is that all of these families pay education taxes to their local municipality to financially support a school system that they receive no direct benefit from.

The proposed tax credit is not money in the bank for independent schools; it's a recognition that not all parents are comfortable with the choice of public education. It is a recognition that these parents have the right to have some of their tax dollars returned to them so they can afford the tuition required by an independent educational system. This is a choice every parent has a constitutional right to make. It is time to end the discrimination. Approving this tax credit will put a little back into the pockets of our parents who, as property owners, pay public school taxes on top of their own children's tuition

fees. This proposed option is a responsible way of reducing this unfair and unjust tax burden.

As a former student of both an independent elementary school and a public high school, I have had first-hand experience with both systems, albeit a number of years ago. My parents believed strongly in Christian values, as I do, and they were concerned about maintaining a strong harmony between what was taught in the home, the school and the church. Despite severe economic hardships, as my parents had both come to Canada from Europe with next to nothing, they still chose to send my siblings and me to an independent Christian school. We formed many friendships in those early days that we still maintain today. We still care and help each other in time of need.

When I finished elementary school, I went to a public high school. I recall one comment that I received from my homeroom teacher in grade 9 or 10, and that was that he could always tell which of his students came from an independent Christian school. As a group, they always seemed to be set aside from the rest of the students and seemed to be more academically advanced than a lot of the other students. That comment has stuck with me through all these years.

1450

The school that my children attend, John Knox Christian School in Woodstock, strives for excellence. The teachers are all certified. They sincerely care for and love their students. The teachers are always available for conversations with the parents. The teachers' home telephone numbers are published. The teachers attend the membership meetings. The teachers participate in the fundraising events of the school. The teachers are a vital part of the school and church community, giving more than they are taking.

They only earn 80% of what a public school teacher does, but they don't complain because they believe that this is their calling. Many of these same teachers have children at John Knox Christian School and pay the same tuition that any other parent would.

The students at John Knox bring a diversity of abilities and disabilities to the classroom. John Knox is now blessed with a resource centre for students requiring extra help, plus we have recently started an enrichment program to further challenge some of the students. These additional programs are paid for by the parents through extra tuition fees.

The students at John Knox are members of the community at large. They participate in intramural sports. They participate in the Rotary music festival. They participate in the fine arts festival. They are taught that they are part of the local community and the broader community.

As a director of two independent school boards, I have first-hand knowledge of the running of the schools. Our principals make a monthly report to the board of directors. We hear about the blessings they receive and the challenges that they face. We hear how the individual teachers are doing, any concerns about some of the stu-

dents and the successes that the teachers and the students have experienced.

As directors, we are ultimately responsible for the finances of the school. Discussion about government funding, or the lack thereof, has happened around the boardroom table for many years prior to me serving on this board. It's frustrating for me personally when I know that most of the western world practices some degree of education choice and funding. England, France, Germany, the Netherlands and Australia are just a few countries where there is educational choice and funding. In addition, 37 American states and five Canadian provinces provide some level of funding for educational choice. This shows that there is widespread acknowledgement of the positive value of school choice.

Canada is a vital member of the United Nations. The late Prime Minister Lester B. Pearson worked hard at establishing Canada's image and role in that international organization. It is therefore sad to hear that United Nations Human Rights Commission ruled in 1999 that Canada, ie Ontario, is in violation of the covenant on civil and political rights.

Ontario is a province which prides itself on being tolerant and multicultural, yet it continues to discriminate against independent schools. Ontario provides tax-based funds for the Roman Catholic school system, but ignores all other faith-based education systems. The United Nations recognizes this as a form of injustice.

In conclusion, I want to say that the proposed tax credit is the right thing for Ontario and it is fair for all citizens of Ontario. The proposed tax credit will assist in making independent education more affordable for all those who desire it. This is an issue of justice which cannot be ignored.

Supporting parents who choose independent schools for their children will not negatively impact our public school system. Yes, our public school system needs to be improved, but so does our recognition of freedom in education choice. This is not an either/or situation. We did not have to pick one at the expense of the other. We can do both things at the same time and do them well. The education of my children is just as important as the education of my neighbour's children. My constitutional rights are just as important as my neighbour's rights.

Let us not act out of fear but out of the confidence that choice in education will stimulate all of us as citizens of Ontario to greater heights. I ask you to support this initiative and to finally undo the injustice that has existed in our province for so many years.

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

Mr McGuinty: Thank you, sir, for your presentation. I want to take advantage of your expertise as an accountant.

The government tells us that it's projected the overall cost of this voucher, once fully implemented, will be \$300 million. I believe it will be somewhere in the neighbourhood of \$500 million, but they based that projection on the premise that this voucher will not have any kind of

incentive effect on people. Have you ever heard of a tax credit not acting as an incentive?

Mr Dileman: Yes, and I believe in this situation, from my understanding of the way this tax credit will work, it will most likely be a refund on your tax return at the end of the year, so that's really not going to help a parent who has to give either monthly or weekly tuition payments. A lump sum payment at the end of the year—we all know what happened to the \$200 credit that Mike Harris gave us last year. Most people just spent it, and that's probably the same thing that's going to happen here. People will have a lump sum amount, and they can choose to spend that how they want, but this may in fact help them to pay for the following year's tuition, and that's an idea that has been bandied about. I think that would be a great—

Mr McGuinty: You don't believe it will lead to growth in enrolment, then?

The Chair: Mr McGuinty, we've run out of time. I have to go to Mr Marchese.

