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Wednesday 3 October 2001

Mercredi 3 octobre 2001

Speaker
Honourable Gary Carr

Président
L'honorable Gary Carr

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO

Wednesday 3 October 2001

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO

Mercredi 3 octobre 2001

The House met at 1845.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

IMPROVING CUSTOMER SERVICE
FOR ROAD USERS ACT, 2001

LOI DE 2001 SUR L'AMÉLIORATION
DES SERVICES À LA CLIENTÈLE
OFFERTS AUX USAGERS DE LA ROUTE

Resuming the debate adjourned on October 2, 2001, on the motion for second reading of Bill 65, An Act to permit the Minister of Transportation to delegate to persons in the private sector powers and duties and responsibilities to deliver services relating to road user programs / *Projet de loi 65, Loi permettant au ministre des Transports de déléguer à des personnes du secteur privé des pouvoirs, des fonctions et des responsabilités pour fournir des services liés aux programmes à l'intention des usagers de la route.*

The Acting Speaker (Mr Bert Johnson): Further debate?

Mr Doug Galt (Northumberland): I rise today in support of the Improving Customer Service for Road Users Act, 2001, Bill 65. As members know, this bill would permit the Ministry of Transportation to transfer the delivery of some of the road user programs and services to new service providers. The proposed legislation is designed to allow some Ministry of Transportation services to be delivered by other service providers.

I think it's important that the members of this House be assured that, through the transfer of services, the government will continue to protect the privacy of all Ontarians. I think that's a very important aspect of this particular bill. The bill includes important provisions to protect the privacy of individuals and to safeguard the confidentiality of their personal information. This comes under the proposed legislation. Alternative service providers would be required to abide by the provisions of the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act with respect to their actions on behalf of the ministry. Additionally, alternative service providers would be mandated to create the position of a privacy officer within their organization. The privacy officer would be responsible for securing all of the customer records related to the delegated business. In our society we are very, very concerned about our privacy rights, and certainly any-

thing that comes from this bill would be protected under our Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act.

Additionally, we are committed to ensuring that road safety would not be compromised under this legislation. We would continue to safeguard the public interest by regularly monitoring and auditing new service providers to ensure they comply with all legislative and contractual obligations. I'd like to put to rest any concerns that this proposed legislation might undermine the safety of our roads. The fact is that, if we read this proposed bill from beginning to end—and I hope all the members here will do just that—it's obvious through the proposed legislation that road safety would not be compromised. Later, if I have time in my 20 minutes, I really want to expand on road safety and the kinds of changes that have occurred in the province of Ontario over the last six years with road safety, particularly in my area on Highway 401; tremendous changes. I just hope I have time for that.

On the contrary, the bill would indeed support and enhance the delivery of Ontario's graduated licensing program. As members know, that program has been a tremendous success story since its introduction a little over six years ago. I'm not exactly one to be a supporter of the NDP, but I have to admit it came in under their regime, and it was one of the better policies, maybe the best policy, they had. I think in terms of the lobbying the insurance industry did to bring that in. They recognized as an industry what graduated licensing could do for safety on the roads here in Ontario. Lo and behold, that was very effective. As a matter of fact, my wife was with Co-operators at the time, really promoting this idea of graduated licensing.

1850

Under the graduated licence system, novice drivers obtain a licence that requires them to obey a comprehensive set of driving restrictions on things like alcohol, night driving and travelling on our busiest highways. These restrictions are designed to provide our new drivers with valuable experience during a period when statistics show they are the most vulnerable. I can certainly vouch for that. I have three daughters, and by the time they finished their first year of driving, we'd lost four vehicles. They've ended up excellent drivers, but it's in that novice period that they have some real difficulty. I may have a daughter watching this tonight and she may be a little upset I mentioned that, but it's so true that in that first year of driving the novice driver gets into

trouble. With the graduated licensing, that has changed tremendously.

Under the graduated licensing system, all novice drivers must complete a two-step licensing process and take two road tests before becoming fully licensed. The graduated licensing system promotes safe driving habits among beginner drivers in the belief that those habits, once learned, will last a lifetime. We know how difficult it is, especially if you get a bad habit, to change that into a proper habit, but once you have established those good habits, they tend to stay there.

The statistics will show overwhelmingly that graduated licensing is indeed working. Studies show that the total number of collisions involving novice drivers has dropped by some 31%. That's almost a third. In those collisions, the number of injuries and fatalities involving novice drivers has gone down by 24%: very significant statistics, indicative of the success of the graduated licensing program.

With graduated licensing, Ontario is on its way toward achieving its goal of having the safest roads in North America. As a matter of fact, we're already at number one here in Canada, and number two, after Massachusetts, in all of North America. This government will continue to strive to improve that kind of safety record.

Our government has been for law and order, safety and security—quite a turnaround from the government we had prior to our coming into government back in 1995. We see things that have just recently happened in the States. We see the strength of our Premier, Premier Harris, coming through. Contrast that with the federal government and the Liberals, so weak and not coming through. You look to the US. Look what happened with the Democrats. They got rid of half their military; they got rid of their intelligence. You can see where they've ended up, similar to what's happened here in Canada with the military and with their intelligence. It's really very unfortunate in a country such as ours.

Interjections.

Mr Galt: I hear the Liberals quibbling on the other side. I can understand why they would want to try to protect their first cousins in Ottawa.

As members know, the Ministry of Transportation has traditionally provided driver and vehicle services to the public. In fact, this has been the case since 1909. In those days, the only obstacle to aspiring drivers was access to a car. The issuing of chauffeurs' licences in 1909 grew to include a competency test in 1913. By 1927 an operator's licence was introduced into Ontario, with 25 examiners employed to test applicants. In that first year, almost 450,000 operators' licences were issued, at a cost of \$1 each. Probably that was pretty expensive in those days.

I well remember my test in 1953. That was when you were still allowed to get a licence, if you were on the farm, at age 15. I had it for six months, and because they changed the law at the end of that year, I had to give it up for six months and get it back the following July. But the big thing in that test—they were just coming out with signal lights at that time—was how well you put your

arm out the window to signal right or left. Once I made two turns, we went back to his office and he signed me up as an official driver in Ontario. I haven't been tested since, and we're doing reasonably well, I think.

Every step of the way over the past 80-plus years, the transportation ministry has worked to improve its customer service capabilities. My, my, how times have changed. Today, we have more than eight million drivers on Ontario roads and more than nine million registered motor vehicles, yet the need to continue in the tradition of customer service excellence established so long ago by the Ministry of Transportation continues today. We can see the ministry has a long tradition of service delivery, in addition to an outstanding record in promoting road user safety. Yet first and foremost, the ministry's role must be as manager, not as deliverer of services. It's all about steering as a government, not about rowing. We believe that ultimately transferring some of these services and programs to other service providers will vastly improve customer service. Customer service is something I've been on a push for since late 1995 or early 1996, and it's just great to see the kind of awards that the civil service in Ontario has been winning.

The demand for driver testing services in Ontario will continue to grow as our population increases, thanks to successful economic growth in this province. The Ministry of Transportation has already made some significant customer service improvements to address the growing population of drivers in this province. In 1999, members will recall that my colleague the Honourable David Turnbull, the previous Minister of Transportation, brought in a package of measures to address the customer service problems at provincial driver examination centres. Under this initiative, the ministry hired more than 300 driver examination staff on a temporary basis. It also opened temporary driver testing facilities and expanded the hours of operation at a number of provincial testing centres. As a result of this initiative, more road tests have been offered and the average waiting time across the province for driver examinations was reduced.

This is particularly significant in my area. A lot of people were very, very concerned about getting into big, long line-ups. As a result of what the Honourable David Turnbull did, the end result has been resolved and the turnaround has been just tremendous lately. I don't think we've had a call in my office for years now.

This new bill would enhance our commitment to improved customer service. It supports MTO's intention to find a service provider for driver examination services. With the passage of this proposed legislation and the eventual move to a new service provider, the province will be able to build on the significant customer service improvements in driver examination services that have already been made.

Under the government's proposed initiative, the new service provider will be responsible for vision testing and for examining candidates on their knowledge of the rules of the road. It would take driver's licence photos and book appointments for road tests, and it would be

responsible for carrying out the road tests needed to obtain Ontario's class G1, G2, commercial and motorcycle licences. All told, it would be able to apply the private sector's unique ability to approach the delivery of business services with creativity, flexibility and innovation, the same tenets that have made Ontario this country's economic powerhouse.

As members will know, Ontario is committed to the highest level of customer service possible in all facets of its operations. This initiative builds on that commitment. By engaging the private sector in the delivery of driver examination services, the government will continue to maintain and then exceed those high standards for excellence in customer service. If we can increase the effectiveness of Ontario's driver testing process today, the public will benefit immediately through enhanced efficiency in the delivery of our customer service.

The key, of course, is to find the right service provider for the job. To ensure that the right organization is indeed selected to undertake this very important task, the ministry has established an open and competitive process. A successful bidder would be required to prove its capability in a number of areas before earning the right to deliver driver examination services in the province of Ontario. It is a process that would demand that all candidates for this role meet a very specific, predetermined set of criteria. If a successful candidate is chosen, the ministry will then develop a detailed service delivery contract with the winning bidder.

1900

I believe the people of Ontario simply cannot lose with this process, because the whole point of the exercise is to provide them with better service. If the selection process results in a new provider of driver examination services, the service delivery contract with the ministry would contain measurable objectives and clear milestones for customer service improvements. We believe that government ministries should set provincial standards and work to see that they indeed are met. We also believe that the government's primary business is to manage services effectively, rather than to deliver services directly.

With the passage of this bill, the Ministry of Transportation would continue to play a key role in licensing drivers across this great province of Ontario. It would set licensing policies, fees and standards, and it would focus its efforts on seeing that those standards are met. The goal here is to improve customer service, and the people of Ontario will indeed be the beneficiaries. Others have already spoken to the bill's benefits with respect to enhancing government's accountability, but from my perspective the real importance of this bill is simply that it will bring better, more efficient and more cost-effective services to the people of Ontario. As members and elected representatives of the people, I believe we all have an obligation to support measures that will result in better services to the public.

The Minister of Transportation has been working hard toward the goal of improving customer services across

this province. This work strongly supports the government's goal of achieving smaller, more efficient government that does a better job and improves customer service through alternate service delivery. It also underscores the government's role as a manager, not a deliverer of services.

In this day and age, customer service has become a highly specialized field. Companies that are good at it generally do very well and those who are not very good at it are often doomed to fail. In managing services that are delivered to the public, the ministry plays an important strategic role in Ontario's transportation sector, a role that embraces all transportation modes and dimensions of provincial policies, planning and management. In terms of Ontario's policies, fees and standards, the proposed act makes it crystal clear that MTO would continue to effectively manage the delivery of these services.

This bill will allow us to engage our private sector partners in the development of flexible, creative and innovative approaches to customer service, and it sets the stage for enhanced efficiencies down the road. This government made a commitment in its 1999 Blueprint document and in the most recent speech from the throne to make the government more accountable to provincial taxpayers. One thing our government has developed a reputation for is that we do what we said we were going to do. That's rather unique in politics in recent years, in some of the other parties, especially during that lost decade from 1985 to 1995. If you look to the federal government, the last thing in the world they'd do is what they said they were going to do, but this government, since 1995, has been committed and they are doing what they said they were going to do.

One important part of that commitment is to ensure that services are delivered in a safe, efficient and high-quality manner. To fulfill that commitment, we are determined to explore new and innovative ways of improving customer service and, wherever it is practical, safe and cost-effective to do so, we are prepared to transfer the delivery of those services to an entity that can do a better job. This proposed legislation reflects this important government commitment and our desire to bring better service to the people throughout the province. We will continue to explore further improvements in the future and we will continue to ensure that hard-working people in all parts of this province receive high-quality services and excellent value for money, things they expect and deserve.

