



Legislative Assembly
of Ontario
Second Session, 37th Parliament

Assemblée législative
de l'Ontario
Deuxième session, 37^e législature

**Official Report
of Debates
(Hansard)**

**Journal
des débats
(Hansard)**

Tuesday 2 October 2001

Mardi 2 octobre 2001

Speaker
Honourable Gary Carr

Président
L'honorable Gary Carr

Clerk
Claude L. DesRosiers

Greffier
Claude L. DesRosiers

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO

Tuesday 2 October 2001

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO

Mardi 2 octobre 2001

The House met at 1330.

Prayers.

INTRODUCTION OF MEMBER
FOR BEACHES-EAST YORK

The Speaker (Hon Gary Carr): I beg to inform the House that the Clerk has received from the chief election officer and laid upon the table a certificate of the by-election in the electoral district of Beaches-East York.

Clerk of the House (Mr Claude L. DesRosiers): I have a letter addressed to:

“Mr Claude DesRosiers

“Clerk of the Legislative Assembly

“Room 104

“Legislative Building

“Queen’s Park

“Toronto, Ontario

“M7A 1A2.”

It reads as follows.

“Dear Mr DesRosiers:

“A writ of election dated the 22nd day of August 2001 was issued by the Honourable Lieutenant Governor of the province of Ontario and was addressed to Ivor Vavasour, returning officer of the electoral district of Beaches-East York, for the election of a member to represent the said electoral district of Beaches-East York in the Legislative Assembly of this province in the room of Frances Lankin who since her election as representative of the said electoral district of Beaches-East York has resigned her seat. This is to certify that, a poll having been granted and held in Beaches-East York on the 20th day of September 2001, Michael Prue has been returned as duly elected, as appears by the return of the said writ of election dated the 28th day of September 2001, which is now lodged of record in my office.”

“John L. Hollins

“Chief election officer

“Toronto, September 28, 2001.”

Mr Howard Hampton (Kenora-Rainy River): Speaker, I have the honour to present to you and the House Michael Prue, member-elect for the electoral district of Beaches-East York, who has taken the oath and signed the roll and now claims the right to take his seat.

The Speaker: Let the honourable member take his seat.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

COMMUNITY CARE ACCESS CENTRES

Mr James J. Bradley (St Catharines): After unwisely and unjustifiably bringing into effect the closure of the 24-hour emergency department of Hotel Dieu Hospital in St Catharines and the removal of the oncology and kidney dialysis units, leaving Hotel Dieu as entirely a day surgery facility, the Harris government is beginning an attack on the community care access centres around the province, including our own Access Niagara.

The closing of hospital beds means that patients are discharged quicker and sicker to nursing and seniors' homes and to personal residences. The CCAC was established to provide home and long-term care services, but, through the service cuts and budget cuts, essential care is not available to many of our seniors and others.

The \$2.2-billion tax cut for corporations and other tax cuts have left the Harris government with declining revenues. Patients in Ontario are paying the price of these mindless tax gifts to the wealthiest and most powerful people in the province.

To add insult to injury, the Ontario government is once again embarking upon a government advertising campaign that can only be characterized as highly partisan, in this case costing some \$7 million. Patients in Niagara would appreciate that money being invested in health care instead of squandered on self-serving advertising for the Harris government.

PROSTATE CANCER
AWARENESS WEEK

Mr Bill Murdoch (Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound): I rise in the House today to support the cause of the Owen Sound Prostate Cancer Support Group, chaired by Colin Campbell, in recognition of Prostate Cancer Awareness Week. These individuals volunteer countless hours of their time to help bring awareness of this growing epidemic.

Prostate cancer accounts for more than all other forms of cancer in men combined, and is the second killer of men after lung cancer. Prostate cancer will affect close to 6,700 men in Ontario this year alone. Almost a quarter of those diagnosed will eventually die from this disease.

The Canadian Cancer Society recommends that men who are in high-risk groups, such as those with a history

of disease and over the age of 50, should visit their doctors for early detection.

It is the most painful of all forms of cancer in its advanced stages. It unfortunately does not present symptoms until it reaches the advanced stages, when it's too late and becomes terminal. That is why early detection is needed. For these reasons, we need to educate people and make them aware of this disease.

The Owen Sound Prostate Cancer Support Group exists with hopes of increasing public awareness and lending support to those who are affected. They are a much-needed group in our community, and we thank them for their hard work.

I congratulate all those involved during the week of September 16 to 23 for a successful Prostate Cancer Awareness Week. I salute your efforts to inform the public and support those people who are living with prostate cancer.

ONTARIO ECONOMY

Mr Dwight Duncan (Windsor-St Clair): We watched yesterday as the Premier of Ontario released a six-minute video across the satellite instead of addressing this House about a very significant issue; that is, the state of Ontario's economy. Let's talk about that for a moment. Prior to the terrorist attacks in New York on September 11, it was very clear—certainly very clear to the working families in my community—that Ontario's economy was beginning to slow down. It was very clear that the Tory tax cuts, the Harris tax cuts, weren't working.

In January of this year we had one major plant close down. The Minister of Labour laughs, but there are 6,000 families on temporary layoff at Chrysler Corp this week alone. I don't think it's a laughing matter. I don't believe that three Ford Motor Co plants shut down in my community are a laughing matter. No government should laugh about that and no government, in our view, ought to be proceeding in the fashion that they announced yesterday.

Their tax cut plan wasn't working. All they announced on the economic side yesterday was to speed up the tax cuts for corporations—corporations that will not be making money this year; corporations that won't benefit from it. It's unfortunate that this Premier and government are stuck in a period of time somewhere long ago. They squandered the greatest prosperity in the history of this province, and now they threaten to drive our economy even further into the ground because of their lack of vision and lack of foresight.

1340

LAKESHORE HOSPITAL

Mr Doug Galt (Northumberland): I draw the Legislature's attention today to a huge success story in my

riding: the construction launch of our new Lakeshore hospital.

Last Friday the shovels went into the ground, the culmination of a massive planning and fundraising effort. While the province provided some \$25 million to date and will provide 70% of the construction costs, the community has risen to the challenge of covering the other 30%. In fact, we have exceeded the original target. To date, more than \$21 million has been raised in a catchment area of just over 50,000 people, truly an astounding feat.

The design of the new hospital is also the result of a co-operative effort. Staff and medical practitioners at the Northumberland Health Care Centre have had tremendous input into the layout of the new facility. They are also committed to this project in that the staff fundraising drive also exceeded its goal of \$1 million, a feat that surprised even Navion, the fundraising consultants hired to oversee the campaign.

Many people deserve recognition for the excellent progress of this project: the NHCC board of trustees, staff of the Ministry of Health, the fundraising committee, the NHCC staff and management team and the hospital auxiliaries. But most of all, the community is to be commended for the outstanding support they have given to this project.

I'm both humbled and filled with pride by this impressive show of community spirit. I thank all of those involved, and I look forward to a gala opening of the new facility in mid-2003.

TAXATION

Mr Gerry Phillips (Scarborough-Agincourt): The question all Ontarians must ask is, "Why do we need corporate taxes 25% below our major competitors in the US?" Premier Harris announced the start of that plan last night. It will result, according to the government documents, in \$2.2 billion less revenue coming to Ontario. We in the Liberal caucus are fully supportive of competitive taxes, but we do not understand the rationale of why we have to compete with the US with 25% lower taxes.

Jobs are going to be the key issue over the next few months. This does little, if anything, to protect jobs. Our US competitors are going to be in a far better position as they invest in security, as they invest in their education system, and Premier Harris has chosen to compete on the basis of corporate taxes 25% below the US. I would say that our automotive sector, which my colleague from Windsor just mentioned, our tourism sector, our exports sector and I think our retail sector are all going to face significant challenges. Right now they are facing them and will in the months ahead.

But Premier Harris has decided that, rather than invest in the things that are going to help fix that, he's going to have corporate taxes 25% lower than the US. This is a foolhardy policy by a foolhardy government.

SCHOOLTEACHERS

Mr Rosario Marchese (Trinity-Spadina): A brief message to the Minister of Education: everyone knows that public confidence in our educational system is floundering. Our schools are crumbling and our teachers are demoralized, and the public wants you to stop beating up on teachers. They do.

I want to read two examples of two people who have written to me, saying to you that we have a serious problem in our educational system.

One teacher from Kitchener, Mr Blair, says, "I wish to withdraw my membership from the Ontario College of Teachers. I will not teach in Ontario, to protest the government's implementation of Bill 80." He continues, "As a teacher I was expected to develop a program geared to the individual needs of my students, but apparently this does not apply to the government."

Another teacher from Kingston, a Miss Kathleen Jackson, says, "All my life, all I ever wanted to do was to be a teacher. Now I'm not so sure.

"My question for you, Mr Harris, is, what exactly do you expect from teachers in Ontario? I work 10-plus hours every day, five days a week. I work four-plus hours on the weekend. I can't take the day off to play golf. I can't decide not to grade my students' papers. I can't roll over in the morning and decide not to go to work.... And in addition, I will now be expected to complete courses, all of which will contain an assessment component. Where do you suggest I get the time to complete these courses? What about travel expenses.... I am sure that making \$1,800 a month, I will have little left over to pay for courses."

She says, "Maybe next time you implement a program to improve education in Ontario, you'll think about teachers like me and what we do every day."

Think about them, Minister.

HEALTH CARE FUNDING

Mr Ted Arnott (Waterloo-Wellington): Earlier this year I conducted a survey of my constituents in Waterloo-Wellington. The results were tabulated over the summer and I have received strong and clear advice about health care. Here are the results:

"Is the Ontario government managing health care effectively?" Fifty-four per cent of the respondents said no.

"Is the province spending enough on health care?" Forty-six per cent said no and only 30% said yes.

On a more positive note, my constituents reported favourable personal experiences with the health care system in Waterloo-Wellington, indicating a satisfaction rating of 54%.

The responses indicated strong support for my private member's resolution, which called for a restoration of the federal government's cuts to health care, at 79%, and 81% supported my demand for an escalator clause that

would increase federal funding to keep pace with our rising costs.