Mr Marchese: Thank you, Bob, for your presentation. I want to say quickly that the elitist schools, in the way that I think you mean them, are the private non-denominational schools like Upper Canada College in Toronto. They're elite in the sense that they have money. I think that's what you mean by "elite."

Mr Dileman: Yes.

Mr Marchese: They're funding them, too. Do you agree with that?

Mr Dileman: That's not something I want to talk about. I'm here to speak as an accountant who has experience with a lot of independent school supporters, and I believe it's time that they got some money.

The Chair: The government side?

Mr Hardeman: Thank you, Mr Dileman, for the presentation. As a quick comment on Mr Marchese's comment about the cap, in the proposal there is a cap of maximum tuition that would deal with higher-cost tuition.

But I really wanted to talk quickly about accountability. We've heard a fair amount during the public meetings about the accountability requirement, as there are public dollars—be it, though, to the parents—going into the system, and the requirement that the system would be held accountable. Do you have any problem in suggesting, or would the school that you represent have any problem meeting the same type of accountabilities that are in the public system and that you've heard the presenters talk about in the hearings?

Mr Dileman: We would welcome it.

Mr Marchese: What kind of accountability?

Mr Dileman: The same accountability that all the other schools have, the public schools.

The Chair: I must bring it to an end. We've run out of time. On behalf of the committee, thank you very much for your presentation.

DAVID BLOCKER

The Chair: Our next presenter is David Blocker. I would ask the presenter to come forward, please. If you could state your name for the record. On behalf of the committee, welcome. You have 20 minutes for the presentation.

The witness addressed the audience.

The Chair: This committee is adjourned for the next 20 minutes.

The committee recessed from 1458 to 1518.

CAROL SPEELMAN, HENRY KOOY

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

Ms Carol Speelman: Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. First of all, let me begin by thanking you for this opportunity to speak to you at this hearing. My name is Carol Speelman and I live in Strathroy with my husband, Peter. I would like to go back just a few years and bring you to the years of my childhood.

I am one of six children of immigrant parents. My parents came to Canada from Europe in the early 1950s. Already then many parents made a choice to send their children to independent schools. They made this decision because of the school's mission and it fitted what they as a family believed. You may ask, "Was the public school not good enough?" It simply comes down to this: public schools are like everything else in society. They cannot be everything to everybody. So my brothers and sisters and I went to the school of my parents' choosing, one that reflected the beliefs, values and traditions of our home.

Contrary to what the public is being led to believe, my parents or any of the others at that time were not wealthy by any means. My father worked a day job as well as an evening job so that we could attend our school of choice. Many evenings I spent cleaning offices with my father so that I could attend the local Christian school. Much was sacrificed, but they were confident that they had made the right choice. Today the story hasn't changed much. The vast majority of students who attend independent schools come from hard-working, lower- and middle-class families. In many cases, mothers have entered the workforce to pay for the tuition. Obviously, these are not families of means but are honest, hard-working citizens who also continue to pay taxes toward the public education system year after year.

I commend the Progressive Conservative Party for making education accessible to all children, regardless of religion, and in doing so, allowing parents to choose a school that best fits how they wish to have their children educated. I know for a fact that Strathroy Community Christian School and London District Christian Secondary School, and I'm sure all the other independent schools, prepare our children for a life of respectful and

participatory citizenship. Both of these schools, as well as others, conduct curriculum development, participate in standardized testing and provide a solid curriculum that meets all government standards.

Much of the concern we've heard today was about the tests that our students haven't been involved in. Let me tell you that the grade 9 math test cost \$45 per student. That would equal \$5,000 for the students at London District Christian Secondary School, money that our parents and our school did not have. The grade 3 and grade 6 testing cost our grade schools money. This was money our schools did not have. We don't have statistics on how our children did in those tests because we couldn't do them, because we didn't have the money. As far as meeting government standards, we have voluntarily participated in the Canada test of basic skills. From these tests, our students are 22% to 25% above the national average.

The teachers in these schools are qualified with an Ontario teacher's certificate or are graduates of a legitimate university teacher education program. Are they accountable? Yes, they are. Not only are they accountable to government standards, as I said earlier, but they are accountable to me, the parent and, believe me, my standards are high. I know this because my daughters are graduates of this system and my son currently attends London District Christian Secondary School.

My children, as well as all students, deserve the support of their government, and we thank Mr Harris, Mr Flaherty, Ms Ecker and the others for recognizing the value of our children's education. Having said that, I wish to let this committee know that I also support our government's commitment to maintaining a strong public system.

Parental choice is a good thing. Choice encourages parental involvement. Parents such as myself are heavily involved in our children's education. We are volunteers in the classroom, coaches for school teams and chauffeurs for class trips. We sit on committees, school boards and finance committees. You've heard that already in many of the presentations. As a result of school choice, all schools see improvement in student achievement and parental satisfaction.

Mr Hampton makes an issue of our schools not being open to students with physical and mental challenges. Mr Hampton knows full well that we have only just received funding from the Ministry of Health and would welcome any student so challenged, provided that we can meet their needs. No school—public, private or independent—could possibly accept a student if it could not meet their needs. Several years ago, when I sat on the board of Strathroy Community Christian School, a parent asked us to consider accepting her physically challenged child. This required a full-time teacher's assistant and facilities to accommodate her special needs. Without the proper health care funding, we could not be of service to this family. As a school we were being discriminated against and, in turn, that became a barrier for a family that wished to have their child in a faith-based school, the

same school her siblings attended. Once again I bring forward the point that it all comes down to choice.