I have about a minute, Mr Speaker. I want to talk about some of the safety issues that I mentioned earlier. In my area, a big concern back in 1994-95 was for a centre barrier on the 401. I'm pleased to report to this Legislature that that barrier is completed. They're just doing a bit of paving to finish up and some lines are going on—a very safe area on the 401 where there used to be a lot of crossovers because of the S turns it went through in Northumberland. They've put rumble strips along the side. They've put cat eyes on some of the major turns on that highway. We're spending more money in

highways now than has ever been spent in the history of this province. I think a lot of things are happening in highway construction that make our highways just that much safer and that is why we have the safest highways in Canada, and second only to Massachusetts in North America.

This bill represents an important step in a way of achieving the objective of high-quality services and excellent value for money. These are the things the public expects and that the public of Ontario deserves. Because of this, I ask that all members join with me here today in supporting second reading of this bill. I know they want to see this kind of quality service present in Ontario. I look forward to the support of all parties on this bill.

Mr Steve Peters (Elgin-Middlesex-London): I'm sorry to tell the honourable member from Northumberland that I won't be supporting this legislation this evening. You talk about doing a better job in the delivery of services. Well, the legacy of this government in supposedly doing a better job in the delivery of services is Walkerton. That is on all of your hands over there.

You talk about increasing effectiveness and efficiency. You're the very party that brought us to this position in the first place in 1995-96. You're the ones who closed down the driver examination offices all across this province, including the one in my own riding of Elgin-Middlesex-London in St Thomas. Talk about efficiency. You've forced constituents of mine to have to drive to London now for a driver's examination test. You're the ones at the very root of this problem that we're seeing in this province.

And you know what? You talk about how this is going to be of such benefit to individuals. The public is going to lose out on this. Not only are fees going to be put in place but you're leaving it wide open for additional fees to be collected by these individuals who are going to be delivering this service today.

I want to make some comments on this. The honourable member for Northumberland makes reference to the lost decade. I wasn't any part of the lost decade. I was elected in 1999, so I'm not going to speak up for that, but I can tell you what we've seen in this province in the last six years: six years of destruction, where you as a government have systematically dismantled the delivery of public services. We've seen it; we're seeing it right now. We've seen what's happened in the testing of water in this province. We've seen what you're doing with the privatization and sale of the Province of Ontario Savings Office. We've seen what has happened in a whole variety of areas where you think the private sector can deliver services better. The public servants of this province have played an important role for well over 130 years in this province, and you've systematically dismantled that service. That is a disservice to the citizens of Ontario.

Mr Tony Martin (Sault Ste Marie): I want to comment on the points made by the member who spoke on this bill from the government side this evening. He said that this is about providing better-quality services, when all of us who are looking at what this government is

doing, have followed their track record, who have been involved in trying to order the public life of this province, know that this government's last concern in most decisions it makes is in fact the quality of services delivered. This is about finding so-called efficiencies. This is about finding new ways to duck the responsibility that government has to provide public services to the people of this province who pay taxes for those services, who expect government to be there to make sure that services are there, particularly where there are issues of safety, such as in this instance where we're dealing with people who drive vehicles on our highways. Anybody who is reading the newspapers or listening to the news these days knows our highways are becoming occupied by more and more vehicles and are more and more dangerous. We need to be ever more vigilant in our protection of those public vehicles to make sure that people who drive actually have the qualifications and are being monitored in a way that ensures they continue to have them and don't provide or prove to be a threat.

If it's actually about better-quality services or costing the government less, I suppose we would want to look at other examples this government has used to privatize or to follow their ideological bent, and we know that in those instances they failed miserably.

1910

The Acting Speaker: Comments and questions?

Mr Ted Chudleigh (Halton): This whole debate strikes me as one that weighs the private sector against the public sector in the delivery of services. I challenge the opposition members to come up with an example where the—

Mr George Smitherman (Toronto Centre-Rosedale): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: Is there a quorum present?

Mr Chudleigh: Apparently I've been interrupted, Mr Speaker. I'm not sure there is a quorum, but I'm sure the table will tell us whether there's a quorum available.

The Acting Speaker: That is a point of order. I'll check and see.

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

The Acting Speaker ordered the bells rung.

Clerk Assistant: A quorum is now present, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: The Chair recognizes the member for Halton.

Mr Chudleigh: It strikes me that this entire debate is between the ability of the private sector to deliver a service or the ability of the public sector to deliver a service. I challenge members of this House to come up with an example of where the public sector can deliver a service more efficiently and with better value to the people who pay for it—that would be the taxpayers of Ontario—than the private sector. The private sector is where those efficiencies come from.

This bill will bring in customer service. It will provide innovation for flexibility within communities. I think all of us recognize there are vast differences in the numbers and types of communities throughout this great province

of Ontario. In order to make it adaptable to those communities so that each community can have the service it expects and deserves from any service, whether it be licensing or any other service in Ontario, that can best be done by the private sector, which is motivated to deliver those kinds of services where and when needed for this great province of Ontario.

Mr Smitherman: I listened with great care to the comments by the member for Northumberland, and if I could offer him a compliment it would be that like a talking Ken doll that never loses its vigour for its same tired old message, he goes on and on and on: the Eveready Ken doll, a bit of a blend of two images. That member, in his comments, went to some great length to talk about the great record of his government just doing what they said they would do.

I want to reach out tonight to the people of Port Hope in his riding, who have, under his leadership and that of Governor Harris—I should say, Premier Harris. He has spoken out with such great confidence in his leader. I want to remind those people that he closed their hospital.

I'd ask the member in his two minutes to remind us to ask him the question, did you tell the people in Port Hope that when you got to Queen's Park you were going to work to favour one community in your riding against them and to see the diminution of their health care services? What's the answer to that, I ask the member?

When you ran for election in 1999, I ask the member for Northumberland, did you go to the people in Northumberland and tell them that you would be supporting a massive change in the way our education system is run in this province, to the point that you would offer money for vouchers and take money out of the public education system to offer an incentive to parents to take their kids out of the public education system and push them into private and religious schools?

I ask you this third question: when you ran for election in any of the times in 1995 or 1999 when you were successful in the riding of Northumberland, very narrowly, I might add, did you tell the people that you were going to be part of a regime that took away the protections of the Ministry of the Environment, which led to the crisis in Walkerton?

The Acting Speaker: The member for Northumberland has two minutes to respond.

Mr Galt: I want to compliment first the member for Halton for just an absolutely brilliant two minutes of response. The other three didn't do nearly as well.

The member for Toronto Centre-Rosedale, I do have to respond to him first because he started out with a compliment, and I have to thank him. But I would like to follow up on his comments about hospitals and what happened in west Northumberland. As a matter of fact, this past Friday I was at the site; construction started for a new hospital. They've raised over \$15 million in fundraisers; well over \$21 million when you include the site and all the rest of the other donations that have come in. They have over \$21 million for a new hospital, and it's now under construction to serve all residents of west

Northumberland. The right result is happening, the absolute right result. Was it in the right sequence? No. But the right result has happened.

I wanted to respond to the comments of the member for Elgin-Middlesex-London as well, talking about staff etc. When the G2 test came through, there was quite a large number requiring G2 examinations at once. That's why the backlog occurred; that's why the government responded on a temporary basis to hire a lot of temporary staff to look after that backlog. Now we're looking at long range. It's unfortunate that during the lost decade neither of the parties looked at long range.

You talked about six years of destruction. Let me tell you that I don't think almost a million more people out there with jobs would consider that six years of destruction. We did not have gridlock, I'll admit, in 1995. It was very easy to drive into Toronto in 1995 because a million people in Ontario weren't going to work, weren't driving those roads. They're now driving them, and I apologize to the Liberals if they are caught up in gridlock and they don't like this million people going to work, this million people having money to buy goods from trucks that are travelling on the roads. That's unfortunate. We'll work on that. Premier Harris has come out with a recent announcement that's going to deal with it.

1920

The Acting Speaker: Further debate.

Mr Smitherman: It's my pleasure to have the chance, on behalf of the residents of Toronto Centre-Rosedale, to speak on this bill. I'll be sharing my time with the member for London-Middlesex-Elgin—no, Elgin-Middlesex-London; it sounds good either way.

I'll be voting against this bill, and I'll be voting against this bill because it's a bill that is locked in the same time warp that we find this government. This government introduced this bill on May 31. In the member's very own comments, he was shameless in the methods that he used to speak in favour of his leader at the expense of the head of the government of Canada. In a time when we find ourselves in slightly uncertain circumstances, that member was shameless and partisan in speaking about Governor Harris—I should say, Premier Harris.

Yesterday we heard in here a Premier who wrapped himself so tightly in the Stars and Stripes that I began to wonder if he'd lost sight of the responsibilities that he bears as the Premier of this province. I begin to wonder, too, whether the member, in the comments that he raised, has lost sight of the extent to which the people of Northumberland expect him to be a representative as part of the province of Ontario rather than as some near-US-like jurisdiction, which this party has favoured for the last six years.

The influences of Mike Murphy in that member's comments and in the way this Premier has governed himself in the days since September 11, I think, are quite problematic.

It's interesting that at a time—I remind people that this bill was introduced on May 31. In the days since

September 11, when we have seen in many jurisdictions a return to public services where previously privatized service providers were active, this government chooses instead to plow forward. This is a government that is lost in a time warp, the time warp of rhetoric from the member for Northumberland, who talks about, "Just doing what we said we were going to do," when in fact they have varied very widely on that point; in a time warp that doesn't reflect the changed circumstances and the changed public attitudes about the importance of good-quality public services in our province.

I want to make a couple of points. We had occasion since this Legislature resumed sitting on September 24 to raise just one very specific circumstance in this House, raised by my leader, Dalton McGuinty, in a question to the government with respect to the security of birth certificates. I think the government found, upon review of the circumstances in which they issue birth certificates, that there was a vulnerability; in fact, perhaps many of them. The government, quite rightly so, and I credit the Minister of Consumer and Business Services for doing so, took up action to offer more adequate protection. I'm not convinced that we've done all that we can. At that time, again, when the public is in a position where they're expecting good-quality public services, we see a government that is prepared to devolve to the private sector, and inevitably into the hands and responsibility of people who are making less money than public servants currently holding those jobs, the potential for the devolution of more of the responsibility for a broad range of services, including identification; as an example, hazardous materials handling licences.

Isn't it interesting that John Ashcroft, I'm sure a much-revered figure on that side, given his historically very conservative stances—isn't it interesting that at the very time the United States is looking at the further risk of terrorism activity, and hazardous materials licences being one example of the path that potential terrorists who are being investigated might have been going down, this government is saying, "This is not a crucial public service. We don't have a responsibility or a need to hold that information close at hand and to ensure on behalf of the people of the province of Ontario that we're doing the best possible job we can in securing personal information and making sure that people who pose a risk aren't accessing drivers' licences," an awfully effective form of identification, I think most of us would agree, or hazardous materials licences, thought to be a vulnerability in the United States to further attack.

This is a government that asks much of us in accepting their best wishes and their words around the protection of people's privacy. Yet in addition to the birth certificate example that I raised a few moments ago, this is coming from the same government that in its haste, in its desire to sell off assets—in this case, the Province of Ontario Savings Office—in a disgraceful act by a minister who has since left the government, offered up personal information on its own clients from a savings office. We are asked at this time, when people are feeling vulnerable, to

go along with this government and "Just trust us." I don't think that's the right response. Yes, certainly there are people who are feeling vulnerable as a result of what happened on September 11. All of us in our daily lives engage every single day in conversations which are dramatically influenced by the events of September 11, and it seems that everything's been influenced except the thinking of that government, which is a one-trick pony, stuck in the rhetoric and stuck in the time warp that was present on May 31 when they introduced this bill, which in my opinion runs the very real risk of diminishing the capacity of Ontario to be a safe and secure society.