Recently, concerns about home care funding in Ontario were brought to my attention at meetings with representatives of the Community Care Access Centre of Waterloo Region. As part of a province-wide measure, the provincial home care budget has been frozen at last year's level, while demands for services increase steadily and funding inadequacies mean that home care services in some individual instances have been reduced.

Some patients are receiving less care and some aren't receiving the care they need because they're on a waiting list. With the budget for home care frozen across the province, more patients will need hospital or long-term-care beds, the very expensive and sometimes unavailable options that home care was designed to replace, where appropriate.

It is time for the provincial government to take the steps necessary to address these problems by making sure that home care services are available to all who need them, that provincial home care funding is equitably distributed across the province, and that unnecessary administration costs don't eat into home care services that people need.

ONTARIO SECURITY

Mr Michael Bryant (St Paul's): The cloistered video stunt announcement of Commissioner Norman Inkster and Major General Lewis MacKenzie as Ontario's security czars did not do justice to either of these highly respected Canadians or to the people of Ontario. There's a public thirst for political leadership that requires security in Ontarian's day-to-day lives. The Premier's bizarre video failed that test of leadership.

Incredibly, according to published reports, Major General MacKenzie has not yet been briefed on what role he will play. Regardless, the Premier has not briefed the public on what role he and Commissioner Inkster will play. What is their mandate? Are their recommendations confined to provincial matters, or is this a marshalling of a public relations campaign against Ottawa? Perhaps most importantly, are they working with the federal government to come up with a coordinated attack on terrorism, or is Ontario going at it alone?

Is the Attorney General fulfilling his role as legal czar and constitutional watchdog? Will the scandalized Red Tape Commission, which currently oversees all matters, oversee the work of these security advisors in getting access to sensitive intelligence information? Will the commissioner and major general be releasing a report to the public, or will a secret playbook for the cabinet never see the light of day?

To whom will they report? To the Premier, a standing committee, the Legislature or the cabinet? How will their well-intentioned efforts be held accountable to the people of Ontario? Imagine a royal commission on terrorism being announced by a government without stating its mandate or stating any reportage, any timelines or other details. That's what Mike Harris did yesterday.

When it comes to restoring Ontarians' security, the Harris government has been slow off the mark and now cannot say where it's headed.

HERITAGE CONSERVATION

Mr Norm Miller (Parry Sound-Muskoka): I had the pleasure of attending the annual general meeting of the Muskoka Heritage Foundation last Saturday in my riding of Parry Sound-Muskoka. In the meeting, the importance of volunteers and the stewardship activities in the riding was recognized.

This was a great opportunity to honour the local volunteers and to become inspired by their example during the International Year of the Volunteer. The Muskoka Heritage Foundation recognizes the importance of the environment in our riding and the importance of the natural areas and the built heritage areas that define the unique identity of Muskoka.

At the meeting, I congratulated a local constituent, Maureen Hunt, on receiving the first ever Robert J. Boyer Award. This is a new award created by the foundation's built heritage committee to recognize individuals in the community who throughout their lives have made significant contributions to the unique cultural heritage of Muskoka.

Naming the award after Mr Boyer reflects on his life-long commitment to the well-being of Muskoka, to its culture and to the preservation of its history. He has been a newspaper publisher, politician, historian and tireless promoter of Muskoka to the outside world. From 1955 to 1971, Mr Boyer served as a Progressive Conservative representative for the Muskoka riding.

1350

Maureen Hunt has been a dedicated and enthusiastic volunteer in the heritage community in Muskoka for over 30 years. She is very deserving of the first-ever Robert J. Boyer Award.

I'd like to congratulate all members of the Muskoka Heritage Foundation for giving their time, expertise and resources in order to make a difference in Parry Sound-Muskoka.

Mr Peter Kormos (Niagara Centre): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: In view of the special time that we are experiencing in this world's history, I ask for unanimous consent for all parties to make brief statements honouring Mahatma Gandhi on October 2, today, the anniversary of his birthdate.

The Speaker (Hon Gary Carr): Is there unanimous consent? I'm sorry; that was confusing; I'll ask again. Is there unanimous consent? I'm afraid I heard some noes.

COMMISSIONERS OF ESTATE BILLS

The Speaker (Hon Gary Carr): I beg to inform the House that the Clerk has received a favourable report from the Commissioners of Estate Bills with respect to Bill Pr 15, An Act to establish the Sioux Lookout Meno-Ya-Win Health Centre. Accordingly, pursuant to stand-

ing order 86(e), the bill and report stand referred to the standing committee on regulations and private bills.

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

ONTARIO ECONOMY AND SECURITY

Hon Michael D. Harris (Premier): Last night I spoke directly to the people of Ontario to reassure them about their families' safety, about their jobs and about the security of Ontario. Today I'm here to inform the House about the actions that we have taken.

Interjections.

Hon Mr Harris: Ontario's strength is in its people, in our diversity and in our reputation for tolerance. Our province—

The Speaker (Hon Gary Carr): Stop the clock. I say to the members in the opposition there complaining that the Premier never makes statements in here, he didn't get out one minute and all you're doing is shouting and screaming like you did last week too. The same thing last week: he got up and it was almost impossible to control you. You screamed for the entire time. Not just one or two, with good-natured heckling, but the entire opposition benches.

Sorry for the interruption, Premier.

Hon Mr Harris: Thank you, Mr Speaker.

Our province is also strong because we care about our families and our children's future. Because we have taken action, Ontario will continue to be a very safe place to live.

Yesterday I announced the appointment of two new security advisors to the provincial government: Norman Inkster, retired commissioner of the RCMP, and retired Major General Lewis MacKenzie. They will be working to improve how Ontario deals with terrorist threats. Their suggestions will lead to greater co-operation with other governments and law enforcement agencies, locally and globally.

While Ontarians handled last month's tragedy well, I want to improve our ability to react to large-scale emergencies. That's why I've asked for a comprehensive review of Ontario's capacity to handle emergencies, including: identifying risks, then eliminating or minimizing them; improving emergency plans and training; ensuring that our communication and notification networks are up to date; and drafting recovery and assistance plans for communities affected by emergencies.

We will require all municipalities to maintain emergency response plans and to train their employees. As well, we will work with the owners and operators of large buildings and public facilities to develop appropriate emergency response plans.

If the terrorists hoped to cripple our economy, to undermine our confidence and to destroy our will, we will prove them wrong. We will show them that our

society and our economy are strong, are resilient, and that we will prevail.

We must also ensure, along with our neighbours to the south, that the events of September 11 do not have a long-term impact on our economy or on the well-being of our families. Our economy and our quality of life rely heavily on our close relationship with the United States. Improving cross-border trade has always been a strong priority. Now it is even more important.

In June, Governor Pataki and I hosted the New York-Ontario economic summit, and I believe we must meet again to discuss how we can take action on the recommendations that will be coming forward as a result of that summit's working groups. I've also requested a new meeting with the Great Lakes governors and business leaders to discuss steps we can take to increase trade.

Ours is the longest undefended border in the world. To ensure the free flow of law-abiding people, of legitimate goods and services, Canada must coordinate customs procedures to create a common North American security perimeter. We will either be inside or we will be outside the perimeter. I believe we should be inside. If we aren't, the terrorists win by impairing the cross-border access that is, and will be, so vital to our economic health, and I believe it is equally important to the security of our citizens.

North America's economy is in a cycle of slower growth compared to the last five years; however, Ontario is in a better position now than it ever has been to weather the economic turmoil. Low taxes, reduced red tape and the removal of barriers to business all position Ontario well for future growth, and we have been prudent in our fiscal planning to ensure people can continue to create jobs, which power the economic growth.

We can do more, and we will. On January 1, 2002, we had planned to implement a number of additional tax cuts, including cuts to personal income taxes, capital taxes and corporate income taxes. There are some who have always opposed our tax cuts. Those same people say that we should not proceed with these already announced and planned tax cuts in light of recent events. Once again, they are wrong.

The members on this side of the House believe tax cuts are more important now than ever before. That's why yesterday I announced that we would introduce legislation that would, if passed, cut personal income taxes immediately and help stimulate our economy. These tax cuts will put more money into the pockets of Ontarians.

Take a typical two-earner Ontario family with one parent earning \$35,000 and the other parent earning \$25,000 a year. Ontario's personal tax cuts to date, together with a full implementation of the 2001 budget, including these accelerated tax cuts, will deliver total income tax savings of \$2,345 to that hard-working family. That's money they can use to buy hockey equipment for the kids, put toward home renovations or help pay for that vacation that they weren't sure they could afford.

1400

We will introduce legislation to accelerate our planned capital and corporate income tax cuts, including cutting the small business income tax rate to 6%, effective October 1. We are proposing to accelerate these tax cuts because we have enormous confidence in the people of this province. We are confident that their entrepreneurial spirit, that their proven productivity will take us through the short term to long-term gains in jobs and in quality of life.

Today I am announcing some additional steps we will take to protect jobs as well as the safety and security of Ontario families.

The Minister of Consumer and Business Services will quickly introduce legislation to increase security province-wide for documents such as birth and death certificates, keeping safe information that could be dangerous in the wrong hands.

There are many people in Ontario illegally. Some are criminal offenders. We need to locate these individuals. So Ontario will establish a special police unit to assist federal officers in tracking down these criminal offenders and aggressively seeking their deportation. I have asked the justice ministers to work on the details of this proposal and report back.

Many people who are awaiting immigration hearings in Ontario are currently detained in various facilities across the province, including provincial detention centres. Today I am offering to work with the federal government to ensure those individuals who require high security are detained in a maximum-security institution. I have asked the Minister of Correctional Services to work on this initiative and to report back with details.

We will continue to take the strong action necessary to keep Ontario safe and prosperous. As I said in my statement on September 24, our justice ministers and the Minister of Tourism, Culture and Recreation will provide further details relating to these and other initiatives in the coming days and weeks.