The proposed tax credit will provide much-needed relief for parents. It is the right thing for this government to do. Reports say that this will (1) weaken public education, and (2) take monies from the public system.

To address the first myth that the credit will weaken the public system, there is no evidence that large numbers of students will transfer out of the public system. In Alberta and British Columbia, over 90% of the families chose to stay in the public system in spite of government funding for a variety of alternatives. The majority of parents are not trying to get away from something; they are seeking a certain framework for the education of their children. The issue is not of us not wanting your children going to school with our children. Believe me, that's not the case. Our children also play soccer with your children. Our children also play baseball with your children. It's the same reason as some parents choosing a girls-only school or a girls-only program. Don't they like boys? Why do some parents choose French immersion or an arts-based school? Because they don't want their kids with other kids? No. The reason is that the education I choose is the best fit possible for my children. Some get a good fit and it's publicly funded. My choice, which is equivalent to a variety offered publicly, is available to me but with a substantial financial penalty.

The tax credit addresses this inequality. It does not promote a mass exodus from the public system. In Ontario, we have a precedent whereby the publicly funded system did not decline into chaos when the government granted Catholic schools full funding years ago. In fact, the many and valued contributions made by graduates of Ontario's Roman Catholic system make a lie of the statement that suggests a single system is the only means to society's well-being. In all jurisdictions where governments have supported school choice, they have retained their commitment to quality public education, and I too support that.

The second myth is that we are taking money from the public system. Parents first pay education taxes that go to the public system, then they pay tuition for the school of their choice and then they will receive the proposed tax credit. This new tax credit amounts to 0.5% of the province's annual \$60-billion budget—a sensible investment in improving student achievement, wouldn't you say? No money has been taken from public education to finance this initiative.

In my job I meet a lot of people. They are average, hard-working citizens. Even they recognize the injustice of this situation. It is an enormous irony that the educational establishment preaches tolerance and inclusion but practises self-interest and exclusion.

I am excited to see that we have a government brave enough to stand up for what is right and honourable. Mr McGuinty has been reported as saying that this issue is the fight of his life. To that I say, Mr McGuinty, this issue has been my life. It has been my parents' life, my friends' life, my child's life. This issue has been part of

all our lives for over 30 years. If there is anyone who knows what this fight is about, it is the families who have been marginalized for choosing how they wish to have their children educated.

I'm up for this fight and I will work tirelessly to ensure that we retain a PC majority in the next election. I applaud Mr Harris and his party for their courage in bringing about justice through choice, for allowing parents to choose the school their children attend, for allowing equal opportunity for all children and for recognizing that public education is only one of the many choices that parents may consider. Thank you for your time and consideration in this matter.

I would like to introduce to you Mr Henry Kooy. He's the principal at London District Christian Secondary School and he would like to address some of the concerns that were raised earlier.

1530

Mr Henry Kooy: Thank you for an opportunity to address this hearing. You have a copy of my presentation. I'm just going to highlight certain parts of it.

Bill 45 has generated considerable discussion. Reactions indicate a number of fears about the impact of Bill 45 on the publicly funded education system. Reactions also indicate that there is a lot of misinformation about Ontario's independently funded schools. As a result, there's been a lot of unfair characterization of independent schools, some of which we've heard today. I just want to address some of these fears.

We live in a society which proclaims the sovereignty of the individual. I find it somewhat ironic that in an age in which we emblazon many items with a "no fear" logo, there seems to be so much fear about the Ontario government's proposed equity in education tax credit. President Roosevelt, back on January 20, 1933, told the American public they had nothing to fear but fear itself. I see some parallels today.

I want to examine a few of those fears: first of all, that Bill 45 will harm the public education system. People need to look at the experiences of Canada's other provinces. Faith-based schools such as London District Christian Secondary School receive public funds in Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta and British Columbia, and this has not resulted in any mass exodus of students from the public school system. Earlier this afternoon we heard that 15% figure of people leaving. Even in the best-funded system in Alberta, it's 5%. In reality, there's nothing to fear. We already have 5% of the students.

There are fears that independent schools oppose public schools. People need to understand that independently funded schools believe there's a need for a strong public school system. We're genuinely happy that the government's proposed budget includes a \$360-million increase in spending for public education. I wish they would return to former funding levels at \$2 billion that went missing, that it gets back there.

We believe the government has a responsibility to adequately fund the public school system. I find it extremely unfortunate that Bill 45 comes at a time when

there's so much dissatisfaction about the levels of funding for public and separate schools. Today I thought I was listening to a hearing on levels of funding, not Bill 45. We are not out to undermine or threaten the public school system. We shouldn't be pitted against it. This is one of Canada's wealthiest provinces. Surely there's nothing to fear. There's got to be enough money in this province for all education systems to be well funded and to be championed.

We hear that Bill 45 favours and benefits the rich. Well, of the 743 independent schools in Ontario, approximately 35 or 40 could be categorized as being elitist. The vast majority of our parents are middle-income. We send our children to non-profit, independent schools to have our children taught from a faith perspective.

We hear that Bill 45 will create a two-tier system of education. Bill 45 will hopefully help to level the playing field rather than create a two-tier system. For a large majority of independent schools, public schools represent the haves while we represent the have-nots. Even with the tax credits, parents will still need to pay a significant amount of tuition. Have no fear, the public system will continue to have more financial resources at their disposal than independent schools.