You could criticize me for scaremongering—

Mr Chudleigh: We will.

Mr Smitherman: Pipe down there, apple boy.

But we have a circumstance where the Premier went out of his way so that he could make a smart announcement and has appointed these experts like Lewis MacKenzie—a man of some decent reputation—and Norman Inkster. I'd be very interested to know whether in their considered opinion, at a time like this when the matter of personal identification is central to people's capacity to move on like a domino in an insidious way and gain access to more and more vehicles, and this government moves forward with this bill—did they consult with their newly appointed security czars? There are two of them. I'd be very interested to hear the government's response to that matter.

No, we see a government that uses the influence of September 11, and the rhetoric is reflected in the member from Northumberland's comments, and yet they have not done an adequate job of looking at the extent to which this legislation runs counter to the very goals of not just this government, but of all jurisdictions in the civilized world.

We know that there has been a circumstance where public sector workers providing security services in airports were over time, in both Canada and the United States, privatized. With all of the rhetoric of the member from Northumberland and the member from Halton, who went to some great lengths to talk about the superiority of the private sector, within 24 hours, perhaps even five, of the circumstances on September 11, there was talk of restoring public sector workers to the role of providing security checks at our airports. Yet this government, which has used so much rhetoric since, has failed to reflect on that.

I am going to stand and vote against this bill, because this bill fulfills a government agenda which is counter to the best interests of the people of Ontario, particularly at a time when they are feeling vulnerable, when they are feeling like their security that once seemed so certain is perhaps less so. I urge the government, I implore the government, I challenge the government, I beg the government, to ask your czars, these two men on whose reputations you have banked such a great public display this week, I ask you, refer this bill to them. I want to know where those two men stand on this bill. I want to know that they believe the best interests of the people of

Ontario are represented in a bill which devolves the responsibility for personal information and the creation of identification to the private sector. I want to know that that's in the best interests of the people of Ontario

Mr Peters: I won't be supporting this legislation, and I think we need to be conscious of what this government has done with the privatization of services in this province. This government constantly stands up and praises the great things that they're doing with the privatization of services, but who's the first to sound the alarm bell when it comes to the privatization of services? It's the Provincial Auditor. The auditor in his 1999 report showed that the privatization of highways had not saved any money and may ultimately result in significant increases in the cost of highway maintenance. What we're going to see out of this privatization is higher costs and less service for the good citizens of this province.

We've seen some of the other effects and where this government's agenda is taking us when it comes to privatization. We're seeing the direction that the government has gone with the jails. We've seen where they're going with air ambulances. We've seen the drastic effect on this province of the implementation of privatization and what's happened in Walkerton.

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This government talks—they're up touting the Blueprint and promises made and everything else—but let's cite some promises made and promises not kept that have had a direct impact on the citizens of this province. A promise made in 1995: no cuts to agriculture. In July 1995, right after the election, \$14 million right out of the budget of agriculture. Boom, just like that.

On May 24, 1995, Mike Harris promises in writing, "We will implement an Ontarians with disabilities act." Well, we're still waiting. The clock is ticking.

And now, the latest of promises made and promises not kept: Elizabeth Witmer, writing to citizens in the city of London in the spring of 1999 talking about children's services, how they're secure for the short term and secure for the long term. What did we see today? We have seen the devastation of children's services in London: not 14 cuts, as was pointed out in the Legislature today, but 18 programs cut as a direct result of the funding cuts from this government to the London Health Sciences Centre. I think that's a terrible thing that you have done to the citizens of southwestern Ontario, all in the name of trying to do things better. You're not doing anything better for the citizens of southwestern Ontario; you've abandoned the citizens of southwestern Ontario. And I can tell you right now that the citizens of southwestern Ontario are going to be speaking up, because we certainly haven't heard anybody speak up, particularly in the back row: London West, London-Fanshawe. They stand up, but they don't say anything—London-North Centre, she doesn't say anything either. They're not standing up for their constituents.

But let's deal with some of the other issues in this legislation here. Road safety: they talk about road safety, but when profit levels are going to be the sole motive for

any organization, we know that the chances of road safety improvements are actually going to decrease.

I think another issue that is of the utmost importance is the Toronto-centred mentality of this government. My apologies, I'm not taking any shots at Toronto, because I think Toronto is a great city. But I think there's a mentality—especially out of this government right now—of this cookie-cutter approach to the province of Ontario, that what's good for Toronto is good for the rest of this province. That is not true. With the privatization of these services, you're going to see rural Ontario and northern Ontario hurt as a result of this. We saw this in 1995 just after the election when they went and closed down drivers' testing offices all over this province, including in the city of St Thomas. What did that do? That didn't improve customer service for anybody in this province. If anything, it made it worse. It forced people in my riding from Port Burwell and Port Glasgow to have to travel to London or Chatham for a driver's road test.

What did it also do? Sometimes you've got to think these things through; obviously this government doesn't think it through. The ripple effect of closing down some of these offices is that it created a tremendous backlog for people who had to wait months and months for a driver's licensing test. That's a direct responsibility of your government and how you failed Ontario citizens.

I think we need to be concerned about access to confidential information. This piece of legislation will allow private road companies to have access to MTO databases and private, confidential driver information. The government claims that these files are going to be protected. But we've seen what's happened with protection of personal information in the release of information from the Province of Ontario Savings Office: again, another entity that this government is bent and determined to privatize; a service that provides—including in my own riding, in Aylmer—a very important role and this government is selling it out from under the feet of the citizens of Ontario.

I think too that a very good point is made, as my colleague pointed out, with the issue of birth certificates. What we're going to see here is an increased risk and an increased possibility for people to fraudulently attain drivers' licences. I think that we need to do everything we can to make sure that we pull our security measures in place. What you are doing is systematically dismantling those things.

This is a real kicker: the elimination of any liability for the province. This piece of legislation states that the province cannot be held liable for any damages that result from reduced road safety arising from the privatization of road safety services. This is a clear indication of the abdication of responsibility of this government, of not standing up for the citizens of Ontario: "Sorry, we don't have anything to do with it anymore. You're out on your own." Well, the potential harm you're doing to individuals in this province is unconscionable and is certainly not acceptable.

I think the other aspect of this too is the constant attack this government has made on a wide variety of areas in this province. We've seen that you love to pick on people. There's no doubt it's unprecedented in the history of this province that a government has run so roughshod over its constituents. We've seen a government abandon persons with disabilities in this province. We've seen a government walk away from the farmers of this province. We're constantly seeing an erosion of services.

We're seeing, again, the government walk away in an abandonment of the citizens of southwestern Ontario with the cuts that were announced today by the London Health Sciences Centre—18 programs. My concern is that's just the tip of the iceberg. If they're doing that with one hospital, there's no doubt the Minister of Health has put every hospital on notice, and we're going to see services rationalized and centralized all over this province. That's not the way to operate, and that's not the way to treat the people of Ontario. You're so disrespectful to the citizens of this province.

The other attack you have constantly made is on the public service in this province. We've got a long, long history of the important role the public service has played from the very foundations of this province in 1867. For years and years, the public has grown to accept the public service and the role public servants play in this province, knowing they're going to have good delivery of services, knowing there are going to be equal standards across this province, whether you go from Windsor to Cornwall to Thunder Bay.

We've seen a constant attack by this government on unions in this province, OPSEU in particular. It seems to be your mission to do everything you can to do damage and destruction to some of the unions in this province.

But do you know what? What you're doing is not helping the citizens of Ontario. You're making it worse, because the standards aren't going to be the same from Windsor to Cornwall to Thunder Bay. You're dismantling those standards. I think that's extremely sad.

You talk about the rationale for doing what you're doing. This government, as was pointed out many years ago by the former Minister of Education, needs to create a crisis. Well, you started—and you're very clever—but the wool is coming up. The public is starting to see through your government and see the damaging things you're doing to the citizens of this province.

You started to plant the seeds for this initiative in 1995 after your election, when you started to close those driver's licensing offices across the province. You created that crisis all over: "Oh, look at the big backlog we've got now. Sorry about that. But in the name of government efficiency, we've shut down these offices." So you created that backlog, created that crisis, and what do you do now to solve that crisis and try to turn things around? You don't reinvest in the public service in this province. You don't do that. You abandon the public service. What do you do? You privatize. I think that is very disrespectful to the good citizens of Ontario.

I truly hope that some of you on the opposite side will start to—I don't think you will, because you're like ants following the leader. What the leader says and what the centre says, you follow and you do. But I urge you to go out and talk to your constituents. Ask them what damage Mike Harris has done to their lives.

The Acting Speaker: The member's time has expired. Comments and questions?

Mr Martin: I want to comment on the speeches just made by the members of the Liberal caucus and to suggest that this caucus will be certainly be in line with them in voting against this bill.

I hear and certainly agree with the comments of the member for Toronto Centre-Rosedale when he suggests this government is out of step with many other jurisdictions across the world today as we recognize the need for ever more vigilance and for government being directly responsible, particularly in areas of safety. This bill certainly fits that description in many serious and important ways. For this government, as it has consistently done over its term in office, to be simply ignoring the reality and the facts as they present themselves and to be saying one thing consistently over its term about things the public has some concern about, and be taking advantage of strong sentiment out there after some devastation happens—and we've had a number of instances of that, none more dramatic or more negatively affecting so many innocent citizens than that of September 11, however—and then in pursuit of its ideology and campaign strategy to simply privatize everything that moves, regardless of the effect it will have on our ability to monitor that which calls on us to be concerned about safety, has to raise some serious issues for thinking people out there across the province.

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Mr Marcel Beaubien (Lambton-Kent-Middlesex): It's a pleasure for me to speak for two minutes tonight on Bill 65, which improves customer service for road users. When I listen to the member from Elgin-Middlesex-London talk about six years of destruction and water and public service, and then the member from Toronto Centre-Rosedale talk about the events that happened in the States and the close link, trying to make political hay of the event that occurred on September 11, I find it somewhat disgusting. When we look at what's happened to the States, you seem to have some type of bored feelings with regard to the Americans. But when we look at what occurred on September 11 and we look at the way the Americans have reacted to it, I think they've unified. Over here you're trying to put a wedge between people in Ontario with regard to that particular situation. I find that totally irresponsible.

Then he talked about eliminating the risk, and he talked about airports. I don't know what the provincial government has to do with regard to safety at airports. But whether it's a federal jurisdiction or a provincial jurisdiction, you cannot eliminate the risk. You may be able to manage the risk, but for anyone on that side of the House to expect any government to be able to eliminate

the risk—I would expect that from the Dalton McGuinty Liberals. I would strongly suggest to the members on the other side of the House that we can manage risk, we can reduce risk, but to have the assumption—as a former insurance broker and a lawyer, the member from Kingston and the Islands knows very well that the elimination of risk is impossible. Any time you want to discuss any other issue, I'd more than welcome tackling you on that.

Mr Jean-Marc Lalonde (Glengarry-Prescott-Russell): I want to thank the member for Elgin-Middlesex-London. The member is right when he says that the safety of Ontarians could be in jeopardy. I can tell you that we've had a good service. We still have a good service, but the government hasn't staffed our centre properly at the present time. In my own riding, Hawkesbury has a driver testing clinic, Alexandria lost their's because the government didn't want to staff it, Rockland only has it every second week, Casselman only has it every second week. I just wonder what's going to happen when the private sector takes this over.