As you know, the Minister of Finance will be providing an update on the province's fiscal situation shortly with the annual fall statement.

I want to emphasize the important message that I delivered to all Ontarians last night. Ontario will remain strong. Ontario will succeed. The people of Ontario have our commitment that we will do everything possible to protect their jobs, to protect our economy, to protect our province and to protect our citizens. Thank you very much.

Mr Dalton McGuinty (Leader of the Opposition): I want to begin by briefly addressing that part of this announcement regarding immigration. Of course—and I want to make it perfectly clear—we obviously oppose illegal immigration and we support the measures to stop illegal immigration, just as we oppose, and will oppose, anything whatsoever that resembles a witch hunt aimed at all of our immigrants. That is in keeping with the resolution on terrorism that we all unanimously supported just last week.

Now let me turn to yesterday's announcement. The world did change on September 11. The world changed, but sadly, the government has not. It has responded to the most tragic and devastating event in years in the same old way, with the same old approach: top down. Instead of showing leadership by reaching out to the people of Ontario, the Premier yesterday delivered his message from the top down, from on high, via satellite, cloistered in his office, apart from the people and outside of this Legislature, and he responded with the same old tired ideology instead of something innovative and intelligent.

The government's response is to do what it has always done in the same way that it has always done it: reward the government's corporate friends and give working families a couple of bucks. Under the government's so-called economic recovery plan, one which is designed to inspire confidence, presumably, in consumers, this government will give the average Ontario family a dollar a week. At the same time, the government is speeding up a tax cut for corporations that will amount to \$2.2 billion. Remember, this is a tax on profits. So the biggest prize goes to the companies with the biggest profits, not companies that are struggling to stay afloat and to hang on to their employees.

Families are worried about their jobs. Families are worried about their savings. The government's response? A buck a week for families and more than \$2 billion for profitable corporations. Premier, we know that you believe in rewarding your friends. We on this side of the House believe in working on behalf of working families.

The world changed on September 11, and it's regrettable that the Premier and the government have not. This government responds with the same old, same old—the same old slogans, the same old tired ideology, even the same aggravating and tiresome style.

Premier, here is what you should do:

(1) Stop hiding the books from the people of Ontario. Provide us with an updated economic outlook and a fiscal plan. Then we'll know exactly how much money we have to work with so that we can act responsibly and intelligently without risking either a deficit or devastating cuts to health care and education.

(2) Once we all know what's affordable, we can develop some innovative ideas instead of the same old, same old. You can start reaching out to business and labour by holding an economic summit.

(3) Introduce a package of innovative ideas, because there are so many to choose from. We could, for example, accelerate spending on capital projects, particularly near the border. A better bridge or an improved road can create construction jobs and facilitate trade, and we need both. We can invest in repairing and improving our hospitals and schools and universities and our colleges. This sort of capital spending will create jobs and secure what should be our long-term competitive advantages: quality health care and education. We could target tax relief as well at the industries that are hurting the most today, where jobs are on the chopping block.

That's what you could have done, Premier. You could have looked at all of these things with business and

labour, after opening up the books so we'd know what we can afford and what we can't afford. You could have responded to an unprecedented crisis with responsibility, intelligence and innovation. You could have acted to protect jobs instead of profitable corporations. You could have helped working families instead of your friends. Instead, it's the same old, same old. The world changed on September 11, to be sure; unfortunately, this government has not.

The Speaker: Further responses?

Mr Howard Hampton (Kenora-Rainy River): A week ago members of this Legislature addressed the tragedy of September 11 in a very non-partisan way. We spoke in a very non-partisan way about the issues that needed to be dealt with, about people's fears, about people's anxieties. It appears that that was last week; now the Premier wants to play upon people's fears, play upon people's anxieties, without offering anything real for people.

People across Ontario need to know that in terms of the border controls, in terms of customs and immigration, in terms of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, in terms of the Canadian intelligence and security agency, none of these things are within the province's control. For the Premier to stand and to try to put across to people that somehow these things are going to be influenced by his television cameo appearance last night or his statement here today is simply playing upon people's anxieties and people's fears.

1410

The Premier talks about a North American security perimeter and he talks about harmonization with the United States. Well, I think the Premier had better explain to the people of Ontario what he means. Does he mean the kind of wall the United States has tried to throw up at the Mexican border, where over the past 20 years the United States has spent billions of dollars, where they have, I am told, in excess of 9,000 border guards and border patrol officers, and yet a million illegal immigrants enter from Mexico every year, and the estimate now is that there are over 11 million illegal immigrants from Mexico? Is that what the Premier means by an American-style security blanket?

The Premier should know, as security experts know, that it is not possible to build a wall around Canada, a wall around the United States or a wall around North America. That is what I find really reprehensible about this: to pretend that this is even an option, when the historical experience in the United States along the Mexican border over the last 20 years suggests that it is not possible, that it is a very wasteful effort and that in fact it's been totally unsuccessful.

I think what the Premier really means is this: we've known for some time that the Premier really does believe in more privatized health care, he really does believe in adopting an American-style system of health care. We know that the Premier really doesn't support public education, that he'd rather have more American-style private education. We know that in general the Premier, in terms

of his statements and his views, would really rather that Ontario were something akin to the 51st state. I have to tell you, Premier, there are lots in this province, and New Democrats are among them, who do not believe that Ontario needs to become akin to the 51st state.

Most of all, Premier, don't play upon people's fears and insecurities and offer them some hope of a security blanket which has been proven not to work everywhere that it's been tried, whether in North America or in Europe.

Then we come to the issue of the thousands of people across Ontario who are worried about losing their jobs, of the communities across Ontario who are worried about losing their industry. What does the Premier offer up? The Premier offers up corporate tax cuts for profitable corporations and nothing for those companies that do not have a profit and therefore will not benefit from tax cuts. People across Ontario need to know that the six big banks in Ontario last year had a profit of \$10 billion, and they will be the overwhelming recipients of the Premier's corporate tax cut scheme.

Meanwhile, corporations like Algoma Steel—70,000 jobs at risk; over two dozen sawmills in northern Ontario which will not make a profit this year—nothing from this; a depressed steel industry generally—nothing from this; A.G. Simpson in the automotive industry, which is in troubled economic times, at least 2,000 jobs at stake—nothing from this.

Premier, both your personal tax cut and your corporate tax cut are not going to do anything to stimulate the economy or save jobs. It's merely another gift to your corporate friends, while people in industries who need help are going to be ignored once again by your government.

ORAL QUESTIONS

TAXATION

Mr Dalton McGuinty (Leader of the Opposition): My questions today are for the Premier. We are pleased to see that you have adopted some of our ideas that we put forth during the course of the past week, in particular requiring municipalities to have emergency plans and to meet with the governors of the border states.

I want to assure you of our full support with those particular initiatives, but I cannot and will not support your reckless corporate tax cuts. Your plan to stimulate the economy and to inspire confidence in consumers results in giving the average working family in Ontario \$1 a week. You've got \$1 a week for Ontario's working families. But on the other hand, you've been able to come up with over \$2 billion in tax cuts for profitable corporations.

Premier, why are you doing practically nothing for our working families at the same time that you continue to reward your corporate friends?

Hon Michael D. Harris (Premier): I actually am quite surprised that the leader of a party that voted against every penny of tax cuts for working families in the province that we've brought in in the last six years somehow or other now is calling for more tax cuts for working families. You can't have it both ways.

It's close to \$2,500 now, every penny of those tax cuts. They're cumulative. Some of them were small and some of them were larger. The cumulative effect of those is now close to \$2,400 to hard-working Ontario families.

You and your party stood up in this Legislature and voted against every single one of those tax cuts. So where do you get off now talking—are you in favour of tax cuts? Do you want more tax cuts? If so, why did you vote against every one that has been brought in in the last six years?

Mr McGuinty: Premier, we know where your tax cut agenda has brought us. We've got the slowest economic growth in the country this year, and next year we are forecast to have the slowest economic growth in the country. We've got the slowest growth in employment in the country. That is what your tax cut strategy has delivered to us.

What I am asking you today is, how can you possibly proceed with a corporate tax cut to the tune of in excess of \$2 billion while at the same time telling our working families, "All we have for you is \$1 a week"? Do you honestly believe that to give a working family today in Ontario an additional \$1 every week is somehow going to inspire them with confidence and act to send them on to some kind of buying spree? Why is it that you're able to find \$2.2 billion for your corporate pals, those already profitable corporations, but when it comes to people who are worried about the future and their jobs and their savings, you found \$1 a week?

Hon Mr Harris: As I said, I am shocked that last June, when we put these very same tax proposals before the Legislature, you voted against them. You voted against tax cuts for working families. However modest they were, cumulatively we know they've had a dramatic effect. You voted against them. I tell you, the last time I heard such doom and gloom from a Liberal leader I think was Dr Stuart Smith, who became known as Dr Negative, and campaigned with results that were negative too.

All this doom and gloom from you is not helping the economy, and it's not true. This province is better positioned now to grow and to prosper into the future than it has ever been, thanks to the tax cuts we brought in and you voted against.

Mr McGuinty: Premier, how would you know what working families are experiencing when you deliver your stone tablets from the top of the mountain rather than come inside this Legislature and debate things in a responsible and intelligent way? How would you know?

Let me bring you up to date in terms of what's happening in our economy. We've got the slowest growth in the country this year. That's what your tax cut strategy brought us. We are forecast to have the slowest growth in the country next year. We lost 17,000 jobs this summer

alone. That's what your economic agenda has delivered to Ontario's working families.

They expected that in these exceptional circumstances you would do something intelligent and innovative. But instead, we get the same old one-trick tax cut pony, which is trotted out time after time. It has got us into the state that we find ourselves in today. It will continue to do the same into the future. Once again, you have left Ontario families in the lurch.

I ask you one more time. You found \$2.2 billion for profitable corporations, and all you came up with is \$1 a week for working families. How do you think you can possibly justify that?