Today we heard much about public accountability. My school is very accountable. We're accountable to the Ministry of Education in order to grant credits leading to the Ontario secondary school diploma. We're subject to a regular and rigorous inspection of our academic program and our operation, and we pay a fee of several hundred dollars for that service. I see close scrutiny. We have education officers come into our classrooms. They want to see the course of study. They want to see the teacher's plan book. They want to see the marks that are given to the students. They want to see the textbooks that we use. They want to go through our files to make sure we're doing the right thing with our OSRs. We get very close scrutiny. When I talk to my colleagues in public education, they laugh at the fact that we're subjected to this. Our scrutiny is much closer than that of public education.

We're accountable to the EQAO. Our grade 10 students are required to write the grade 10 reading and writing tests administered by that organization. Our results are open to the public. We've got nothing to hide. As was mentioned earlier, students in our elementary panel in grades 3 and 6 would gladly write the tests that are asked for in math and English, but there's a fee involved. We're very accountable to our board of trustees and the entire membership of London District Christian Secondary School. We're accountable to our parents, who pay significant tuition fees in addition to paying taxes and who participate in fundraising initiatives. They want their children to have a solid academic education for acceptance at post-secondary institutions and future employment. Come to one of our membership meetings and look at how closely my spending budget is scrutinized. I'm very accountable to our membership.

We're accountable to the general public. We get judged every day by our neighbours. We get judged by teachers in the public system when our students transfer to their institution. We're accountable to the universities and colleges that receive our students. We're very accountable.

The other thing is whether or not we have the right to teacher-test and so on. The majority of our teachers are members of the Ontario College of Teachers, because they do have their OTCs and they do pay the \$90 fee. If teacher testing goes through in this province, our teachers will write those tests as well. We are accountable.

We hear the fear that independent schools take the best students away from the public system. Independent schools such as ours do have students with a range of abilities. We need to have a resource program. We've increased our resource teaching position to a full-time one for next year and we're designating a separate classroom for resource. In our senior division we don't just offer the university stream courses; we offer the college stream and the workplace stream as well, because we have to meet the needs of all our students. As a school we seek to be as inclusive as possible with the resources we have, not exclusive.

What follows is a bit of a history on our school and its operation, but I'll just skip over that.

Parents in our school system desire a faith-based education for their children. They have felt compelled to establish faith-based independent schools. These parents feel strongly about the issues of parental choice. They reject a one-size-fits-all approach to education. They believe strongly that the provincial government should financially support the education of all students, regardless of the school system in which the student is enrolled. As Carol mentioned earlier, this has been a matter of discussion for more than 40 years. This isn't just something that was cooked up in the last three months.

The government's recent announcement about tax credits was welcome news and was celebrated by supporters of independent schools. Through Bill 45, the provincial government is at long last addressing the need for equity in education. Finally Ontario is getting in step with much of the rest of Canada. We applaud and thank the Progressive Conservative government of Ontario for taking this initiative.

The Chair: With that, we've run out of time. There is no time for questions. On behalf of the committee, thank you very much for your presentation.

1540

ONTARIO CHRISTIAN SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS ASSOCIATION

The Chair: Our next presentation is from the Ontario Christian School Administrators Association. I would ask the presenter to come forward, please. On behalf of the committee, welcome.

Mr Henry Wiersema: To the members of the committee, thank you for this opportunity.

Let me paint a picture for you that I have experienced over and over for the last 30 years that I have been involved in Christian education. A mother and father phone and ask for a meeting. They want to discuss their children's education. They are Christians and believe in Jesus Christ as their personal saviour but carry that belief one step further and believe that He is Lord over all, that is, creation, their family, the work they do; in short, their rising up and their going down.

They sit at the dinner table discussing their children's education. They would like to have their children attend a school that will reinforce the biblical values they teach at home. So they come to Strathroy Community Christian School and ask a lot of questions about curriculum, discipline, extracurricular activities, staff etc; in short, what values are being taught at this school? They are very conscientious about where their children should go to school.

They also ask about the cost of education. I explain that the school is operated and funded by parents, grandparents, relatives and friends who believe in the Christian values that are taught at Strathroy Community Christian School. However, I also have to explain to them that their tax dollar does not go to Strathroy Community Christian School and that they need to pay tuition costs out of their own pocket.

That is the way it used to be. This story is history. Now we are in the midst of a change, and I am very thankful that the Progressive Conservative government has recognized that parental choice is very important in a democratic society. The government realizes that it is in the best interests of society for the government to support all students receiving an education that meets the standards for realizing the public good.

This afternoon I speak to you not only as the principal of Strathroy Community Christian School but also as a past parent and future grandparent. I also represent my colleagues of the Ontario Christian School Administrators Association. This is a support organization for principals in Christian schools in Ontario, a number of which are located in southwestern Ontario—approximately 15.

I would just like to inform you about one aspect of this organization which deals with competency and professionalism. One of the stated purposes of our organization is to take a leadership role in Christian education in Ontario. The Ontario Christian School Administrators Association has been a functioning, active member of the educational scene in Ontario since its inception in the 1960s. This organization provides an accountability basis that encourages all principals in our association to maintain high standards of professionalism and competency.

Here are some of these initiatives. Our support of the Ontario Alliance of Christian Schools evaluation program, which is a thorough evaluation of all our schools on a cyclical basis. Another initiative is professional development through regularly held workshops and conventions, which have a high rate of membership at-

tendance. We sponsor regional principal associations that meet for professional development and support; also, a network of organizational committees that oversee the developing work of administrators in Ontario Christian schools. We also have a certificate and diploma program that operates on a near-equivalency basis with similar public certificates to ensure that all of our administrators are qualified to lead schools in this province.