The government is supposed to be there to give service to Ontarians. At the present time, we know this government is trying to get away from all those services. Also, at the present time, I think the system is working pretty well, even though at times we are on the waiting list. But there is a central bank controlling the appointments at the present time. There are times when there are cancellations. You don't have to go and tip those people to make sure you're the next one on the list. They understand that sometimes people have to travel long distances to go to work. There have been some mistakes by doctors at times, entering the names into the computer and then all of a sudden they find out that they made a mistake. We would probably have to travel to Ottawa, 100 kilometres for some people coming from Hawkesbury. So I'd just say that when we privatize this type of service, we are looking at the possibility of reducing services in the rural areas.

Mrs Julia Munro (York North): I'd just like to comment on some of the concerns that have been raised with regard to the question of security. I would like to draw the member's attention to the fact that this piece of legislation has been recognized by the privacy commissioner. I'd like to, for the record, quote part of the letter that was sent. It begins:

"The manner in which private service providers have been made subject to the Freedom of Information and the Protection of Privacy Act is laudable.... This legislation, as well as the process through which privacy has been addressed, will serve as a good example to other government institutions, in the event they decide to provide services through private service providers."

I want to draw this to the attention of the members, because I think it speaks to some of those issues that had been raised earlier in the debate. This is a piece of legislation designed to provide improved customer service. It's also a piece of legislation designed to protect those very customers. I think the kinds of things that have been put in place in this legislation demonstrate that we will

provide the regulatory framework to ensure the best service to the customers and at the same time we will ensure that the privacy of those customers is respected.

The Acting Speaker: The member for Toronto Centre-Rosedale has a chance to respond.

Mr Smitherman: I just want to say to the member from Sault Ste Marie and to my colleague from Glengarry-Prescott-Russell, I appreciate their comments. Their commitment to the provision of services to their constituents is well known. To the member from Lambton-Kent-Middlesex, who has since left the chamber, I would say with his record on Ipperwash, the word "irresponsible" thrown back at me rings a little hollow. I was looking forward to hearing from the member from York North about what happened to those long-term-care beds that were promised in Vaughan-King-Aurora and ripped from her hands in a desperate attempt to hold on to that riding. I wonder if those have been given back subsequently.

I want to repeat my challenge to the government. You can use the word "irresponsible." It's fine. I think I asked an excellent question. I'm sure the legislative assistant to the Minister of Transportation, who sits over there, wrote it down and is going to have that in the briefing book for tomorrow. I'm not suggesting that I know the absolute answer to this, but the government this week went out and appointed two people in whom we're supposed to have a lot of confidence to be the security czars in this province. Given that they didn't know, other than that the Premier called them by phone and said, "We'll get back to you later with the details"—fly-by-night government that we've got here—I want to know that this bill has been vetted through them, then. Because it involves the provision of a valuable piece of identification, and to call me irresponsible for raising questions about the new reality, the new context in which we're operating subsequent to September 11, strikes me as irresponsible from the government side.

This bill should be withdrawn and it should be reviewed in that context. This is a government which has a record for six years now—it can talk about the lost decade, but for six years now, they've been the government. During that period, they did an extraordinary disservice to tens of thousands of their own clients in a scandalous action at the Province of Ontario Savings Office. On that basis, it is our job to ask these questions. When will they be answered?

The Acting Speaker: Further debate?

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Mr Martin: I want to begin my 20 minutes this evening with some comments on the particular bill in front of us, perchance that people out there watching may not completely understand what it is that this government has announced and is proposing to do.

The government has announced that it will privatize a range of products and services now offered through its network of driver examination centres. These functions will be carried out by an existing network of 281 private driver and vehicle licence issuing offices across Ontario

and include routine licence issuing functions. The government says this move will not result in the layoff of any permanent staff, although contract staff may not have their contracts extended.

More importantly, this government has also announced that they intend to privatize driver examination. That's where this bill comes in. This includes vision testing, knowledge testing, photographs for photo-licence cards, road testing and road test appointment booking.

OPSEU, the workers in this field at the moment, says this could mean the loss of some 900 jobs.

The government will put out a request for qualifications, followed by a request for proposals, in an attempt to find an appropriate private sector operator. They expect to have this process complete in about a year.

The bill has narrowed the range of Ministry of Transportation functions to be privatized compared to last fall's version of the bill. They have explicitly stated in section 2 that the privatization is restricted to delivery of services of a road user program and that the power to make regulations or establish program standards or policies will not be delegated. In addition, enforcement of standards on commercial motor vehicles also cannot be delegated.

The ministry will write terms and conditions of a delegation which must go through cabinet, permitting among other things—and it's important for people to pay attention to this—fees to be charged to the public and granting the delegate access to specific ministry resources, including databases for the purpose of exercising or performing the delegated powers, duties or responsibilities or providing ancillary services. It's an important point to remember, and I'll return to it a little later in my comments.

The fact that there are going to be 900 jobs in the public service lost; the ability to charge fees and, I suppose, because we have a track record here, to increase those fees; and the granting of access to specific ministry resources, including databases for the purpose of exercising or performing the delegated powers, duties or responsibilities or providing ancillary services provides a window for some interesting further developments by this government and its partners out there in the private sector.

Sub-delegations are allowed, but the minister must OK them and can have the sub-delegate report directly to the minister. The minister can unilaterally amend or revoke a delegation agreement. The Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act applies to the private sector delegate, and the delegate shall appoint a privacy officer to safeguard the records. This is a new feature of this bill.

The private sector delegate shall provide the minister with an annual report.

The minister or ministry cannot be sued for any act of the delegate. This is another interesting piece of this bill, not inconsistent with other pieces of legislation that this government has passed in its attempt to walk away from, turn its back on, its responsibility and to put in place provisions in law that relieve it of any accountability in

instances where the people delegated may find themselves in difficulty or in contravention of the law.

The ministry, of course, cannot be sued for any act of the delegate, as I said. The ministry can't be sued for anything done in good faith. A delegate who knowingly contravenes the act, regulations or delegating agreement is liable to fines of up to \$100,000 a day. Officers, directors, employees or agents of the delegate are liable to fines of up to \$25,000 a day for the same contraventions. But there's a wide chasm between that and what it is the government will be held responsible for if something should happen.

The government likely sees this as a way of simultaneously cutting the cost of adding more driver's licence examiners—there is currently a waiting period of up to six months for a driving test—and reducing their own political responsibility for it by making it the responsibility of a private delegate. It could backfire if the private operators are shown to be corrupt or sloppy, because public safety is indeed at risk here. That has been mentioned a couple of times this evening by other members of this House.

It's not beyond the realm of possibility that private operators may be susceptible to bribes or other inducements from people who badly need licences for work or other purposes. This possibility increases if the staff are poorly paid.

Initially, the OPSEU collective agreement requires current employees to be offered jobs at no less than 85% of their current pay. Over time, however, especially if the privatization takes place in a way that makes it hard to unionize, these conditions could deteriorate. I'll refer to that a little later.

While user fees and selling of licence-holder information to third parties are both features of the current system, one can imagine the government making it easy for private operators to raise fees substantially. They let the new owners, for example, of Highway 407 raise tolls within months of its sale. They did this to get a higher price for the treasury. While this may benefit the taxpayer, in the long run it increases costs to the direct user. Interestingly enough, the direct user is this same taxpayer. So you can get it out of one pocket or you can get it out of the other pocket, but it's the same person wearing the pair of pants.

An October 30 story in the London Free Press says that some unregistered and unregulated truck driver training schools do a very poor job and increase their fees if they discover a student is there on a federal grant. The Ontario Trucking Association says, "There are ... few, if any, legal requirements on how they"—the unregistered schools—"do the training and the qualifications of their instructors." That should be reason enough for some concern, anxiety and alarm where this bill is concerned.

A September 28 story in the St Catharines Standard says the province is cracking down on driving schools. Minister David Turnbull says the ministry is concerned about the possibility of fraudulent certificates being sold to new drivers. In Quebec, the employee of a private con-

tractor involved in licence issuing—not driver testing—gave out driver's licence information to the Hells Angels. They used this to track people they later shot, including Michel Auger. Three people were murdered and four survived murder attempts.

A 1998 MTO study found that drivers who took an approved driver training course had a 45% higher crash rate than those who didn't.

We in this caucus obviously will be opposing this bill for the reasons I've just outlined. The government thinks the solution to long waiting times for driver exams is to privatize. That will mean examiners who are poorly paid may be unreliable. This could have serious implications for road safety.

With private driving schools under investigation for poor performance by the ministry and private truck driving training schools being accused of ripping off their students, the ministry might want to fix the private parts of the system before throwing more of its customers to the wolves. In Quebec, the Hells Angels got hold of driver records through a private contractor and used the information to track down people whom they shot. Is that the example we want to follow in Ontario?

The bill allows the imposition of new user fees on the public. It also allows the private operator access to ministry databases. This sounds like the 407 all over again.

To put this bill into perhaps a little bit larger context, I want to focus now on the question that has been raised here in the House and has been raised previously and is being talked about out there, this issue of private versus public and whether in fact we should be going down that road.

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The member across the way at one point this evening asked for those of us on this side to provide examples of where the private sector delivery of previously publicly delivered services in this province has in fact turned out to be more expensive, more damaging or more detrimental or caused problems for the public in accessing service and participating in the life of this province, whether it be economic, social or for health reasons.

One example I put out to you, Mr Speaker—and you were here when this was done and you remember the arguments that were made—was the dismantling of a very important and central service to those who live and carry out work in northern Ontario, and that was norOntair, a service that was run very efficiently, very effectively and very safely under the public sector, under the Ontario Northland Transportation Commission, a service that was recognized across the country as one of the best available, making air transport available to almost every community of any size in northern Ontario, connected and coordinated so that when there was a pickup and you landed in a bigger centre, you landed within minutes of being able to get on to another plane to take you to Toronto or Winnipeg and to move on from there, if that was your desire.

The government of the day argued that if we got the government out of the business of providing this service,

the private sector would simply come in and pick up the slack, would move into the room that was vacated and deliver a service that was as coordinated and connected, that would offer a service that was as efficient and cost-effective to the public as anything norOntair could provide.

Alas, the reality of today is that most of those smaller communities particularly that were serviced so well by norOntair find themselves without air service. The ones that do have service provided now by the private sector have it very sporadically, have it in a way that doesn't connect it as effectively as norOntair did to those other services that took them on beyond some of the bigger communities in northern Ontario.

There's a perfect example of where this government, in its drive to privatize and to downsize government and its involvement and to reduce the so-called cost to government of providing services to people, wiped out norOntair with the expectation that the private sector would come in and take over and in fact it didn't happen. We're worse off because of that. That's just one example.

Another example of course is highway maintenance and the provision of highway maintenance. My colleague M. Bisson last night spoke at length in this place about those issues, how the argument was made by this government that turning the care and maintenance of our highways over to the private sector would be more cost-effective, that they would do a better job and on and on, when in fact we know, those of us who live in northern Ontario, that is not the truth. We have more instances now in the north of highways being closed because it's just too expensive for the private sector to bring in the kind of equipment and people needed to keep highways open when there's a major storm that goes on for a significant period of time compared to when the Ministry of Transportation was overseeing that, I might say in partnership with the private sector. Those highways were kept open most of the time. It was the rare exception, driving up those northern highways, that you would find a highway closed. Now it's a regular occurrence in my part of the province.