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Hon Mr Harris: There is, as a result of the announcement last night, an acceleration of \$150 million in tax cuts for businesses large and small to create jobs, to keep people on the payroll, to stay afloat, to help keep the economy going. But again I am surprised that now, with the cumulative effect of \$2,345 for a typical two-member working family here in Ontario—they now have \$2,345 more in their pocket—you voted against each and every one of those tax reductions. You had no care, you had no concern for the hard-working families in this province when we brought in those tax cuts, and now somehow or other you stand up and feign that you actually care about them or that you're interested in them.

We will continue, as we have, to represent hard-working, taxpaying families. I have not talked to one Ontarian—not one Ontarian—who agrees with your assessment.

The Speaker (Hon Gary Carr): New question.

Mr McGuinty: My question is for the Premier. Again, let's put this in some perspective, that for every dollar you found for working families, you found two for corporate tax reductions. Your objective here with the corporate tax reductions, as stated in your budget document, is to reduce corporate taxes in Ontario to the extent that they are 25% less than they are for our American counterparts.

The question I have for you, Premier, is: do you really feel that it is appropriate, now that New York state, for example, is on its knees, for you to accelerate your corporate income tax cut so that we can lure more investment from New York at this point in time? Do you really think that's appropriate, Premier?

Hon Mr Harris: I think the preamble to your question is an insult to the governor, to Mayor Giuliani and to the people of New York, who have stated very clearly that they will be stronger after the events of September 11 than ever before.

For you to suggest otherwise is absolute nonsense, and let me tell you this: the governor of New York supports 100% the policies of this government toward tax reduction and competitiveness that we articulated in previous budgets—100%. We are of one mind on this; we in this Great Lakes milieu are of one mind on this. For you to insult the people of New York at this time is an absolute disgrace.

Mr McGuinty: Premier, I think it's—

Interjections.

The Speaker: Members, come to order, please. The member for Ottawa West-Nepean, this is your last warning. Last warning for you.

Interjection.

The Speaker: I don't care. You've been yelling. When I say, "Order," the last person gets caught. You're it. Last warning for you.

Sorry for the interruption. The leader of the official opposition.

Mr McGuinty: Premier, don't be afraid to stare it in the face. In your own budget document on page 88, you make it clear that your intention is to undercut your neighbouring states to the tune of 25% through your corporate tax cuts. That's what you said your stated objective is here. All I'm asking you, Premier, is whether or not you feel it is appropriate. It's one thing to say you've got the corporate tax cuts on the books and they'll come into effect at the beginning of next year, but it is another thing to accelerate those tax cuts. The fact of the matter is that we are in competition with New York state. We are in competition with investment. We'd rather have the investment here than over there.

What I'm asking you, Premier, is whether you think it is appropriate at this point in time—

Hon Janet Ecker (Minister of Education, Government House Leader): It's about getting jobs.

The Speaker: This is the last warning for the Minister of Education and House leader. Now that you're House leader, you're sitting a lot closer to me, and I can hear you very clearly. This is your last warning.

I apologize again for the interruption to the leader of the official opposition.

Mr McGuinty: Premier, if the neighbour's barn burns down, you're supposed to roll up your sleeves and offer to help get them back on their feet. What you want to do, Premier, is sell your crops at a rate that's going to undercut the neighbouring farmer. I think that's inappropriate and I think it's offensive. I'm asking you, Premier, to tell me how you consider this aspect of it and how you think it's appropriate to attack the competitiveness of New York state at this particular point in time.

Hon Mr Harris: I can assure you that Governor Pataki, the people of New York and the government of New York understand this: a strong Ontario is good for New York, just as I understand that a strong New York is good for Ontario. We both agree. That is why we were the first to get off the mark and to offer assistance, to offer help, do anything we could do for the people of New York. That's also why we continue to work co-operatively toward jobs in Ontario, jobs in New York, why we continue to work co-operatively to improve access across our borders. We know that every new job created in Ontario helps New York. We know that every new job created in New York helps Ontario.

I am pleased to see that for the first time in six years, you seem to understand that we have to be competitive with other jurisdictions if we're going to have our share

of jobs in Ontario. This is a very good admission for you to make.

Mr McGuinty: Premier, I'd ask you to focus on the questions I keep putting to you on this particular aspect. There's no issue here. We all understand how important it is for us to be competitive. You and I differ in terms of how we should be competitive. You think the only way for us to be competitive is to undercut our neighbours to the tune of 25% on corporate tax cuts. I'd rather that we be competitive on the corporate tax cut front and at the same time have adequately supported health care and education, and protections for our environment. We think it's important to bring a balanced approach to the definition of competitiveness, one that is suited to the 21st century, one that is suited to us as a society that's trying to develop a highly competitive, knowledge-based economy. So we understand all of those things, which you do not.

What I am asking you here today is something about the ethics, whether you think it is appropriate to accelerate a corporate tax cut which was already on the books, and that is one thing. But for us to do this now, to try to lure investment away from New York state, I think is inappropriate, and I want you to comment on that.

Hon Mr Harris: Let me say this: it is only through tax cuts in a competitive economy that we've been able to have the balanced approach and do both. We've been able to put \$6 billion more into health care; we've been able to put more money into education. Had we followed the economic policies that you and the NDP followed, we would not have been able to make up the massive cuts that the Liberals in Ottawa put on us: on our social programs, on our children's programs, on our health programs, on our education programs. So perhaps, with your revelation that we need to be competitive, you will begin to understand that you can't just mouth being balanced; you have to actually demonstrate being balanced by being tax-competitive, by creating jobs, by making sure we can compete with other jurisdictions, and then also by massively increasing health care spending and education spending. So we have demonstrated balance, not mouthed it and then flip-flopped and then voted against it and then talked about it. So I suggest—

The Speaker: Order. The Premier's time is up.

New question.

Mr Howard Hampton (Kenora-Rainy River): My question is for the Premier. Yesterday you finally admitted that Ontario's economy is in trouble and that we are losing jobs. But your response, more corporate tax cuts for profitable corporations and more personal tax cuts for the well-off, is the wrong response and it won't work.

The six big banks had profits last year of \$10 billion and, based upon your corporate tax cut, they will benefit to the tune of hundreds of millions of dollars. Meanwhile, Algoma Steel had no profit, so they will get nothing from your corporate tax cut. Meanwhile, 22 sawmills across northern Ontario, in a depressed sawmill and soft lumber market, have no profits. They will get no benefit from

this. A.G. Simpson, automaker, 2,000 jobs at stake, will get no benefit.

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Premier, we know this will help the well-off, but please, tell us how this is going to help companies and jobs where they don't have a profit now and won't get a tax cut.

Hon Mr Harris: Let me, rather than tell you in my own words, quote from those who actually create jobs in Ontario. Canadian Manufacturers and Exporters news release: "Ian Howcroft, vice-president CME Ontario Division, said Premier Harris's announcement making the tax cuts effective immediately 'is the best thing to do in order to help boost business confidence and spur new investment.'" That's how you get jobs, in case you didn't know.

A Toronto Board of Trade news release said much similar. We know that the NDP and the Liberals have a different philosophy about tax competitiveness. We understand that. We saw your demonstration of that for 10 years, and we saw the province go into virtual bankruptcy. So we might as well agree to disagree.

We think our economic policies will produce more prosperity, more jobs, more hope, more opportunity, more money for health care, more money for education, more money to help people who need it, and we've demonstrated that over the last six years.

Mr Hampton: Premier, there are 70,000 jobs at stake at Algoma Steel. There are 50,000-plus jobs at stake in sawmills across northern Ontario; A.G. Simpson, at least 2,000 jobs. None of those jobs will get anything from your corporate tax cut. Because those companies are not making enough money, they're not making a profit, they will not get anything from the corporate tax cut. That's the point.

The very jobs that are at risk in this province, the very communities that are having a hard time, will get nothing from this. When you read a press release from some of your corporate friends who are going to get a tax cut, yes, I'm sure they like it. But the problem is, Premier, and the issue is, what are you doing to help the very industries, the very jobs that are in trouble? Your tax cut isn't going to do anything.

So tell us now: what is your strategy to help those jobs that are at risk, those communities that are having a hard time, those very industries that are facing depressed markets? What's your strategy for them, Premier, because you don't have one so far?

Hon Mr Harris: I think you know very well. We are at the table talking about the city of Sault Ste Marie and about Algoma Steel and other areas. I understand your strategy is to constantly put money into individual companies. It's a strategy, I guess, that you were talking about when you said a couple of days ago, talking about the last recession, "said Hampton, his government took steps to ensure Ontario residents were protected from the most severe implications of that economic downturn. That is what is needed now, he said." Howard Hampton said, "What's needed now is exactly what we did in the province of Ontario when we were in government."

Seventy-five percent of Ontarians disagree with you and continue to disagree with you at the polls. You were an unmitigated disaster. What about the six million people in the jobs, who are working right now? Don't you care about any of the jobs in the province of Ontario? Why are you trying to recycle the failed policies that you and the Liberals brought to this province that led to the unmitigated disaster of record unemployment, 1.3 million on welfare? Why do you continue to perpetuate a myth that those policies somehow worked?

Mr Hampton: Premier, you might want to go up the de Havilland, and you might want to talk to the workers there. Their company is still in existence because a government in 1992 and 1993 had the confidence to invest in them at the very time you said they should go down the drain. You might want to go to the four or five pulp and paper mills that are still working and the sawmills that are still working and all of those industries that had government help to get through tough times.

That's the point, Premier. Your personal tax cut amounts to \$16 between now and Christmas. It won't even buy a CD. Your corporate tax cut is going to all the wrong people. It's going to the people who already have the bulging pockets, the people who already have the money. And you don't have a strategy to help those industries, those factories, those plants, those mills, those workers who are either already laid off or who are very worried that they're about to be laid off and lose their jobs. That's the point, Premier.

Maybe I'll give you one more chance. Please tell us—please tell us—how putting more money in the pockets of corporations who already have a lot of money is going to help those companies, those jobs, who don't have a profit and won't benefit from your corporate tax cut.

Hon Mr Harris: The reduction of capital tax affects every business in the province, every company, including Algoma. This is a tax that you seem to think should be increased and tax even those who are not making a profit.