As was mentioned before, it was with great excitement that I received the news of the refundable tax credit proposal announced by the Minister of Finance, Jim Flaherty. This proposal honours the principles of justice in education which we have been advocating, bringing us into the mainstream of educational reform and into the company of the rest of the western world, where educational choice has been a fact for years.

I applaud this initiative for a number of reasons. As the principal of Strathroy Community Christian School, I know that for the majority of the parents who support our school, Christian schooling is not a choice; it's a requirement of their faith, an obligation, a necessity. For Christian parents every aspect of schooling is religious, and it is in schools within the general boundaries of their faith that their children must be taught. The Christian families of our school system believe there is no such thing as a religiously neutral school system and therefore they must send their children to one which reflects their beliefs.

As the principal of Strathroy Community Christian School, as a parent who has had five children go through it and as a grandparent anticipating my grandchildren to go through Strathroy Community Christian School or other Christian schools in the province, I am very familiar with the financial sacrifices made by our parents, as well as the time sacrifices. The great majority of our families are not part of the wealthy private school parents who have been described in the media and by political opponents. I know that in my particular school a quick perusal of the family list would indicate that very few of our parents are independently wealthy and that the vast majority are part of the hard-working majority of the population of Ontario, with diverse occupations including farming, teaching, sales, skilled trades, labourers in industry and building, entrepreneurs and small business owners. These parents recognize the injustice of the current system and are extremely pleased with the refundable tax credit proposal.

As the principal of Strathroy Community Christian School, I witness daily the sacrifice of time of the parents of our schools. For those who fear that there will be a huge number of small private or independent schools beginning because of the tax credit, they need not fear this. We recognize the tremendous time sacrifice made by our parents and our supporters to keep these schools running smoothly. Parents in our Christian school are involved in many areas of the school, from overseeing its integrity to its mission and vision to the general repair and maintenance of the buildings. The schools we administrate benefit from high levels of parental involve-

ment—parents who realize that it is not a small task or undertaking to establish and maintain a school. This factor alone will prohibit large numbers of small private schools from beginning.

The media, political opponents and the public school teachers' groups have tried to make the case that this initiative will be to the detriment of the public school system. Again, as you've heard mentioned before, there is no evidence for this at all. In areas where funding has been extended to private and independent schools, there was not a major exodus out of the public school system. In fact in Alberta, where the most generous funding initiatives are in place, over 90% of parents still support the public schools.

Much of the western world practises some degree of educational choice. From the full voucher system found in Scandinavia, to government-funded systems of choice in the countries of western Europe, to New Zealand, to the 37 American states with varying levels of choice legislation, to the five major provinces in Canada which provide levels of funding for educational choice, there is widespread acknowledgement of the positive value of school choice.

In a recent study by the Fraser Institute, the author stated, "Evidence suggests that if the Canadian education system supported greater parental choice, student achievement would improve. It certainly has done elsewhere."

As the principal of Strathroy Community Christian School, I have seen our students graduate to become productive citizens of the high schools they attend and ultimately productive citizens of this province. Our students leave our school having received an education which allows them to be successful in the endeavors of life that is before them. Our students receive a quality education in our schools, an education which strives to adhere to the general principles of the Ontario Ministry of Education and prepares them well for the rigours of high school, college, university and the workplace.

As the principal of Strathroy Community Christian School, I am privileged to work with a staff that is well trained and qualified for the work of teaching in Ontario today. The staff at my school continue to work sacrificially, often giving well beyond the call of duty, to offer a spectrum of activities including intramural activities, extracurricular activities and other programs to benefit our students.

As the principal of Strathroy Community Christian School, I might add that I have a very cordial working relationship with my colleagues in the public and separate schools in Strathroy. I am very supportive of all initiatives to provide the public and separate schools in Ontario with adequate and appropriate funding. I am just as concerned that all students in Ontario receive the best education possible whether in the public system, the separate system or the independent system. I applaud the increase in funding proposed in the new budget.

I also acknowledge at the same time the need for all schools to be fiscally responsible. As an independent

Christian school, our constituency works closely with board and committees, who closely monitor the financial actions of our schools and hold us highly accountable. I don't need to go through all that again. You just heard that in the last presentation.

In summary, I speak for my colleagues and myself. Students who graduate from our schools do well in the schools and careers they encounter in the next steps of life's journey. They go on to be responsible and productive citizens and taxpayers of this province.

Our schools are fiscally responsible and highly accountable structures, with qualified staff and supportive communities.

It has always been our intent, and will continue to be our intent, to advocate for a strong public system. Independent school supporters want public education to be strong and dynamic because all children, no matter where they are educated, are the future of this province.

I remind you again that Alberta, with the greatest range of educational choice and the most generous funding model for independent schools, still has over 90% of their students attending public schools, which, by the way, consistently rank at the top in academic achievement. There is strong and increasing evidence that educational choice improves education for all students.

Finally, our parents are exercising their obligation and rights as citizens of this province to choose the type of education they require for their children. The government's support of this is just and right. This is in accordance with article 26 of the United Nations human rights declaration on education and the practices of much of the western world.