Not to speak of the auditor's report on the provision of provincial highway maintenance and the fact that he points out that it has cost up to, in some instances, 20% more to provide the kind of service that we now experience in the north delivered by the private sector than it did under the public sector, which debunks any argument that the members across the way might make that in fact providing services to the public of Ontario using the private sector is more cost-efficient and cost-effective. In the example of our highway maintenance, that's turned out just not to be true.

Just to reflect again for a minute on comments that I made earlier, Highway 407 is also another example of this government turning over a public piece of infrastructure to a private operator who then in turn increases the cost of those tolls so that on the one hand, yes, you get a one-time lump of money into the government to do some things that perhaps you need to do. In this instance,

this government, of course, used that to continue to give money away by way of the tax break, only to then turn around and have to allow the private sector operator, in order to cover his costs, to charge ever-increasing tolls on that particular highway.

I don't want people to get me wrong here. I think there are some things that the private sector does well and should be allowed to do and should be encouraged to do, and we should be supporting them in doing it. As we look at what's happening in the economy today and the softening of the business environment that we now find ourselves in, there are lots of things that this government could be doing to support private sector interests that are appropriate in this province. That support is desperately needed, but the government is reticent, or doesn't have the capacity, to respond and to be helpful in that way. So they continue down the line of this privatization scheme and say, "We're doing enough. That's what we're doing, that's our contribution, and we don't need to do any more."

But there are many things—many things—in the interest of public safety, in the interest of public health, in the interest of making sure that everybody is included and involved in the interest of protecting the basic rights and dignity of individuals that the public sector should—and in my view, have to—do, and that actually the public sector does better and in a more cost-effective way. There are some things, particularly when you consider, as in this bill, the protection of public safety, the ever-increasing need for government to be vigilant where public safety is concerned, that government delivers and should be accountable and responsible for delivery of. This is, in effect, a perfect example of that.

In my mind, instead of announcing ever more privatizations of public services and ever more tax cuts, this government should be sitting down with people and consulting them and starting to develop a long-term process and planning process so that we might in fact get our heads around some of the challenges that confront us today as government, as the world changes as we speak, so that we're not knee-jerk responding to very important issues, that we're not simply operating out of ideological leaning, but that we are in fact doing everything possible, whether it's in the private sector and supporting the private sector in the delivery of a healthy and robust economy or whether it's in the delivery of public services, such as protecting the safety of drivers on highways and everybody else who finds themselves in need of the use of our public transportation systems.

This bill is an example of how this government plans to stimulate—and has been stimulating—the economy. Perhaps a little later I can expand on that, but for the moment, suffice it to say we will be voting against this bill because we don't think it's in the public interest.

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The Acting Speaker: Thank you. The member's time has expired. Comments and questions?

Mr Galt: I was intrigued by the presentation I was just listening to from the member for Sault Ste Marie. I

hate to disappoint him, but that was one of the poorest speeches that I've heard in this Legislature and it was disappointing in the content. I think he could have put more into that; he could have stuck more to the topic.

Nevertheless, in spite of that disappointment, I was hearing him talk about things like privacy. Well, if he looks at the bill and he reads that bill, he'll find it in there. There's the freedom of information and the right to privacy. Part of that legislation moves with it, and whether you're in public or in private, that right to privacy is there. They'll also be required to have a privacy commissioner in such an organization that would be carrying out these tests. So I think that's null and void.

He talked a bit about safety. If he'd been listening to the presentation I made earlier this evening, he'd understand that safety is a big issue with this government. We're very concerned about it. Just have a look at what's going on with our highways, the safest highways in Canada, second safest in North America, second only to Massachusetts. Some of the things we've been doing with those highways are putting in centre barriers on our four-lane highways, putting in rumble strips, putting in cat eyes, spending more money on highway construction than has ever been spent in any one year in the history of this province. We've been doing that consistently. The highways in northern Ontario, in your area—you should be appreciating that—have never been in better condition. You realize that. Winter and summer they're in better condition. That's the kind of safety record that this government has, and we intend to continue with it.

Mr Alvin Curling (Scarborough-Rouge River): I just wanted a few minutes to comment about this bill.

Here this government goes again. It wants to privatize everything. As a matter of fact, when they came into power they wanted to abdicate their responsibility as a government to govern properly. So what did they do? They talk about delegate, but really what they mean is to abdicate, and furthermore, their delegating means to sub-delegate. As a matter of fact, I don't see how this will help in any situation.

The bottom line basically, any time we privatize anything and the private sector has taken over, is for them to make money. It's not about safety or what have you. I think it's about making money. So what you have done, you've maybe cut costs in all kinds of corners.

You wonder, for instance, if this government hasn't learned. You can see in Walkerton what happened there, and it speaks for itself. They're stumbling all over. As a matter of fact, we had deaths in that process. It's awful what happened there, privatizing water. They try to privatize prisons, and the same thing's going to happen.

The bottom line is all about making money, and here we are going ahead again to privatize this section of the motor vehicle issuance of licences. We see the review that's going to go on about how we have security. Even in airports, although it doesn't fall under them, we have to realize that much of that was privatized, and what has been done? The bottom line again is to make money, so

what they have done is recruited individuals who are not well trained.

I think this government will wake up one day and realize that selling off its responsibility—that's why democracy is such an important role in here, because the next time the election comes around, the people will understand that they don't want to govern. They want to pass on most of what is happening to their friends. Maybe it's about making money for their friends, not at all about protecting the interests of the public which they should be governing. I think they should take another look at what they're doing and start to govern.

Mr Chudleigh: The member for Toronto someplace didn't speak too much about the elegant remarks from the member for Sault Ste Marie, but he did mention a number of times what the government was doing in privatizing many of the services.

I thank the member for Kingston, who wanted to hear my comments. I'm sure the member for Kingston is as upset as I am at his former city, the city of Kingston, of which he was mayor at one time, and did a marvellous job, I understand. They perhaps should have put a little more money into sewage treatment plants, because they are still dumping raw sewage into Lake Ontario. I'm sure you're as upset about that as I am. But if you had done a little more when you were mayor perhaps, who knows what might have happened.

Mr Martin from Sault Ste Marie was eloquent, as usual. He seems to have taken on a new aura since he's shucked his robes and become a broader-speaking member. He certainly recognized that there are some parts—this is a huge movement for this member—of the public service that perhaps should be privatized. I think I heard him say that. I think that's a great step forward for a member of the NDP.

Interjection.

Mr Chudleigh: We can check Hansard in about a half an hour. I'm sure I heard you say that, member for Sault Ste Marie, and I congratulate you on it because I think that's a huge step forward for you, to admit that there are some parts of the public service that should be privatized.

This is one of them. You see, taxpayers deserve to have the money that they give to government respected, and that's what this government does. It respects the money that taxpayers—

The Acting Speaker: The member's time has expired. Comments and questions?

Mr Sean G. Conway (Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke): I just want to make the point, and I want to agree with the member for Halton, that taxpayers, who in this case have \$925 million taken out of their pockets annually by the provincial government for motor vehicle registration and other fees, should be getting more value for the nearly \$1 billion they are paying than they've been getting over the last number of years. That's my basic complaint: that we are, as motorists, paying a buck to the provincial government and we're getting about 15 cents' worth of service.

Mr Chudleigh: We're changing that.

Mr Conway: Yes, you're changing it, and I will say again, as somebody who represents rural Ontario, I expect that for the rural parts of my constituency, the service, which has been deteriorating for the last number of years, will get only worse. I've got the CCAC example of the last five years to make that point. I may be wrong, and I'm quite prepared to be proven wrong. But I want to say again tonight that in this fiscal year, the Ontario provincial government will take \$2.3 billion in the gasoline tax, will take another \$550 million to \$600 million in the fuel tax, and we will take \$925 million approximately in road-related fees, totaling \$3.8 billion. Those are taxes. We are not putting anywhere near those kinds of monies back into the highway program or things like driver testing.

Much is said about the highway construction program. It is 20% less this year than last year, according to Mr Flaherty's budget. No more than 40% of the road-related taxes are going—

The Acting Speaker: The member's time has expired. The member for Sault Ste Marie has two minutes to respond.

Mr Martin: I want to thank the members for Northumberland, Scarborough-Rouge River, Halton and Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke for participating in this discussion this evening.

I want to ask the member for Northumberland if he ever simply considers himself just a great big bag of wind, because certainly that's the way he presents in this place. I want to say to him, in response to his comments earlier about the jobs that this government has created, that most of the jobs this government has created have been jobs that they've killed in the public sector and then divvied up into part-time positions and then announced and taken credit for in terms of new jobs initiated and put in place. Any fool could do that.

The member for Halton suggested that I said there are things that the private sector should be doing that are actually in the public realm. That's not what I said. Just to clarify it for him and to make sure that he's not confusing the public out there, what I did say, because I have it written down here, is that there are some things the private sector does well, and it's too bad this government doesn't support them in that and provide some service and some help, particularly when you consider what's happening with the economy out there right now. All the indicators are indicating that now that the US economy is going into the tank, the Ontario economy is rapidly following suit, which suggests that what we have been saying in here, that this government has been simply riding the coattails of the US economy, is in fact true.

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I also went on to say that there are many things, and I mean many things, that the public sector should and has to do. In fact, there are many things that, if it hadn't been for the public sector, wouldn't be done, and that the public sector actually does better and in a more cost-effective way.

The Acting Speaker: Further debate?

Mr Garfield Dunlop (Simcoe North): I have to say it's great to be back in the House after the September 11 catastrophe or terrorist attacks in the United States. We're hearing the comments already in the last couple of days and the debate's open and there's criticism on both sides, but on the other hand I think it's so important that we have this opportunity. So many places in the world don't have this opportunity. I just wanted to make that short comment on the fact that we are very special here and I think we should appreciate it.

As the honourable members know, our government believes that for the most part the proper role of the government is to manage public services rather than just strictly deliver them. In our 1999 Blueprint document and again in this year's speech from the throne, we promised to explore alternative approaches to service delivery.

Alternative service delivery of public services is an important part of the government's commitment to accountability. We have also pledged to provide high-quality services to Ontario taxpayers while ensuring they receive value for their money. Through alternative service, we ensure that the services received by taxpayers are modern, safe, efficient and cost-effective.

I can tell you that my cabinet colleague, Transportation Minister Brad Clark, has worked hard to make this a reality. I want to congratulate Brad for bringing forth this bill. He was a new member of our government in 1999. Brad has worked very hard. He started out in his role as parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Health and has worked with Brian's Law. I'm glad to see that as the Minister of Transportation he is moving forward with a number of projects and initiatives. I'm pleased to be able to say a few words about this bill this evening as well.

In this province there are currently more than eight million licensed drivers out of a population of 11.5 million. Growth in population is estimated at an additional two million people by the year 2015. There are currently more than nine million registered vehicles in our province. These numbers continue to grow every year. I think you can see that in our highway system. No matter where you are in the province, there seems to be more and more traffic at all times. There are more and more drivers, and more vehicles as well.

A large part of that growth is due to the overwhelming economic success of our province. I don't think anybody would argue with the fact that we've had great economic growth, and we as a government like to take a lot of credit for the success in the economy that we've seen over the last five or six years. It demonstrates that this government has put the right economic building blocks in place by focusing on sound financial management, a competitive economy, jobs, and certainly growth.

As our population continues to grow, we will find increased demand for driver services. The Ministry of Transportation is responding to an established need. For these reasons, I am very pleased today to lend my support

to the Improving Customer Service for Road Users Act, 2001.

This bill is designed to improve customer service to the public by permitting the Minister of Transportation to transfer the delivery of some road user services and programs to other providers. At the same time, the proposed legislation would still mandate the minister to protect the public interest.