If you look at property taxes, the lowest that they've ever been and the lowest they've been increased—or they've been frozen or gone down—is under the five years of our government. The record property tax increase was under your government. These are taxes that every company pays, whether they make a profit or whether they don't. The record payroll taxes that we reduced for all companies: these are taxes that are a tax on jobs.

I don't know why you continue to perpetuate a myth that your policies that destroyed jobs, that destroyed investment, that put people on the welfare lines, that drove them to the food banks, are the ones that we should follow now. Nothing could be further from the truth.

BORDER SECURITY

Mr Howard Hampton (Kenora-Rainy River): Premier, today you used the term “Canada must coordinate ... to create a common North American security perimeter.” I want to ask you, exactly what do you mean

by that? Do you mean that we should coordinate and simply adopt American immigration policies? Should we adopt American customs policies? Should we adopt American policing policies? Should we simply sign over our sovereignty and say that whatever the United States sets as policy is good enough for us?

You owe people across Ontario an explanation. What exactly do you mean by creating “a common North American security perimeter”?

Hon Michael D. Harris (Premier): What I mean is we should get our heads out of the sand and start talking to other countries. We can learn things from other countries that have faced these kinds of terrorist threats before. We can learn from Britain and Northern Ireland. We can learn from Germany. We can learn from the Basque region of Spain. We can learn from India and Pakistan and other countries. The terrorism they have lived with is the kind of life we do not want in Ontario, we do not want in Canada and we do not want in North America.

I think what we should be doing is talking with other countries and learning the best practices. I think we should be talking to the Americans about their practices. I think they should be talking to us about our practices, because I tell you this: if we are not going to have a common perimeter, we are going to threaten Ontario lives and jobs and the economy of this province. If we can work in a practical, co-operative way, get our heads out of the sand and come up with policies that work, we will be safer—

The Speaker (Hon Gary Carr): Order. The Premier's time is up.

Mr Hampton: Premier, it was you who used the words “create a common North American security perimeter.” I just want to ask you. We have seen what the Americans have tried to do on the Mexican border: billions of dollars spent over the last 20 years, thousands upon thousands of border patrol officers and customs officers, and yet the estimation is that a million illegal immigrants come into the United States every year.

Is that what you mean? Is that what you're offering up to people? Is that what you're saying to people while you're playing on their fears? Because if it is, the evidence is everywhere that it doesn't work. The evidence is that if Canada were simply to adopt a common policy—we know what the United States is asking—we adopt their immigration policy, we adopt their customs procedures, we adopt their rules on gun control, we adopt their view of how immigration and all of those issues are supposed to work.

If that's what you mean, then I think you owe it to Ontario citizens to stand up—

The Speaker: The member's time is up.

Hon Mr Harris: Thanks for the advice.

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TAXATION

Mr Gerry Phillips (Scarborough-Agincourt): My question is to the Premier. Governments across North

America will be looking at how they're going to respond to the economic challenges. Last night you announced that the most major response by you, I think, over the next few months will be that you have decided that we have to have corporate taxes 25% below our competitors.

Our competitors are going to respond in different ways, some investing in education and other things, but you've decided that the way we will compete, the way we will deal with this crisis, is to have corporate income taxes 25% below our competitors. My question to you is this: why have we decided that we in Ontario, in order to compete in this difficult economy, need to have corporate taxes 25% lower than our competitors in the United States?

Hon Michael D. Harris (Premier): I have not said that. I've said that we have to be competitive in our tax rates with the states that we deal with, the countries that we deal with. We have to be tax competitive. We have to be tax competitive for our professionals, our entrepreneurs and our investors. We have to be tax competitive corporately as well. There are many different taxes. Certainly one of the tremendous advantages, for example, that we have that people point out—and I do on a regular basis—is that we don't have the massive payroll taxes for health care that they have in the United States. It is not any one tax; it is the whole collection of taxes and of costs of doing business.

When we took office in 1995, after a decade of Liberal and NDP tax increases, corporations and businesses told us, "If we have to choose between the United States and Ontario to make a buck, to make a profit, to invest, to hire people, we are not choosing Ontario." Now they are saying we are getting competitive, and we intend to keep it that way.

Mr Phillips: You said in your budget and the budget documents, "We are going to have corporate taxes 25% below the US," not competitive, "25% below the US." If you look at the economies that are best able to compete, it is those that have competitive taxes and ensure that they've got an environment that also is friendly for business and offers the best labour force.

Again, Premier, you've said something in the House which isn't consistent with your budget. You said, no, you want competitive taxes here, but your budget says that you are implementing a program for corporate taxes 25% below the US. I say to the people of Ontario, who are facing challenges with jobs, facing challenges with their financial stability: how is that we, in order to compete for the future, have decided that we are going to make our most major investment in getting corporate taxes 25% lower than the US? That's not competitive.

Why did you not say that you want a policy of competitive taxes with the US and we will make sure our fiscal house is in order? Why do we want our corporate taxes 25% below the US?

Hon Mr Harris: There are different tax rates in different states. There are some states quite frankly we will never get our tax rates as low as, because we do not have the massive oil revenues, for example, of Texas. We

will probably never have lower tax rates than Alberta as long as oil is at the price that it is. We don't have those massive revenues as well. But we do want to be competitive.

It is kind of a moot point, though, as far as your party goes. You opposed every tax decrease that we brought in. You were happy to have the highest taxes. It is really a moot point. If you want to be the highest tax jurisdiction in the world, vote Liberal. If you want to be competitive, vote Conservative. It's that simple.

ANTI-CRIME LEGISLATION

Ms Marilyn Mushinski (Scarborough Centre): My question is for the Attorney General. Three weeks ago today, we witnessed unspeakable acts of horror. The chilling aftermath has reminded Ontarians never to take our freedom and safety for granted again. I know that families are still concerned about their safety in the wake of the events of September 11. In fact, recently Premier Harris promised to look at ways that provincial legislation could be used to prevent terrorist acts. Could you please explain, Minister, to Ontarians how the government's organized crime legislation could be used to combat terrorism?

Hon David Young (Attorney General, minister responsible for native affairs): I thank the member for what is both an important and a very timely question. The primary intent of Bill 30 is to assist victims of organized crime and assist them particularly in relation to activities of criminals who are financially motivated and who are intent upon victimizing the people of this province. The proposed legislation would allow the courts to seize, freeze and forfeit, in some circumstances, to the crown proceeds of unlawful activity in order to assist victims. Bill 30, as it is currently drafted, would give us one more tool, an important tool, to go after unlawful profits including those made by terrorists.

If the bill is passed, our government would use Bill 30, where it is warranted, to protect victims and prevent further victimization. To the extent that terrorist groups engage in unlawful activity to make profit, Bill 30 would give us the means to seize, freeze and ultimately forfeit the proceeds of that unlawful activity.

Ms Mushinski: Thank you for that explanation, Minister. I know that the government of Ontario shows that it really cares about victims. We've created a permanent Office for Victims of Crime to advise the government on ways that it can help victims, and we've also taken a leadership role in supporting victims through all stages of the justice system by introducing new programs and expanding support services for victims.

Minister, I wonder if you could explain to this House and to all Ontarians what the government of Ontario has done to assist victims since the September 11 attacks.

Hon Mr Young: I thank the member for her question and her supplemental. On the day of this great tragedy, on September 11, our Premier stepped forward and immediately offered the services of the chief coroner to help

in the state of New York. An emergency plan was put in place and we also shortly thereafter came forward to provide a program that offered up the \$3 million to help Ontario families whose loved ones were victims.

Later, a victim response team was established and is drawing on the skills and the expertise—and they are considerable—of the Office for Victims of Crime, and they are coordinating our assistance efforts.

I would like to say as well that we will be working with families, families of those directly affected by this great tragedy, to help them in settling victims' estates. Finally, the victim response team has set up a toll-free hotline. It's available 24 hours a day, seven days a week, and the number is 1-866-406-HELP.

ONTARIO ECONOMY AND SECURITY

Mr Dalton McGuinty (Leader of the Opposition):

Premier, for two weeks you and the Minister of Finance have told us not to worry, be happy, the economy is strong, and then last night you panicked. Without an economic and fiscal update, you sped up your \$2.2-billion corporate tax cut giveaway. That's like being in a car, proceeding down an incline cautiously at night without lights, and then you press on the accelerator. I mean, it's very important for us to know something about the lay of the land, about where it is that we are going, Premier.

How is it that you can proceed with this additional acceleration in tax cuts without having presented to this House, without having a good grip on, an update when it comes to what the economy is doing and what the fiscal outlook is doing?

Hon Michael D. Harris (Premier): As you know, there will be a fiscal update. There always is in the third quarter. We'll give you the update after all the second quarter finances and the numbers are in. I can tell you, and the minister has assured you as well, that we have budgeted cautiously and prudently. We have made provisions for growth that could be less than what was predicted in the budget and it certainly appears that's going to be the case for this year. So as soon as the second quarter finances, those numbers, are in, we will have a statement to make.

I can assure you of this: there is the capacity within the finances of the province this year to maintain our spending program, not to exceed it, but to maintain our spending program within the budget and cover approximately \$170 million that it will cost for the accelerated tax cuts. So that gives you a general idea, but the specifics we'll be pleased to share as soon as all those numbers are in.

Mr McGuinty: Premier, you will understand, because I've raised this time and time again in this Legislature, that I think the appropriate and responsible thing to do is to produce forthwith an update when it comes to our economic and fiscal outlook. That's the right thing to do.

You will understand, of course, that the economy was experiencing a downturn prior to September 11. You budgeted for 2.2% in growth. We've now discovered that

we are closer to 0.8%, which makes us the slowest-growing economy in the country. Revenues are slowing in terms of the rate they're coming in at, and September 11 acted to further slow the economy. As people are losing jobs, our expenses are going up.