Members of this hearing, I believe that the province of Ontario and the educational system in particular will be enhanced by the proposal now before the Legislature of Ontario. It is time to stop thinking about public education as the only entity in the educational landscape. As the present government has indicated with this legislation, we are dealing with students, not systems. The proposal to extend refundable tax credits to parents of independent and private schools is just and right and therefore must be passed by this government.

I thank you for this opportunity to speak to you and I wish you a tremendous amount of wisdom and unity as you seek to serve the needs of all parents, but more importantly the children of this great province.

1550

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

Mr McGuinty: Thank you very much, sir, for your presentation. I just have a very simple question for you with a bit of a preamble.

The argument has been historically that there is a fairness issue here which must be addressed. The fairness issue has everything to do with one denomination alone receiving funding publicly and none of the others being able to avail themselves of any assistance.

Would you object, then, if the government were to amend its legislation so that it was only available to parents with children in denominational schools?

Mr Wiersema: Sure, I would object to that. I think what the government is doing by providing choice for parents—what would happen is, you'd fill out your tax form and you would put on there, "My kid goes to Stratford Community Christian School." The government has a list of schools that are accountable to the Ministry of Education or wherever they're going to go to be, and then they would receive their credit.

So whether that's a denominational school, whether that's a faith-based school, whether that's a Montessori school, a Lutheran school, whether that's Upper Canada College, they should all be in the same camp.

Mr McGuinty: Would you hold the same opinion, then, for a for-profit school as well?

Mr Wiersema: You see, when you talk about profit schools, are you talking about education? What is the purpose of a profit school? I ask you that. I think, Mr McGuinty, if you want to ask me for an opinion—

Mr McGuinty: It's not a trick.

Mr Wiersema: —about profit schools, profit schools are a mistake. I don't think people in education should be in it for profit. We are in it because we want to serve kids, that's why. That's why we do that.

Mr McGuinty: Just so I understand, then, you would not be in favour of a tax credit for a profit-making educational venture?

Mr Wiersema: Right.

Mr McGuinty: Thank you.

Mr Marchese: Just to understand this: the people going to Upper Canada—just one example of a school; there are many—their tuition is \$16,000, and if they have a bed there it's \$28,000. You're saying, "God bless, if that's the choice they make."

Mr Wiersema: That's right.

Mr Marchese: That's OK, and the government should give them a tax credit because, why not?

Mr Wiersema: Mr Marchese, we have millionaires who have kids in the public school system, but all they do is pay the same taxes that I do.

Mr Marchese: OK, so you're saying—

Mr Wiersema: Let me just—I have no problem with—

Mr Marchese: I have another question for you.

Mr Wiersema: All right. Go on and ask the other question.

Mr Marchese: One of the previous speakers said he was surprised, for a society that proclaims the sovereignty of individuals, that some of us would oppose it. Do you believe in the sovereignty of the individual?

Mr Wiersema: No. I believe in the sovereignty of God. Different story.

Mr Marchese: I was a bit surprised by his comment because I thought he supports such a view. You see, social democrats, which is us, NDP, support the sovereignty of society over individualism. Individualism is a concept invented by Americans, those nice free trade

kinds of guys. The Alliance supports the sovereignty of the individuals, and for me that's not part of a choice that I want.

I think public schools support societal needs, by and large, and probably we don't always succeed as we might want, but that's the place to do it. That's where society is protected, you see? That's where I want to put—

Mr Wiersema: Mr Marchese, how would you answer the parent who comes to your doorstep and wants a faith-based education? What would you say to them?

Mr Marchese: My answer? God bless, you can have it. You go—

Mr Wiersema: Where? Where?

Mr Marchese: Wherever you want.

The Chair: Mr Marchese, your time has run out. I have Mr Wood.

Mr Bob Wood (London West): I wonder, sir, if you could tell us what your schools teach your students about respect for and tolerance for others.

Mr Wiersema: Everything. We have an excellent rapport among the students in terms of respect for one another, in terms of tolerance. It's part of what we teach them all the time.

Mr Mazzilli: Sir, I just want to take away this myth that the opposition plays with the school tax credit. A maximum tuition of \$7,000, from what I've seen from the literature handed to me, covers most religious schools. You can see how the Liberals are trying to weasel their way out of this, because for Upper Canada College and many of the others, this tax credit is insignificant or useless to them when tuition is \$20,000. But now they're trying to find a way to bail out. At least Mr Marchese has given us his point, that he wants publicly funded education; they're trying to find an out from this.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr Mazzilli. We have run out of time. On behalf of the committee, thank you very much for your presentation this afternoon.

NICOLE NELSON

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

Ms Nicole Nelson: My name is Nicole Nelson and I'll be three pages brief here—because you guys look like you've had a long day—but 10 pages passionate, so everybody prepare. It will give you more time to get to questions. You seem to be more animated then.

Mr Joseph Spina (Brampton Centre): Two more days of this.

Interjections.

Ms Nelson: There's passion for democracy right there for you.

When I was first notified of my opportunity to speak—a mere 24 hours ago, I might add, but that seems to be ample in Harris time—I was asked if I was

speaking on behalf of an organization. But, rather than speak on behalf of any of the many organizations that I am a part of, I choose to come today as an individual; more specifically, an individual in the context of a multicultural society.

While public schools in their very nature are open to anyone, private schools often cater to a more exclusive clientele. Some deal only with gifted students; others deal with those with learning disabilities. Some instruct students who have a particular religious or cultural background. While formerly this type of education was more the exception than the rule, the government seems to have shifted its mandate from merely coexisting with private schools to endorsing them. Bill 45 offers up private schooling as a viable alternative to public schools, but at what cost?