The government would monitor new service providers to ensure they comply with existing and future legislation. As well, it would rigorously audit the performance of all new service providers to ensure that the public is receiving services that are safe, efficient, effective, consistent and, of course, fair. The bill includes important provisions to protect the privacy of individuals and to safeguard the confidentiality of their personal information.

Under the proposed legislation, alternative service providers would be required to provide the provisions of the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act with respect to their actions on behalf of MTO. Additionally, alternative service providers would be mandated to create the position of privacy officer. The privacy officer would be responsible for securing all customer records related to the delegated business. I am very pleased to advise the members of the House that this legislation has received accolades from Ontario's own Information and Privacy Commissioner.

I want to stress that as we transfer the delivery of services to other providers, road safety in this province will not be compromised. Indeed, the safety of all road users remains a high priority for this government and for the Ministry of Transportation. In fact, in terms of road safety, I am pleased to let the honourable members know that Ontario has moved to first place in all of Canada. In fact, in North America, Ontario is second only to the state of Massachusetts.

When I heard comments from the member from Northumberland, he talked about the barrier they'd created on Highway 401 out in Northumberland county, and MTO has done the same on Highway 400. These are major construction projects costing literally hundreds and hundreds of thousands of dollars, simply for the fact that we can create the barrier to make it much safer for people travelling on the 400 and the 401. I know those are on-going projects, as they extend that barrier in the north, easterly and westerly directions.

Even though there are more vehicles and licensed drivers on roads than ever before, Ontario has the best record in Canada, with the fewest number of fatalities per 10,000 licensed drivers. The priority this government has placed on road safety in the past several years has contributed to this important achievement. We have implemented new road user safety programs, including an immediate 90-day suspension for drivers who have been drinking, the impoundment of any vehicle being driven by a person who is suspended under the Criminal Code for driving-related convictions, the impoundment of critically defective commercial vehicles and higher

finances and sanctions for a wide range of offences. Of course, I'm very pleased that when we get to Bill 131, the private member's bill I introduced last year on the ignition interlock, it will add another dimension for people who drive under the influence of alcohol. That too will improve the amount of safety on the roads of our province.

Our fatality rate in 1999 dropped to 1.10 per 10,000 licensed drivers, marking the 11th consecutive year of improvement. It goes without saying, however, that even one road fatality in our province is one too many. Clearly, road safety is a priority that is being addressed through a commitment by MTO to the highest standards possible in developing and delivering effective programs.

Part of delivering effective programs is providing quality customer service. The ministry has already made some significant customer service improvements that will address the growing population of Ontario drivers. MTO has hired more than 300 driver examination staff on a temporary basis. The ministry has also opened temporary driver testing facilities and expanded the hours of operation at several provincial testing centres. As a result, MTO was able to offer more road tests and we reduced the average waiting time province-wide for driver examinations.

But it was also clear that we needed to do more. That is why the transfer of driver examination services to a new service provider is being considered as the first major initiative under this bill. It is clear that alternative service delivery of driver examinations would bring innovation and greater flexibility to the way the services are delivered. Under a new service provider, MTO is committed to reducing the wait time for road tests to six weeks or less across our province.

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As the honourable members know, this government has already taken a number of measures to address the growing service pressures around driver examinations. In particular, we have sought to reduce the long waiting times faced by people in some parts of the province when booking their driver exams. We have made clear progress in this regard, but we also believe there is further room for improving service delivery.

By transferring the ministry's driver examination business to another service provider, MTO would build on the customer service improvements that have already been achieved and offer enhanced service to the public in the future.

I mentioned earlier the support my cabinet colleague received from Ontario's Information and Privacy Commissioner. We are proud of this support. Similarly, support was received from other parties interested in protecting the public interest and improving customer service for new drivers.

Canada Safety Council president Emile Therien said, "Privatizing driver testing makes a lot of sense. It will improve safety by providing testing when it is needed. Driver testing is a government function which can and should be privatized in the interests of safety."

The Insurance Bureau of Canada had similar praise. Mark Yakabuski, the bureau's Ontario vice-president, says, "Allowing alternative service delivery for driver examinations will solidify the enormous success that Ontario's graduated licensing program has already achieved in its few short years of existence. We hope that other jurisdictions will emulate Ontario's leadership in this important area."

The Ministry of Transportation has done its homework and has studied how driver exam services have been improved by the private sector elsewhere. Jurisdictions like Alberta and Michigan report high customer satisfaction. MTO learned from those jurisdictions' successes and from their failures. As a result, we can be confident that our made-in-Ontario solution for the delivery of driver exams would reflect the best of all experiences.

Although the transfer would affect many MTO staff, we can also be confident that a new service provider would need and want to take advantage of the considerable skills and professionalism of our existing staff. A new provider of driver examination services would need a flexible, multi-skilled workforce, people who can perform in a high-demand environment with new and changing relationships. Job offers, as required under the collective agreements of those affected staff, will be a mandatory part of any contract with a service provider and many MTO driver examination staff may find job opportunities with the new employer.

As the Minister of Transportation advised the House when he introduced the bill for first reading, the proposed legislation has been written to address a number of important issues. For example, as part of the driver examination model, provisions would be in place to ensure that driver testing in Ontario continues to be fair and objective. As well, checks and balances would be in place to ensure that drivers who receive a driver's licence from the province continue to be required to meet Ontario's high standards for driving skills, as well as knowledge of the rules of the road.

Clearly, under a new service provider, the benefits to our driver examination programs would be wide-ranging. For instance, the new system would provide support to, and enhance, Ontario's graduated licensing system. In itself, the graduated licensing system has been an unparalleled success story since it was introduced six years ago. A new service provider would help this program continue to build on its successful track record.

To ensure that driver testing in Ontario is delivered consistently in all parts of the province, the ministry would seek a single service provider to deliver driver testing services province-wide. Taxpayers would know exactly who is responsible for providing these services and who is accountable for their timeliness, cost and quality.

Under this new service delivery model, MTO would continue to play a vital role in the licensing of drivers on the province's roads. The ministry would establish the standards and curriculum for driver licensing. It would also train the service provider's trainers. And MTO

would ensure the service provider's compliance with all of its legal and contractual obligations.

As the service manager, the ministry would continue to develop policy, legislation and regulations on driver examination services, just as it does today. Moreover, the government would continue to set regulated fees, including the fees charged for driver testing.

Under the new service delivery model, the service provider could elect to offer new, value-added services to the public and would have the right to determine what fees it would charge for those services. However, those services would first require approval by the Ministry of Transportation before they could be implemented.

As I said earlier, alternative service delivery is all about serving customers better and finding more flexible and innovative ways to deliver the services. It's about dealing with growing demand in ways that are smarter and more effective. The Ministry of Transportation will continue to be responsible for establishing quality standards throughout Ontario's transportation sector and for ensuring that every driver who receives a licence is qualified to hold one.

I want to make a few comments about some of the questions around Bill 65; for example, why did the government introduce Bill 65 in the first place? It's partially because we're committed to improving customer service. The Common Sense Revolution, as I said earlier, and the Blueprint promised taxpayers a smaller, more efficient government. With this legislation, we are keeping our promise. The bill is designed to improve customer service without compromising safety. The legislation gives the Minister of Transportation the authority to transfer the delivery of some road user programs and services to other providers. Under the legislation, the minister would continue to safeguard and protect the public interest.

The legislation supports the government's role as a manager, rather than as a deliverer, of public services. The bill reflects the government's intention to focus on setting quality standards and monitoring and rigorously auditing service providers to ensure compliance with all obligations.

Why is MTO exploring the transfer of driver examination services to the private sector? First of all, we are committed to improving customer services. Without compromising safety, transferring the business of driver examinations would improve customer service. Road test wait times would be reduced to six weeks or less across our province. We would continue to set fees for driver exam services. We will seek one service provider to deliver driver examinations to ensure consistent delivery of services. We will continue to safeguard the public interest by regularly monitoring and auditing the service provider. We will further protect the public interest by requiring the service provider to abide by the provisions of the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act. We will continue to establish and enforce quality standards to make sure Ontario drivers continue to be highly qualified.

Why is the ministry potentially outsourcing selected functions of MTO's back office in Kingston? Again, without compromising safety, transferring selected Kingston back office functions will improve service delivery. We will issue RFPs to seek service providers. We will continue to safeguard the public interest by setting standards and regularly monitoring the service providers. We will further protect the public interest by requiring the service providers to abide, as I said earlier, by the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act.

There have been a lot of cases working with the public, the private sector and MTO in the past. I know both of the opposition parties have worked, over the past 20 years, with the private sector in the maintenance of our highways. In all three parties, that was an agreement MTO had with a number of different service providers. As well, we count on the private sector to construct our roads and they do a great job across our province. As to the rules that exist today and the contractors that maintain our highways today, I beg to differ with the member from Sault Ste Marie. I think they're doing an excellent job across our province. I travel a number of the major highways on a frequent basis, particularly Highway 400, and it's always in immaculate condition as far as I'm concerned.

We have done a lot of work in the past with the private sector. There's nothing wrong with the private sector. They do good work. The words "private sector" are not dirty words, although I gather that from a lot of comments that are made from across the floor.

Our government remains committed to examining the province's assets and the services it delivers to the public. If there's a better way to deliver those services, rest assured we intend to pursue it. This bill will get us closer to that goal and I ask for the full support of this House on second reading and hope to see it passed eventually and approved by all three parties.

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The Acting Speaker: Comments and questions?

Mr Conway: The member makes a very predictable—and I'm sure he believes everything he said—argument. I was just reminded as he was talking about a couple of things, and I certainly have no problem with the private sector; it has an extremely important role to play and we've engaged the private sector over the years to do all kinds of things. I guess my complaint and my concern continues to be, we have been picking the pockets of the motoring public to the tune of billions of dollars a year and we just simply will not put anything like the required amount of that money back into the services for which the tax or fee was constructed in the first place. So we've now got the sorry state of driver testing that we've got.

As I hear my friends opposite talk about their belief in the security and privacy protections, good luck. I have no reason to believe it will happen. I said yesterday and I'll repeat now, look at the POSO scam: right in front of us our friends at finance and Wood Gundy thumbed their

noses. We couldn't have cared a tinker's damn about a very serious violation.

I just wonder what John Ashcroft might think about a scheme where the ABC Corp decides to get their hands on driver testing. It would be very interesting after September 11 to see whether or not there are going to be any concerns about issues like that.

The Energy Act was passed here a couple of years ago and we have all kinds of sanctions and rules around electricity marketers. The enforcement? Virtually none. It's just a harem-scarem, catch-as-catch-can world out there. The act looks good; the speeches are wonderful. It's like water polo: you'd better not look at what's going underneath the waterline. But let us all stand up and mouth the bromides, because God forbid that we as legislators would actually be held accountable for what it is we say, along with the Tooth Fairy, is supposed to happen.

Mr Galt: I was particularly impressed with the content and the delivery of the speech that was just made. Here we are; the member for Simcoe North has just presented that 20-minute presentation. It's been a long time in this House since we've heard such excellent content from a presentation. He talked about the service providers out there, some of the service providers that already are looking after various things for government.

I think of the days in this House when we first started having some of the highway maintenance done by private service providers and the kerfuffle in the opposition ranks and the carrying on. I look at the maintenance of our highways today and I don't hear any complaints coming from the opposition. These are private providers. They made a lot of noise at that time, but they're not saying too much at this point in time.

He went on to talk about the private sector—brilliant speech. He talked about the private sector, that it's not a dirty word. Well, it certainly isn't and "profit" isn't a dirty word either. We're talking competition versus monopoly. We can get in there and the public sector can compete; we're not saying they can't compete. He talked about the quality—I thought it was excellent near the end there—of the 400-series highways. Have a look.