You tell us, Premier, that you've found an additional \$170 million for your accelerated tax cut plan. What I'm wondering now is, given that you've enlisted Messrs Inkster and MacKenzie to come up with recommendations for security measures, how much have you budgeted for those anticipated security measures which we are going to want to implement, of course, at the earliest possible opportunity? How much have you budgeted for those security measures?

1450

Hon Mr Harris: As you know, we have just engaged the two individuals. We cannot prepare a budget until we know what they are going to recommend. We are planning to get started with them, hopefully, later this week. We will be asking them to review our measures. We'll be talking with the federal government. We'll encourage dialogue as well with other governments. But, unlike Liberals and NDP, who just run deficits, we do plan in our budgets for contingencies. Thank goodness we did, because we have a contingency that needs taking care of now. For the security and safety of Ontarians, we think it was important that we allowed for that contingency; as well for competitiveness and jobs and our businesses and our working people. We think it's important, and thank goodness we budgeted for that in our recent budget as well.

AGRICULTURE INDUSTRY

Mr Bert Johnson (Perth-Middlesex): I have a question for the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs. This being the fourth annual Ontario agriculture week, it is only appropriate that we take a few moments to review this government's policies and activities in this important industry. Please tell the House what our ministry has accomplished since you took over the portfolio last winter.

Hon Brian Coburn (Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs): Before I begin, I'd like to recognize the contribution and the hard work that the member from Perth-Middlesex has done to recognize agriculture in Ontario.

Our government has accomplished many things since I became involved in this portfolio, and certainly sales tax exemption is one of the things. For farm building materials we have made a permanent point-of-sale exemption. Also, we were very quick to recognize the fact of wet weather and depressed prices last year, and the Premier and this government saw fit to provide \$90 million to help our farmers this past spring. That, of course, triggered \$120 million from the feds as well.

We are also continuing to work with our farm and commodity leaders to develop made-in-Ontario solutions

so that there can be some sustainability and a future to one of the largest economic—

The Speaker (Hon Gary Carr): Thank you, Minister.

Mr Johnson: Minister, since you took over this portfolio last winter, my experience is that you've been very accessible to people in the agri-food industry.

I have also been told that you are eager and that you listen to people's concerns. This summer I was honoured to have you visit my riding of Perth-Middlesex to meet over 30 local, municipal and agricultural leaders. Please tell us what kind of response you received from the agricultural community to our government's policies.

Hon Mr Coburn: One of the things that is really outstanding in the agricultural community is a willingness of the stakeholders and those who participate in agriculture and agribusiness to work with us in partnership in developing solutions for the many challenges that agriculture faces in today's economy.

As a result of the consultations that we're undertaking now, I'm very pleased and honoured to tell you that they've worked shoulder to shoulder with me in helping to develop a made-in-Ontario solution. We have many challenges in terms of risk management, food safety and nutrient management. There's a general willingness throughout the agricultural community to work with us to meet some of those challenges and turn them into opportunities that expand our ability to sell our first-rate products here in Ontario and around the world.

PRIVATIZATION OF PUBLIC SERVICES

The Speaker (Hon Gary Carr): The member for Beaches-East York.

Applause.

Mr Michael Prue (Beaches-East York): Thank you, Mr Speaker. I hope to get that every time I stand up.

Mr Premier, the question is for you. Yesterday you gave a response to the events of September 11. We were surprised to see that you are not reviewing Bill 65, which allows you to privatize Ministry of Transportation driver examination and licensing. Many people are concluding that September 11 shows how much we actually need government to protect people and act in their interests, yet you are putting sensitive private documentation into the hands of private companies. You are putting driver examinations in the hands of small private operators. You are increasing the risk to Canadians, to Ontarians, to the people who do not need to have their private lives exposed. Mr Premier, will you reconsider Bill 65 in light of the events of September 11?

Hon Michael D. Harris (Premier): First of all, let me congratulate the member on his very successful election and offer my personal congratulations as well. I wish the member very well representing his constituents and as part of the caucus that he has now joined. I thought the member was going to thank me as well for calling the by-election when I did, but nonetheless, I'm sure he may want to chat with me privately afterwards.

With regard to providing services, as you know, we are huge supporters of our public sector in the province of Ontario. We've continued to reward them for initiatives with bonuses. We celebrate their successes with the Amethyst Awards, for example, and other awards. We are now being studied by other jurisdictions for how productive our civil service is.

But by the same token, we are also—

The Speaker: I'm afraid the Premier's time is up.

Mr Prue: Mr Premier, let me give you an example. MTO's licensing and control branch holds vast amounts of very personal information on each driver in the province, things like whether they're being treated for depression or what other health concerns they may have that may affect their driving. We're told that this road to privatization may breach this confidentiality. The consequences of this kind of information falling into the wrong hands are more serious now after September 11. Isn't it time to put ideology aside and keep driver exams and licensing public and secure, like the province has done for the last 40 years?

Hon Mr Harris: On the other hand, we are also a government that is committed, at the same time as we protect security, to improving services. For example, when we took office we had to deal with auditor's reports that said things like this—this is the annual report of the Provincial Auditor in 1989—“An individual may change his or her legal name for \$100 and then apply for a driver's licence as if he or she had never been licensed. The driver system has no way to detect such a fraudulent application.” Drunk drivers could get another licence while suspended. “We concluded that an individual had three (valid) licence numbers.”

So you see, when we took office we had to deal with these things that the auditor had pointed out in the public system that was there. I suggest to you it is not so much whether it is a job performed by the public sector or the private sector, it is the policies of the government. So we are committed to improving service and we are committed to ensuring privacy of information.

CANCER TREATMENT

Mrs Lyn McLeod (Thunder Bay-Atikokan): — years now that cancer patients are waiting unacceptably long times for radiation treatment. This summer we learned that the waits for cancer surgery are equally unacceptable: 50% of cancer patients are waiting more than five weeks for surgery, 20% wait more than two months. You responded to this incredibly shocking information with the assurance that you were going to solve the problem with your plan to merge cancer centres with hospitals. In fact, Minister, your plan to gut our cancer centres will make waits longer.

That's exactly what you were told last week by Graham Scott, the man you appointed to head Cancer Care Ontario on an interim basis. He said that if you go ahead with your merger plan, waiting times for radiation treatment and cancer surgery will grow and access to

treatment will be unequal across this province. Minister, will you now abandon your plan to gut Cancer Care Ontario and let our cancer centres continue to manage the care of cancer patients?

Hon Tony Clement (Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): The honourable member is incorrect in her characterization. But I would be remiss if I didn't share with this House the good news on the cancer care front. On June 1 of this year, for instance, Cancer Care Ontario was able to announce that breast and prostate cancer patients would no longer be sent to the United States for radiation treatment, and indeed yesterday Cancer Care Ontario announced that patients would no longer be referred to northern Ontario for treatment, because of the success of their efforts to treat patients closer to home in a much more humane way. So those have been successes of cancer care here in Ontario.

1500

Mrs McLeod:—dealing with cancer patients who need radiation therapy when you know full well how far you have to go to meet the goal of treating 90% with radiation therapy within the stated time of four weeks, which is acceptable.

Today's question, however, is about cancer surgery waits. When that study came out, with its shocking information about how long people are waiting for cancer surgery, you tried to blame it again on somebody else. You said, "It's not a lack of money. That's not the problem. The problem is an inefficient cancer system."

The problem is a lack of money, a lack of hospital beds, a lack of operating room nurses, and a lack of diagnostic equipment. Your plan for so-called integration of cancer centres with hospitals is really just a way of burying the fact that cancer patients have to wait for treatment, because if Cancer Care Ontario is no longer coordinating patient care, is no longer setting standards for care, we won't know how long patients are waiting for treatment. Cancer patients will know.

I ask if you will today acknowledge that the waits for cancer surgery are a direct result of the underfunding of hospitals, and will you target funds for cancer surgery so patients can get the care they need when they need it?

Hon Mr Clement: We have and we will. The fact of the matter is that on September 17—granted our focus was on some other things at that time—I was able to announce that \$20 million this year is going to Cancer Care Ontario for additional medical equipment, another \$10 million to Princess Margaret. I can tell the honourable member and this House that since January 1999 there have been 168 new radiation therapists who have been appointed, 50 new medical physicists, 23 radiation oncologists. Princess Margaret Hospital alone has exceeded their target for a 10% increase in treatments, treating more than 12.6% more patients this year, and they will be on track again next year.

That's the good news in Cancer Care Ontario because of the policies of this government. We are concerned about the very issues that the member raises, and yet she draws the wrong conclusions.

INTERNATIONAL WALK TO SCHOOL DAY

Mr Raminder Gill (Bramalea-Gore-Malton-Springdale): My question is for the Minister of the Environment. As we are aware, today is International Walk to School Day. Thousands of students in my riding are making a special effort on this day to walk or bike to school. Walking and biking to school are healthy alternatives to driving. In fact, Mahatma Gandhi, whose birthday the world is celebrating today, walked everywhere, and through peaceful and non-violent means was able to win independence for the largest democracy in the world. Minister, please tell us what we are doing to promote International Walk to School Day.

Hon Elizabeth Witmer (Minister of the Environment): The member has highlighted the fact that today is International Walk to School Day. It is an initiative that is sponsored by a non-profit group known as Greenest City. I've had the opportunity to support the Greenest City group in their efforts to encourage children to walk to school. In fact, this group has undertaken efforts to educate not just children but also parents about making good alternative choices.

We know that transportation is the single largest source of smog-causing pollution in the province. So today children and families are encouraged to get out of their cars and to walk to school. Parents are also encouraged to reduce the idling of their motors when they drop or pick up their children at school.

Mr Gill: Minister, York University has conducted a study that shows that less than half of Canadian children walk to school and would be happier and healthier if they could walk or ride a bike.

I should also note that the increased traffic around schools poses a risk, as traffic fatalities are the leading cause of death for Canadian children over the age of one. Could you please comment on these statistics and suggest any actions we could take to address them?