If an increasing number of parents, finding that funding cuts have eroded the special religious or support services that their children need, withdraw to private schooling, what effect will this have on the province? Keeping in mind the focused nature of many private schools, what implication will this new style of education have in the context of a multicultural society?

Public schools can provide the opportunity for cross-cultural learning, but private schools can limit the extent to which a student has a truly diverse and multicultural experience. Public education teaches much more than just mathematics and reading skills. Public schools provide social skills and a forum for becoming familiar with and interacting with those who lead different lifestyles and come from different cultures. It educates the future generation of Canada in the skills of tolerance, viewing with diversity and acceptance. As young Canadians grow into their teenage years and into an increasing awareness of self, public education provides a forum for critical thinkers to dialogue in an open environment.

Bill 45, however, encourages Ontarians to parcel off their unique belief systems into separate schools where they can grow into mutually exclusive identities. Psychological evidence shows that the creation of closed social systems can lead to exclusionary ideologies and labelling "the other." Moreover, as these students leave the private schooling system and encounter diversity, as they inevitably will in a Canadian society, they will lack the resources to cope with conflicting opinions and foreign value systems.

Educators are entrusted with a unique and powerful role in society. For many young Canadians, they are the implicitly trusted source of information that forms the foundation of their knowledge base. Researchers have acknowledged that the early years are fundamental in forming opinions and thought patterns and that these thought patterns are harder to change with age. For these reasons, it's essential that the educational experience provide the best information and all the information to our children at their crucial developmental times.

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We rely on the media to provide accurate, unbiased and complete information such that we can make

informed decisions. If we uphold this type of commitment to information as one of the basic tenets of journalistic integrity, how much more so should we instill these same values into our first formal source of information, the educational system? Private schools, however, are not bound to these same mandates. They have no specified curriculum, they don't have mandated teacher testing, they accept who they want and they often teach only one world view to their students.

My mother once taught at a private Christian school, and they were often faced with what they called the "bubble debate." Some thought that the bubble might burst when the students left the sheltered environment of the Christian schools. Others used this metaphor: that the young Christians were like saplings that were being sheltered until they grew strong enough to weather the winds of adversity. In either case, we must ask: is an exclusive education in one world view the best way to protect a culture and maintain multiculturalism in the framework of a Canadian society? Sheltering young people for the express purpose of making them unbending in their views smacks more of an education in intolerance than in multiculturalism.

Consider the case of a health club that wants to have an exclusively white clientele or an employer who will hire only Catholics. We would never dream of supporting these initiatives in today's society, yet we give the unilateral power to private schools to choose and refuse their clientele on the grounds of sex, race, religion, sexual orientation or any other ground they deem appropriate. Consider the case of a student whose education and, presumably, home life has given him one sole definition of normal sexuality. Could it be that this student, when he meets a gay man for the first time in university, will be ill-equipped to deal with this situation?

Furthermore, in the context of an increasingly global society, private education may have implications for the very core of Canadian identity itself. Consider the case of a private school that has the ability to set its own curriculum. A Jewish school may choose to teach Hebrew as a second language instead of focusing on French. Some Canadian history courses might be replaced with the history of Israel or of the Jewish people. It is not the mandate of cultural schools to provide a foundation in Canadian culture; indeed, their mandate is just the opposite, to maintain a cultural heritage that is different than a Canadian heritage.

Heritage and foreign cultures are celebrated by Canadian society, and I have no intention of suggesting that cultural education is not valuable, both to the individual and to society as a whole. A private, unregulated system, however, allows for an education in an environment that teaches one culture to the exclusion of others, perhaps even to the exclusion of Canadian culture.

Public education builds the collective consciousness of every Canadian. It provides an awareness of both of Canada's official languages and ensures a shared knowledge of Canadian history that promotes the unity of society. It is this shared inheritance that provides a com-

mon thread among all Canadians, and the awareness and celebration of different cultures within the school system promotes a multicultural society. Private schools lack the diversity for this experience, which is integral to the development of Canadian youth.

As a society, there are values that we must share in common. Every individual willingly relinquishes a small part of their personal freedom to participate in a society, a collective. In the diverse reality that is Canadian society, tolerance and respect for diversity are two crucial components of this value system. Without these collective ideals, we would be merely separate cultures sharing the same piece of land.

We've all heard the arguments about the dangers of a two-tiered system that discriminates based on socio-economic status. In the face of a government that believes fundamentally that services are best delivered privately, I think this is a valid and justifiable concern. The division of services in this instance, however, can occur not solely along socio-economic lines, but also along religious, racial, sexual and ethnic fault lines that persist in our society.

Bill 45 is much more than a baby step toward the privatization of our education system or the creation of two-tiered services. It will create division above and beyond those of economic inequity. It will fragment our society as it has fragmented our provincial house. It will reopen the sores of religious and ethnic tension that Canada has spent many dollars and decades trying to heal. It will teach our young Canadians that opting out of the Canadian common good is acceptable and even profitable under the Harris government.

A private schooling system will lead to setbacks for the women's movement, for gay rights, for civil rights and for cultural sensitivity. As a woman, as an advocate for gay rights and as a student who relishes opinions, diversity and lifelong learning, I cannot support Bill 45.

To conclude, I'd like to leave you with a parting thought. Consider the role of diversity within the provincial Parliament. The parliamentary system is built upon these same basic tenets: the will of the majority, tempered with a strong respect for the opinion of the minority.