Interjection.

Mr Galt: I'm sure the member for Kingston and the Islands, as he drives through Northumberland, is impressed with the quality of the 401. He's certainly not impressed with the quality of what happens in Kingston when the sanitary sewer overflows and goes into the Rideau River. He was the mayor of that fine city and I'm sure he's not very proud of that. But he would be proud of the 401 as he travels through Northumberland, as he travels anywhere, from Kingston right to Toronto. The highway is in excellent shape, not like the condition it was in when their party was in office.

Mr Peters: I'm pleased to rise and listen to a member who continually touts the ideological horse blinders that this government wears when it comes to privatization.

Let's just look at some of this track record. The auditor so rightly pointed out in his 1999 report some of

the concerns that he expressed about privatization. Let's look at Walkerton. That's a great thing to have on your hands, the Walkerton tragedy and the pressure that you put on for privatization.

Let's talk about meat inspection and what you did to the Ministry of Agriculture by privatizing the meat inspectors. Look at the rise of illegal abattoirs that has taken place across this province. Let's look at meat grading, another thing that you privatized through the Ministry of Agriculture. What happens now? The price of hogs goes up, the index goes down. You've just made Michael McCain a very happy man. You're really doing a great job for the private sector.

The auditor pointed out the issue of road maintenance and privatization. Your vision of jails; why don't you look to the States and look at what's happened to jails? Privatization hasn't worked.

Look at what you forced on hospitals through privatization in this privatization in this province, whether it be laboratory services, housekeeping or food services; again, your drive for privatization.

Education: look at what you're doing there in your support for the private schools in this province.

Look at some of the legislation that's been introduced. Nutrient management and food safety are two examples. What's the common line all through those pieces of legislation? Alternative delivery of services; ie, privatization.

Health: look what you've done to the people of this province by delisting services, where you're forcing them to go into a two-tier system.

Your track record on privatization is abysmal. Why don't you support the public service? You're constantly attacking the teachers of this province. You're constantly attacking OPSEU in this province. Shame on you.

Mr Martin: We again, from the other side of the House, have heard a defence of privatizing anything that moves in this province. There are so many things that we as government have responsibility for and should be held accountable for that this government seems to be not interested in or doesn't understand.

If they wanted to delve into the intelligence of doing what they're doing in so many instances over the last five or six years that has led to putting at risk the public life and public health of this province, they have lots of examples around the world where privatization has led to less than satisfactory results. For example, in some instances the provision of power has turned out to be inconsistent and not dependable. These jurisdictions are now looking at ways that they might get back into some public ownership. The only problem is that when you turn these very valuable services over to the private sector, then you learn the lesson that so many other jurisdictions have learned: that it doesn't work, that it is more expensive and that at the end of the day the public is further at risk. It's very hard to unscramble the egg.

Some of the things that governments have done in this province in the name of trying to do things better, improve and have government evolve were always changeable by subsequent governments, so that it might reflect

the reality—the new reality often—of the day that they were in. But this government is doing things, and this is another example of it, that at the end of the day are going to be very difficult to fix once they put them in place.

The Acting Speaker: The member for Simcoe North has two minutes to respond.

Mr Dunlop: I want to thank the members for Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke, Northumberland, Elgin-Middlesex-London and Sault Ste Marie for their comments.

Mr Garry J. Guzzo (Ottawa West-Nepean): Their helpful comments.

Mr Dunlop: Their fair comments. I think it's fair to say that I can understand why some of the people in the Liberal Party are having a bad week. You've seen your national leader show no leadership. The leadership surrounding the events in the United States has been directed and led by the Premier of Ontario. So I can see you're disappointed this week.

As far as your comments on privatization are concerned, I really can't understand this hatred you have of the private sector. Your former leader, David Peterson, started government agency liquor stores, and I thought that was a good move at the time. Minister Sterling is doing that today. The government agency liquor stores that Premier Peterson put in have worked well. They're run by the private sector. I don't see anything wrong with that.

There's a lot of interest being advanced in this program and in using the private sector to help a lot of small businesses. I have no problem with someone earning a profit. I have no problem with the private sector building and maintaining highways. If they can operate the driver examination centres, so be it. I think it'll work well, and I have confidence in the private sector that it will do that. I don't know of anything the government does anywhere that is run more efficiently than the private sector can do it. I think they deserve a chance, and for that reason I'm supporting this legislation 100%.

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The Acting Speaker: Further debate?

Mr Lalonde: I'm going to split my time with the member for Kingston and the Islands.

Bill 65 is called "privatizing road safety." I tend to call it, "Privatization could become risky to Ontarians." Let me state clearly that Dalton McGuinty and the Ontario Liberal caucus oppose Bill 65. We oppose it because there has been no guarantee of safety when this government decides to privatize. The Harris government is moving ahead once again with privatization of services without really analyzing the effects on Ontarians. Every time this government does this, they send out press releases stating how much money will be saved by the taxpayer, but they never mention how much it will cost the individual.

Let me tell you that the Provincial Auditor is not fooled by this line. In his 1999 report, he showed that privatization of the maintenance of our highways has not saved a single cent and in fact has resulted in significant

increases. Besides this, it put the safety of Ontarians at risk.

Let me tell you what privatization has done in my riding. On November 22, 1999, I brought to the Minister of Transportation's attention that prior to privatization of highway maintenance, each year MTO maintenance crews were on duty 24 hours a day as of November 1. But since privatization, maintenance crews must be out on our highways only 35 minutes after receiving a call from MTO. Because of this, we are seeing more accidents and, unfortunately, like the one a few years ago on the 417 near Casselman, privatization has caused two fatalities.

Where there is public interest, there should be government interest. I am very concerned that the privatizing of driver testing will result in reduced services for rural and northern residents. Will the four driver testing centres in my riding alone stay open?

The private sector is there to make a buck. I have already received a number of calls in my riding office due to the lack of time available for driver testing exams. I do believe, though, that driver testing services can be improved while keeping them public. As in other areas, such as the environment, meat inspection and construction site inspection, this government must hire more employees to serve the needs of Ontarians.

I also wonder if privatization of driver testing services will have the same impact on my riding as the privatization of radiology clinics. DiagnostiCare, a private company from Alberta, bought up all five clinics in my riding—140 in Ontario—and now they're trying to close them all down because they say they don't make any money, or they will sell the licences at a high cost. They want my constituents to go to Ottawa clinics for these services. Not only does this cost the government more money, because often patients have to be transported by ambulance, but this is not the answer to this problem as we have no public transportation and many seniors who need these services often do without them, which then becomes more expensive in health care costs.

We also have been told by our doctors that they will leave our rural communities if they do not have the services they require to serve their patients.

I encourage this government to reconsider their decision to privatize driver testing. This is nothing but a money grab. I am worried that although the basic fees will be set by the government, many people will be pressured into purchasing additional services offered by these private companies in order to pass the test. Also, do you not think it would be in the best interests of these private driver testing centres to have students fail the test and have to take a second test and pay again?

In 1961 the Conservative government put an end to private driver testing facilities to put a stop to corrupt private testing operations. I encourage this government to keep the driver testing centres as they are now, but they must ensure they are properly staffed to serve the public.

Mr John Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands): I'm very pleased to get up on this bill as well. It never ceases

to amaze me how this government will never admit to anything, even things that are purely factual. Today we had an instance in the estimates committee, for example, when I asked the Minister of Health about CCAC funding in the Kingston area, where last year some \$27 million was spent and this year only \$25 million was spent. I asked him, "Is it not \$2 million less that you're spending this year?" He refused to admit that.

It's exactly the same with respect to this bill. I'm sure there are many individuals out there who might say to themselves, "Wasn't this the same bill they talked about last year, Bill 137?" And of course the people are right. In many ways this is almost the same bill we talked about last year. The reason that bill is not yet law is that it hadn't been given second reading when the session was prorogued, and so they had to start again. So here we are again.

Now, there are some changes to Bill 65, as opposed to what was contained in Bill 137. I'm sure people out there might say to themselves, "Why is the opposition always taking one approach and the government another approach, and does anything ever change?" I can tell you that things have changed. Bill 65 has dealt with many of the things we complained about that were contained in Bill 137 and are no longer there. We still do not agree with the general concept of the bill: the privatizing of driver testing services. But some of the major objections we in the opposition talked about—and I'm sure there are people out there who might think that whenever the opposition says anything the government doesn't take to it—in effect were listened to in this particular case. I'm not sure whether it was our talking or that the government realized the error of its ways, but it did make some changes to Bill 65.

Bill 137, you may recall, was a complete blank cheque to basically privatize all MTO services and safety services. Now at least we're only talking about driver testing services. There's a big difference there. The government hasn't given up on this idea that it may at some point in time in the future bring in the privatization of other road safety responsibilities, but this bill is much more limited in scale than Bill 137. So even though we don't agree with the concept of the bill, the opposition to the bill and hopefully those of us in opposition who spoke to it, had something to do with the fact that this bill was changed.

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There's another one. In Bill 137, the private testing facility operators were in effect allowed to charge whatever fee they wanted. That's the way the bill was set up. This current bill specifically states that the government sets the fees. I would say the public has won on that. The other method, which was indicated in Bill 137, was wide open-ended. There was really no government control over what fees could be charged. At least now this bill specifically limits it to the fact that the government sets the fees. They still can be whatever they want to charge, but at least there is a little bit more accountability than was contained in Bill 137.

As well, Bill 65 controls the private sector's use of private driver information to a much greater extent than Bill 137. Rather than the government coming in here and being honest about it and saying, "We have the same bill as Bill 137 that we had last year and we realize that you in opposition do not agree with the general concept of the bill, but as a result of representations that you in opposition have made," and perhaps other groups as well, "we have made the following changes to give greater protection to the general public." Did they do that? No.

It seems to me, having been here for six years, that it is almost impossible for this government to ever admit that it was wrong about anything. I've given you the example of this bill. I gave you the other example as to what happened with respect to the CCAC funding in my particular area, which has affected the services to a lot of vulnerable individuals who are coming out of hospitals and will not have those services available because there is actually a budget shortfall of \$2 million. In other words, the ministry has said, "No, we're not giving you the \$27 million that we spent for CCACs last year; we're only giving you \$25 million." The minister cannot even find it within himself to acknowledge the fact that he's giving \$2 million less.

I say to my friends opposite that if we want to have a more meaningful debate in this House on the various issues that come before us, why don't we try something totally different? Why don't you put on the line what each piece of legislation actually means and what you intend to do, and put it right out front? Then we can react to that in a much more positive and better way, because currently, the way the system is set up here, it isn't working.

The other thing that I and other members in the opposition are getting a little tired of is it seems to me that whenever a member on the government side doesn't know what else to say, they get involved in some personal attacks or personal vindictiveness. I honestly believe it behooves all of us here to respect one another and the fact that we are all elected in our own ridings, and that for whatever reason, the people of those ridings feel the person they elected here is the best to represent them at that given moment in time. I really don't believe that any kind of personal attacks of any nature whatsoever are called for in this chamber. By personally attacking other members, what we're really doing is taking something away from all of us collectively here.

Earlier today I talked about one of the implications of having a bill like Bill 65, which is all about privatization. Let's face it, I think the people of Ontario know that this current government we have, rightly or wrongly, is all about privatization. The Minister of Labour said it so well here yesterday. I looked up Hansard and I think I'm quoting him correctly. He said that the private sector can do anything better than the public sector. It's right in Hansard. I was here when he said it in the debate.