Hon Mrs Witmer: There was a study that was undertaken by York University. Personally, I was very glad to see that three quarters of the students who were interviewed indicated that they would prefer to walk to school as opposed to riding to school. Certainly as a former Minister of Health, I recognize the tremendous impact of allowing children the opportunity to walk to school. Not only is it healthier because of the exercise but also, if we could take off the streets some of those cars that are driving children to school, it would reduce the amount of air pollution. We will continue to support initiatives whereby children are encouraged to walk to school and continue to support initiatives where parents are encouraged not to idle in front of the school when they park, because we know that even 10 seconds of idling starts to have a very negative impact.

EDUCATION FUNDING

Mr Gerard Kennedy (Parkdale-High Park): I have a question for the Minister of Education. I want to talk

about the effects of your lack of defence and promotion of education within your cabinet, where you've allowed corporate tax cuts to divert resources away from students.

In particular, Minister, you may be aware that there is a new report today, the Secondary School Tracking Report, and in it is something very disturbing. It suggests that 65% of our high schools are not able to have textbooks for the new curriculum. That's 65%, two thirds of students, going without. Two thirds of students are sharing texts, and 92% are having to make do with old and worn textbooks because the priority of this province under this government is not the basic learning chances for students.

Madam Minister, I want to ask you today, in light of this report, will you stand up and fight for students and argue in front of us in this House for resources to make sure they get a fair chance to learn?

Hon Janet Ecker (Minister of Education, Government House Leader): Mr Speaker, through you to the honourable member, maybe he has to argue in his caucus for more money for education, but in this government we have indeed put more dollars in public education, increased the investment in public education and in classrooms, because we believe it is so important. And those kinds of investments will continue into our public education system: this year alone, over 300 million new dollars—\$360 million—for education.

I know the honourable member is trying to sort of blow up the figures, but I think we should note that 16% of high schools responded to this survey, so he's talking about a percentage of the 16% that actually responded. I congratulate the parents for the work they have done. We review this information, as we do with information from school boards and all of our partners, at this time of year to set our priorities for funding next year; we will certainly do it with this. But I think he should be accurate in terms of how he casts this picture.

Mr Kennedy: Minister, denigrating the parents who put this survey together does you no credit, because you have no figures to show otherwise. Your own figures on funding show that last year you provided \$30 million for textbooks, and this year you're providing 50% less, \$15 million. That's the kind of fighting you're doing for students. Minister, your own brief to your caucus says that parents see there is a lack of textbooks and classroom supplies. So you admit it to these people in private; you won't tell the people of Ontario about it here today.

Madam Minister, we want to know: on your own Web site you only offer textbooks for three subjects—English, math and history. You do not offer textbooks for social science, for history, for a whole range of things. Knowing that 65% of students are going without books, will you be the Minister of Education? Will you stand up today and say you're going to go back to your cabinet and fight for the resources to make sure that every kid in this province gets a chance to learn because they have their textbooks in hand?

Hon Mrs Ecker: There's a whole textbook industry out there that's going to be really interested to hear the

Liberal critic say they're only providing books for certain subjects. School boards get more money for textbooks and learning resources. They have the ability to use that money flexibly. They get it through the foundation grant, they get it through special grants, they get it through other programs targeted to particular programs. So there are resources there for textbooks.

Do we need more resources for textbooks? Of course we do. Where has the honourable critic been? This is news to him, that with the new curriculum we need new learning materials? Of course we do, and that is why we have indeed been putting specially targeted money for learning resources for our students.

BORDER SECURITY

Mr Bart Maves (Niagara Falls): My question is for the Minister of Citizenship. Since the acts of terrorism in the United States on September 11, there's been ongoing discussion both in Canada and the United States on the matter of border security and refugees. The federal government has been criticized, with federal Liberal Immigration Minister Elinor Caplan saying there might be changes or there may not be changes to immigration policy.

Minister, Ontario is home to most of Canada's immigrants. What assurances can you offer them in light of these reports?

1510

Hon Cameron Jackson (Minister of Citizenship, minister responsible for seniors): As all members of the House know, the federal government is the level of government that sets immigration levels and admissions into our country and the current Bill C-11 is before the Senate. But there is considerable time left in order for us to participate in discussions on this new legislation. Processing refugees to determine genuine claimants is a sensitive and complex issue. I shall be requesting that the federal Minister of Immigration sit down with representatives from our province so that we can raise some of the concerns that have been raised by Ontario residents.

Unfortunately, some people have been linking immigration to this issue, and that can be somewhat misguided. Canada is a nation built on immigration. We live in a nation, and a province in particular, that promises peace, harmony and a chance for prosperity in a democracy that discriminates against no one. We have welcomed one million new Canadians to this province who have found jobs, tolerance with their churches and their schools. We will—

The Speaker (Hon Gary Carr): Order. I'm afraid the minister's time is up.

Mr Maves: The question of border controls and refugees is not the only one that has arisen as a result of the terrorism in the United States. There have also been occurrences of threats, harassment and intolerance toward some cultural groups. I understand that you have been meeting with leaders of various groups as a result of

these reports. Would you update the House on those activities?

Hon Mr Jackson: Although we have a threat from terrorism, we also have a threat that we must also deal with, and that is attacks on tolerance in our province. So far we've been fortunate not to have too many experiences of this—but I know that we all continue to work hard. I know many of the members of our caucus have met with members of the cultural community, in particular the Muslim community, and reached out to them to give them the reassurances and to let them know that they have the total support of this government, that we will not tolerate racially motivated crimes against our citizens. The Ontario Human Rights Code is one of the strongest in North America and is there for the protection of our citizens. With the Premier, with his statements and the leadership that's provided, this government plans to introduce measures to provide our citizens with added security.

Members of all faiths—

The Speaker: I thank the member.

The member for Trinity-Spadina.

EDUCATION FUNDING

Mr Rosario Marchese (Trinity-Spadina): My question is to the Minister of Education. Today, People for Education at Oakwood Collegiate revealed the sorry state of our secondary schools. You obviously know that 65% of the respondents don't have enough textbooks for the new curriculum and half of Ontario's schools have fewer teachers but more pupils. You've refused to meet with People for Education for two years. Why is it that you're so afraid, or at least reluctant, to meet with this, in my view, very important group and discuss the concerns that they're tracking?

Hon Janet Ecker (Minister of Education, Government House Leader): Yes, I have stood in this House before and welcomed reports by parents of whatever group in terms of input they believe this government needs to have as we make the funding priority decisions for next year. In this case, 16% of high schools did respond to their survey on this. We are indeed looking at the priorities for funding next year, as we do every year. The honourable member is very familiar with that.

I should point out that this government also this year invested \$163 million in the secondary panel to help with more teachers, to help with the workload. School boards had the flexibility—because they needed it and they wanted it—on how they allocated those resources for extra teachers. Some have used it in different ways. Some have used it for compensation. It is within their purview to do that. We do appreciate that every time one states a fact in here, the honourable members across the way love to turn it into some attack on something.

Mr Marchese: I asked you: why are you so afraid and/or reluctant to meet with this group? That's what I asked you. Two years. It is an important group. You can't find some time to meet and discuss their concerns?

You know that our schools are crumbling while your government gives away \$175 million in tax cuts. Our schools and children desperately need that investment. You're giving it away; it's going down the drain to someone else. You know that you spent, yes, \$30 million—in the first two years of our secondary schools—in the reform of the curriculum. But for the next year you've only allocated \$15 million. It's a serious concern, and you know that. With \$75 million alone, you could buy a new textbook for every Ontario student who needs one. Your seedy tax cut won't help parents who are paying \$150 per student in classroom materials alone. We need textbooks, not tax breaks. Will you commit to funding textbooks for Ontario's schools and students?

Hon Mrs Ecker: I have met and will continue to meet with parent groups. As a matter of fact, we believe it is important to get the input of parents. That's why we're going to be launching a province-wide survey for all parents to have input into their education priorities.

We have indeed increased money for textbooks this year again. They get money, as you know, through various ways, as I said earlier. For you to stand up and pretend that's the only money school boards have for textbooks, with all due respect, that's not an accurate picture.

Do we need to continue to invest in the new curriculum? Of course we do. That's why every year we have increased money for textbooks, for learning resources, the early reading initiative again this year, more money for learning resources, because we understand that we need to increase resources and investments in public education. But you don't have that money to invest in public education without the jobs, without the prosperity, and that's what tax cuts get you, that kind of income, that kind of investment. The honourable member should understand that by now—

The Speaker (Hon Gary Carr): Order. The minister's time is up.

PETITIONS

HYDRO ONE EQUIPMENT

Mr Dave Levac (Brant): This petition is now reaching into the thousands when it comes to the people who support it in a small community in the county of Brant.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the government of Ontario has direct responsibility for Hydro One and the equipment owned and operated by Hydro One;

“Whereas the electrical equipment in Brant county is in desperate need of repair, regularly causing disruptive blackouts to the residents and businesses of Brant county; and

“Whereas this equipment was previously offered for sale to the municipality, during which time the

municipality was conducting its own restructuring and was forbidden to purchase the infrastructure by the provincial government; and

“Whereas the municipality of the county of Brant is now in a position to purchase the dilapidated structures owned by Hydro One;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“To allow the municipality of the county of Brant to commence negotiations with Hydro One to purchase the infrastructure that lies within the county’s borders to ensure that this equipment is properly maintained and to avoid further blackouts to our industry caused primarily by the neglect of Hydro One.”

I sign my name and hand the petition over to Simon the page.

SAFE DRINKING WATER LEGISLATION

Ms Marilyn Churley (Toronto-Danforth): I have a petition which reads:

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the people of Ontario have the right to receive clean and safe drinking water; and

“Whereas clean, safe drinking water is a basic human entitlement and essential for the protection of public health; and

“Whereas the people of Ontario have the right to receive accurate and immediate information about the quality of water; and

“Whereas Mike Harris and the government of Ontario have failed to protect the quality of drinking water in Ontario; and

“Whereas Mike Harris and the government of Ontario have failed to provide the necessary financial resources to the Ministry of the Environment; and

“Whereas the policies of Mike Harris and the government of Ontario have endangered the environment and the health of the citizens of Ontario;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“(1) Immediately restore adequate funding and staffing to the Ministry of the Environment;

“(2) Immediately pass into law Bill 3, the Safe Drinking Water Act, 2001.”