Although my submission is just one of many that you'll receive in the next few days, I hope that my opinion, joined with all the others, will work toward the creation of better policies that benefit us all. In the same way we must provide a forum for the exchange of cultural and religious beliefs within our schooling system, acceptance and respect for diversity cannot be restored with an infusion of funds or touched up in time for elections. It must be firmly rooted within the fabric of our society. Private schooling is not the answer within the context of a multicultural society, and I urge the provincial government to remove the tax clause for private schooling from Bill 45.

The Chair: Thank you very much. We have three minutes per caucus.

Mr Marchese: Thank you, Nicole, for an intelligent, reflective and philosophical presentation. You've heard a number of other deputants to whom I've asked this question, where I said, "Would you support the non-denominational schools, the very private ones?" By the way, the private schools like Upper Canada are there because it's class-based. These people have got bucks and they want to shut themselves out from everybody else. That's partly why they're there. But these guys are saying, "That's OK. If that's the choice they make, they too can have government support." What do you think?

Ms Nelson: I won't comment as to the truth of that statement, because I can't say that I've had the experience of attending an Upper Canada College school for myself. However, as you mentioned, my argument is much more of a philosophical one. On principle, I disagree with private schooling because of the type of education that it allows for and, yes, the type of education that our government allows to occur in private schooling can lead to the creation of elitist, upper-class private schools like the one you mentioned.

Mr Marchese: That applies to that, of course. But the other faith-based Christian groups are saying, "Look, give us our choice. We want a choice to be able to take our students wherever we want." I'm not sure whether it was two previous speakers ago who was arguing for the sovereignty of individual choice or individualism. I'm not quite sure because, as you know, I'm not an advocate of that. What would you say to the fundamental right, they say, to have individual choice? They argue it should be a human right to have a choice about—

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Ms Nelson: As I mentioned in my presentation, every individual does willingly sacrifice something to a collective. That's the basis for a collective. We are not countries of one; we are a country. As such, we need to behave as a country, sacrificing some things for the better good of the public. There is certainly a place for religious and cultural education and there is certainly a place for experiences to interact with those with different views, and that is fundamental and necessary for the improvement of Canadian society as a whole, so we don't fragment into countries of one.

Mr Mazzilli: Thank you very much for your presentation—very in-depth and well thought out. But the one thing I do want to point out, ma'am, the Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation, in their second page, said, "So far we have succeeded remarkably well in assimilating and integrating people." You would agree with me that you would not be into assimilation of any sort, because of the causes that you have said you are fighting for.

As a future leader, obviously you would support the United Nations, and as a future leader, let me give you the three options the United Nations has given: the first is to offer full funding to all religious schools; second, stop funding the Catholic school system; or third, offer religious education in the public system. Which one of those three choices would you pick if you were the leader

at the time making the decision that the United Nations recommended?

Ms Nelson: I wasn't aware that there would be a multiple choice section to this interview here. But can I say that there are always more than three options.

Mr Mazzilli: So you wouldn't comply with the United Nations?

Ms Nelson: There are always more than three options. Options are defined for the purpose of asking questions like that. I can say that this issue is not a question of Catholic schooling, which is a historical inequity and has its roots in a historical basis. If we were to create a separate schooling system like the Catholic schooling system today, in the context of today's society, it would be much different. There's not the need for it today that there was historically, and yet that remains as a vestige of a system that was necessary in the past.

Mr Mazzilli: Obviously a very difficult decision to make. Again, I respect your opinions, but these are the positions of the day and the government of the day has decisions to make. I respect the United Nations and—

Ms Nelson: Maybe the government of the day should promote free thinking—

Mr Mazzilli: Let me just—

Ms Nelson:—some exchange of ideas, some generation of new ideas, because, really, isn't that what the education system is all about? We don't sit down in schools and say, "OK, class, today we have three opinions. Pick one." We share them, and from the generation of those opinions, new opinions emerge.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr Mazzilli. We've run out of time.

Mr McGuinty: Thank you very much for your very articulate presentation. Let me say in passing that we've heard from a number of presenters today who could appropriately be called youth, and they have lent me a great deal of comfort in terms of where it is that we're going in the future: people with passion, a sense of commitment, motivated by a powerful sense of idealism. That speaks well to our future.

You have spoken very passionately about the what, and I wonder if you might address the how. This policy represents a dramatic departure from education policy for the province of Ontario. We have been told that when there was an extension of funding for the Catholic schools to take into account grades 11, 12 and 13, as it was then known, there were 68 days of travelling, public committee hearings. We have been granted eight days. I know that supporters of faith-based schools are so close to this that they can taste it, but I believe they also believe in fairness. For that reason, I think we should be taking more time and giving more people an opportunity to express their opinion about this. This was never part of the campaign platform. If you could speak to that.

Ms Nelson: Absolutely. As I mentioned before, I was notified at noon yesterday that I would be speaking. I worked at 8 o'clock this morning and I got off work at 4:30 last night. You do the math. I recognize that this presentation, albeit not the best I could have created, is

the best I could come up with. I know that had I had more time, I would have been able to create something much better. One would think that the same logic would apply to the Harris government in the creation of policy. Good policies take years to develop, years of consultation. As I said before, it's the foundation of the democratic system: the inclusion and discussion of opposing views and ideas. That's a year-long process, it's

not a three-week process, and that's something Mike Harris has not caught on to yet.

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

This committee is adjourned until 10 o'clock in Sudbury at the Holiday Inn.

The committee adjourned at 1615.

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