The first thing I would say to that is, if he really believes that, then that's a pretty strong condemnation of all the people who work for us here in Ontario, whether

they are here at Queen's Park or in all the various offices or who work anywhere in government. To make the blatant statement that the private sector can deliver things better than the public sector and at a cheaper cost, as he did here yesterday, I think is totally uncalled for.

I will agree there may be some services that can be delivered better privately under certain circumstances. I personally happen to believe that when we're talking about public safety issues, public safety concerns, there is an accountability aspect for us here in government, or for whichever party forms the government, to be accountable for the actions it takes in those areas. There are certain basic services, whether we're talking about protective legislation or what have you, where government absolutely is the only organization that can deliver those services, and I think this happens to be one of them.

When we give somebody the right to drive a car on the road, that is a very serious responsibility. Immediately that person potentially has the power to kill and maim people. We had better make darn sure that the person who goes out on the road has the best training and is tested in the most severe way, and that there is somebody ultimately accountable for that. The more you privatize things, the less accountability there is in the system.

I know all governments—at the federal level as well—have developed these mechanisms of setting up these arm's-length transactions or arm's-length organizations that are no longer accountable to the Legislature, so you can't ask any questions about them here. Our millennium fund is a perfect example; we call it here the innovation trust fund. You may recall \$750 million has been put into the hands of an organization that's at arm's length from the province, and therefore no minister is accountable for it. You can't ask questions about it here in the House. Federally they've got the millennium fund in much the same way. I certainly don't think the federal government handled that in the best way.

What I am basically saying is that for there to be accountability in the system, it is absolutely essential that services that relate to public safety and public welfare be delivered in the public sector. That's where you get the accountability and that's where we can have a philosophical difference in a bill like this with members of the government. We can argue about that and we can discuss that in a positive fashion. We don't have to get involved in personal attacks. Perhaps on the government side we have to sometimes admit that, yes, the members of the opposition sometimes have good ideas, as obviously was the case with respect to Bill 137, when a lot of our complaints about Bill 137 were in effect incorporated in the new Bill 65. What's wrong with that? What is wrong with the government saying, "Yes, we listened to you and we've made changes to it. You may still not like the general principle, but we think we have a better bill now that in effect protects the public better than old Bill 137." Of course there seems to be some milieu or atmosphere around that I guess a government can never admit they were wrong about something, which is a very sad state of affairs, in my opinion.

There are other people who are affected by a bill like this and I want to very briefly talk about them. I am talking about those small co-ops that have been formed by basically mentally handicapped and mentally challenged people. Many of them were set up some seven or eight years ago. I know that in the Kingston area we have about five of them. They do work for the Ministry of Transportation. They shred old licences that have been discarded. They do various amounts of, to us, perhaps tedious paperwork, but it has given the people who work in these co-ops a tremendous sense of achievement. They can go to work every day. They can do something productive in their lives that they otherwise wouldn't be able to. These organizations are under severe attack with a bill like this, because there is absolutely no guarantee that the new private operators will hire these co-ops in order to continue doing that kind of work.

2110

I know that the government members will say, "We are only talking about driver testing here," But the bill in effect will allow for a greater degree of privatization with respect to road-user services.

Let me just read to you from one letter in the minute that I've got left. This is from a 21-year-old in the Kingston area. This was addressed to the Honourable David Turnbull with respect to Bill 137, but much applies to this bill as well.

"I am a 21-year-old woman with cerebral palsy and I work at a co-op. I pull staples out of documents as part of records management for MTO. I enjoy my job and want to keep it. The necessary supports for me to live in the community are here in Kingston. I just cannot pick up and relocate. With my current job, I feel that I am giving back to the community and creating a worthwhile role for myself."

That individual and 49 other individuals in my community, when a bill like this passes, are at risk of losing their jobs. The interesting thing is, from information I've received from the Association for Community Living, that these individuals, if they didn't have these jobs, would cost the system, through Community and Social Services, about \$400,000 to maintain. So (1) we are taking away the dignity of these people and (2) we are perhaps not saving any monies. It is costing the system more money. I say, government, please withdraw.

Mr Tony Ruprecht (Davenport): I listened very attentively to the members from Glengarry-Prescott-Russell and from Kingston and the Islands, and it's obvious they make a great deal of sense. Why is that? Not very far from here is the provincial savings office, within this building in fact, of the government complex. If you want to know about privatization, put it to a test. Walk over there. You'll see that people are smiling. They're very happy to get your business. You get to know them personally after awhile because they have a few minutes to discuss your items with you. You know what? There is hardly ever any line-up at the provincial savings office, hardly ever. Take the test.

Then go to a bank. I say to you, go to any bank, whether it is a big one or a small one, go to any bank. What do you find? You know what you find, because you go to the bank yourself. You know what you find: line-up after line-up. Not only that. We are not only talking about inconvenience when we are talking about privatization. It is not just inconvenience. We are talking about service. It is the service that's very important here.

Secondly, we should know why these provincial savings offices were established in the first place. You know why? Not just for convenience, no, but because the rest of Ontario, small-town Ontario, didn't have a bank. Did the big banks want to service small-town Ontario? Did they go into small-town Ontario and open up an office, open up a branch? They didn't. That's why the province had to step in; not just convenience, my friends, but service. What we are afraid of on this side are cuts in service and savings when privatization comes in.

The Acting Chair: Questions and comments? The Chair recognizes the member for Elgin-Middlesex-London.

Mr Peters: Sorry, I didn't have my jacket on. I believe that we should have some decorum in this Legislature. It is important to do that.

Hon Helen Johns (Minister without Portfolio [Health and Long-Term Care]): Take the button off.

Mr Peters: No, I have permission to wear this button. This button is in support of a young lady by the name of Dani Harder. I had unanimous consent in the House today. Dani Harder is in the Toronto marathon this weekend. Dani Harder is an example of a vibrant young lady in this province who's been abandoned by the Mike Harris government. Permission has been granted to wear this button today.

Privatization: we've seen over and over again the track record of this government that privatization in this province does not work. We've seen over and over again by this government constant attacks against the public sector in this province. Since 1867, when this great province was created, we've relied on the public servants of this province to deliver the services that our citizens demand and need. But what we've witnessed in the past six years, the dark days of this province, is an unprecedented destruction of those very services. I think that's extremely sad for what we are seeing happening.

I want to take a bit of this time right now to talk about another serious piece of destruction that this government has inflicted on the citizens of southwestern Ontario today because of the lack of funding by the Ministry of Health to the London Health Sciences Centre. Today it was announced that not 14 programs were being eliminated, but 18 programs were being eliminated, and that lies on the back of this government. The fact is that the other London members did not stand up and speak up for their constituents, and that's a real shame, because this is a hospital that deals with a wide range of services. In particular, the children's paediatric cardiology program is gone and it lies in the hands and is the fault of the Mike Harris government.

Mr Martin: I want to commend the speaker for being very focused, in particular, in his presentation here this evening with regard to this bill and the impact that it might have on the whole question of road safety in this province, because it is a particular concern in particular parts of the province; certainly his own, where we've seen many very tragic and unfortunate accidents take place. We need to do everything in our power to reduce and eliminate the risk out there to all who use our public highways. Certainly in northern Ontario that's no different, where we have miles and miles of road to be looked after, roads that are absolutely necessary for everything that we do in our everyday life. Whether it is going to work or going for health care, recreation or whatever, we need our roads to be safe; we need our roads to be looked after, and we need those who drive on those roads to be qualified to be in the care of the vehicle that they are driving. We need to ensure those people who are responsible for making sure that that in fact is the case are of the highest quality. In order to get people who are of the highest quality, I think you need to make sure that they're being trained effectively and that they're being compensated in a way that reflects the responsibility that goes with that particular job.

That's where we on this side become very concerned, because we have example after example of governments privatizing public sector operations, turning them over to companies whose prime interest isn't the safety of people, but their bottom line. How can they make a profit on the delivery of this service? That's why they're in the private sector. I say that that is a conflict of interest.

Mr Galt: Thank you very much, Mr Speaker. I listened intently to the presentations made by the member from Glengarry-Prescott-Russell and the member from Kingston and the Islands. I hate to disappoint them, and I've heard some pretty terrible speeches in here, but those were probably at the bottom of the barrel. I can't imagine. The content was just terrible.

There was a lot of talk about driver licence and testing as a public service. We have so much going on in the private sector. I think of people like our physicians, most of whom are in private practice. As they've ranted and raved about the difference between public versus private, I don't think they quite understand how much private activity goes on out there serving the public good. That's one particular example, and there are a lot of teachers in the private sector who are serving.

They go on and they talk about risks to safety. I think that's been well covered. They talked about risks to privacy. You know, there's the protection of your rights in the freedom of information, that particular bill, that's all there and in place. I don't have quite the right name just quickly, but it's all in place. They suggested there might be corruption or fraud, but this is indeed going to be extremely well protected, not to mention customer service. This is the thing that we are really looking at. It is a hallmark of this government, improving customer service. We're talking about getting away from the monopoly and looking at competition. That's when customer

service really flows forward, when individuals are competing to ensure that they have customers coming to the door. Once the customers aren't coming—they have feet and they can go in the other direction. It's so important that we improve the quality of customer service to the people of Ontario.

The Acting Speaker: The member for Kingston and the Islands has two minutes to respond.

Mr Gerretsen: I'm always interested when the member from Northumberland stands up, because he always has such tremendous class about him. To refer to other members' speeches in this House as being the bottom of the barrel, or something like that, I think is totally uncalled for. This is precisely the thing I was talking about. Can't we at least have enough respect for one another in this House so that when we listen to each other's speeches, we do not have to get into the kind of personal vendetta that this member and other members on the government side get involved in? He just talked about

exactly what I was talking about in terms of showing some dignity and respect for one another.

For him to talk about fraud—neither the member from Glengarry-Prescott-Russell nor myself talked about fraud at all. You know? If the truth be known, he wasn't even here to listen to our speeches that he talked about. So let's get something on the table: let's at least try to treat each other with dignity and respect, sir.

We on this side of the House do not believe the privatization of the driver testing services is a good idea or should happen. I also said, sir, that this Bill 65 is a great improvement over Bill 137 because you took three of the items we mainly complained about, the private information and the privatization of other driver services, out of this bill. So at least for that we thank you, because you have made a bad bill at least a little bit better, but it's still a bad bill and should not be passed.

The Acting Speaker: The clock is approaching 9:30. This House stands adjourned until 10 am tomorrow.

The House adjourned at 2122.

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

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Galt, Steve Gilchrist, John Hastings,
John R. O'Toole, Jerry J. Ouellette, Ernie Parsons
Clerk / Greffière: Tonia Grannum

CONTENTS

Wednesday 3 October 2001

SECOND READINGS

Improving Customer Service for Road Users Act, 2001, Bill 65, <i>Mr Clark</i>	
Mr Galt.....	2383, 2387, 2394, 2399 2403
Mr Peters.....	2386, 2389, 2399, 2403
Mr Martin.....	2386, 2390, 2391, 2395 2399, 2403
Mr Chudleigh.....	2386, 2395
Mr Smitherman.....	2387, 2391
Mr Beaubien.....	2390
Mr Lalonde.....	2391, 2400
Mrs Munro.....	2391
Mr Curling.....	2394
Mr Conway.....	2395, 2398
Mr Dunlop.....	2396, 2400
Mr Gerretsen.....	2400, 2404
Mr Ruprecht.....	2402
Debate deemed adjourned.....	2404

TABLE DES MATIÈRES

Mercredi 3 octobre 2001

DEUXIÈME LECTURE

Loi de 2001 sur l'amélioration des services à la clientèle offerts aux usagers de la route, projet de loi 65, <i>M. Clark</i>	
Débat présumé ajourné.....	2404