I will affix my signature to this petition; I support it.

PROTECTION OF MINORS

Mr Bob Wood (London West): I have a petition signed by 1,024 people, some of the 23,000 people to date who have signed this petition:

“Whereas children are being exposed to sexually explicit materials in many commercial establishments;

“Whereas many municipalities do not have bylaws in place to protect minors and those that do vary from place to place and have failed to protect minors from unwanted exposure to sexually explicit materials;

“Whereas uniform standards are needed in Ontario that would make it illegal to sell, rent, loan or display sexually explicit materials to minors;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“To pass Bill 95, Protection of Minors from Sexually Explicit Goods and Services Act, 2000, as soon as possible.”

1520

HOME CARE

Mr Rick Bartolucci (Sudbury): This petition is to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario and it says:

“Whereas the need for home care services is rapidly growing in Ontario due to the aging of the population and hospital restructuring; and

“Whereas the prices paid by community care access centres to purchase home care services for their clients are rising due to factors beyond their control; and

“Whereas the funding provided by the Ontario government through the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care is inadequate to meet the growing need for home care services; and

“Whereas the funding shortfall, coupled with the implications of Bill 46, the Public Sector Accountability Act, currently before the Legislature are forcing community care access centres to make deep cuts in home care services without any policy direction from the provincial government;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“That the Legislative Assembly direct the provincial government to take control of policy-setting for home care services through rational, population-based health care planning rather than simply by underfunding the system; and

“That the Legislative Assembly direct the provincial government to provide sufficient funding to community care access centres to support the home care services that are the mandate of community care access centres in the volumes needed to meet their communities’ rapidly growing needs; and

“That the Legislative Assembly make it necessary for the provincial government to notify the agencies it funds of the amount of funding they will be given by the government in a fiscal year at least three months before the commencement of this fiscal year.”

Of course, I affix my signature as I am in complete agreement with it.

PERSONAL NEEDS ALLOWANCE

Mr David Christopherson (Hamilton West): I have further petitions from hometown Hamilton. The petition reads as follows:

“Whereas individuals who are tenants or residents in facilities such as care homes, nursing homes or domiciliary hostels under certain acts are provided with a per-

sonal needs allowance to meet incidental costs other than those provided by the facility; and

“Whereas the personal needs allowance has been fixed by the Ontario government at a rate of \$112 for nearly a decade and has not kept pace with cost-of-living increases, and furthermore is inadequate to meet incidental costs such as clothing, hygiene products and other essentials;

“Therefore, we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to immediately review and amend provincial legislation to increase the personal needs allowance from \$112 a month to \$160 a month for individuals living in care homes, nursing homes or other domiciliary hostels.”

Again, I continue to add my support by signing this petition.

PROTECTION OF MINORS

Mr Bob Wood (London West): I have a petition signed by 976 people.

“Whereas children are being exposed to sexually explicit materials in many commercial establishments;

“Whereas many municipalities do not have bylaws in place to protect minors and those that do vary from place to place and have failed to protect minors from unwanted exposure to sexually explicit materials;

“Whereas uniform standards are needed in Ontario that would make it illegal to sell, rent, loan or display sexually explicit materials to minors;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“To pass Bill 95, Protection of Minors from Sexually Explicit Goods and Services Act, 2000, as soon as possible.”

REQUEST FOR PUBLIC INQUIRY

Mr John Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands): I have a petition here that is of great interest to the residents of my community and it's addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

“Whereas Sharon Reynolds, a seven-year-old young girl, died tragically; and

“Whereas the crown's case against Louise Reynolds was not proceeded with; and

“Whereas there are many unanswered questions relating to the circumstances surrounding the death of Sharon Reynolds,

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“That the Premier of Ontario and his cabinet colleagues call upon the Lieutenant Governor in Council pursuant to section 2 of the Public Inquiries Act to order a full and independent inquiry into the death of Sharon Reynolds.”

I agree with it. I've signed it and I'm handing it to Emma McGuire.

COMMUNITY CARE ACCESS CENTRES

CENTRES D'ACCÈS AUX SOINS COMMUNAUTAIRES

Mrs Claudette Boyer (Ottawa-Vanier): “Whereas the Mike Harris government promised to institute patient-based budgeting for health care services in the 1995 Common Sense Revolution;

« Attendu que les Centres d'accès aux soins communautaires doivent maintenant collectivement faire face à un manque à gagner de 175 \$ millions en raison d'un gel de leur financement par le gouvernement provincial ;

“Whereas due to this funding shortfall, CCACs have cut back on home care services affecting many sick and elderly Ontarians;

« Attendu que ces réductions dans les services ont principalement été effectuées dans les services d'auxiliaires familiales, ce qui oblige les Ontariens et Ontariennes à recourir à des établissements de soins de longue durée plus coûteux ou à retourner à l'hôpital ;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to immediately institute real patient-based budgeting for health care services, including home care, so as to ensure that working families in Ontario can access the health care services they need.”

I gladly sign this petition.

PROTECTION OF MINORS

Mr Bob Wood (London West): I have a petition signed by 1,024 people.

“Whereas children are being exposed to sexually explicit materials in many commercial establishments;

“Whereas many municipalities do not have bylaws in place to protect minors, and those that do vary from place to place and have failed to protect minors from unwanted exposure to sexually explicit materials;

“Whereas uniform standards are needed in Ontario that would make it illegal to sell, rent, loan or display sexually explicit materials to minors;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“To pass Bill 95, Protection of Minors from Sexually Explicit Goods and Services Act, 2000, as soon as possible.”

ONTARIO PUBLIC SERVICE

Mr Pat Hoy (Chatham-Kent Essex): I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the November 2000 announcement of massive privatization of Ministry of Transportation services will have a significant detrimental effect on citizen road safety, confidentiality of citizens' information and on the economy of Ontario; and

“Whereas the employees of the Ministry of Transportation are recognized in writing by the provincial government to have provided excellent service on the government's behalf; and

“Whereas the government of Ontario is taking away the livelihood and decreasing the standard of living of thousands of employees and families by its actions both directly and indirectly through spinoff effects; and

“Whereas citizens of Ontario are entitled to safe roads, consistency in driver testing, and competent inspection of trucks, school buses and vehicles carrying dangerous goods; and

“Whereas communities continue to need to retain decent-paying jobs if they are to maintain viability and vibrancy; and

“Whereas we taxpayers have entrusted the provincial government with the maintenance of public safety with an apolitical and efficient public service, a service free of profiteering and protected from conflicts of interest; and

“Whereas privatization is an abdication of such public trust;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to place a moratorium on all further privatization and to restore and promote public service as being of significant value in our society.”

I too have signed this petition.

PROTECTION OF MINORS

Mr Bob Wood (London West): I have a petition signed by 1,008 people.

“Whereas children are being exposed to sexually explicit materials in many commercial establishments;

“Whereas many municipalities do not have bylaws in place to protect minors, and those that do vary from place to place and have failed to protect minors from unwanted exposure to sexually explicit materials;

“Whereas uniform standards are needed in Ontario that would make it illegal to sell, rent, loan or display sexually explicit materials to minors;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“To pass Bill 95, Protection of Minors from Sexually Explicit Goods and Services Act, 2000, as soon as possible.”

Petitions to this effect have now been presented to this Legislature signed by some 23,000 people.

COMMUNITY CARE ACCESS CENTRES

Mr Bruce Crozier (Essex): “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the Mike Harris government promised to institute patient-based budgeting for health care services in the 1995 Common Sense Revolution; and

“Whereas community care access centres now face a collective shortfall of \$175 million due to a funding rollback by the provincial government; and

“Whereas due to this funding rollback, CCACs have cut back on home care services affecting many sick and elderly Ontarians; and

“Whereas these cuts in services are mostly in homemaking services, forcing Ontarians into more expensive long-term-care facilities or back into hospital;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to immediately lift the funding freeze for health care services so as to ensure the community care access centres can provide the services that Ontario working families need.”

I sign this in support of it and give it to Cynthia Tran from LaSalle to deliver it to the Clerk’s desk.

Mrs Sandra Pupatello (Windsor West): “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the Mike Harris government promised to institute patient-based budgeting for health care services in the 1995 Common Sense Revolution; and

“Whereas community care access centres now face a collective shortfall of \$175 million due to a funding rollback by the provincial government;

“Whereas due to this funding rollback, community care access centres have cut back on home care services affecting many sick and elderly Ontarians; and

“Whereas these cuts in services are forcing Ontarians into more expensive long-term-care facilities or back into hospital;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to immediately lift the funding freeze for home care services so as to ensure that community care access centres can provide the services that Ontario’s working families need.”

I am happy to submit this on behalf of the people from Burritts Rapids—

The Acting Speaker (Mr Bert Johnson): Thank you very much.

1530

AIR QUALITY

Mr James J. Bradley (St Catharines): By the way, Mr Speaker, I must compliment Stratford on the wonderful season it’s had this year despite the difficulties. There has been a problem with tourism, but I know that Stratford has been very successful. Nonetheless, here we go with the petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

“Whereas the Harris government’s wholly owned Nanticoke generating station is North America’s largest dirty coal-fired electricity-producing plant and Ontario’s largest producer of the chemicals and acid gases which contribute to deadly smog and acid rain; and

“Whereas the Nanticoke plant, which has more than doubled its dangerous emissions under the Harris government, is now the worst air polluter in all of Canada, spewing out over five million kilograms of toxic chemicals each year, including many cancer-causing chemicals and mercury, a potent and dangerous neurotoxin; and

“Whereas at least 13 Ontario municipalities and seven northeastern US states have expressed concerns that Ontario Power Generation’s proposed cleanup plan for

Nanticoke is inadequate in protecting the air quality and health and safety of their residents; and

“Whereas the Ontario Medical Association has stated that 1,900 Ontarians die prematurely each year and we pay \$1 billion annually in health-related costs as a result of air pollution; and

“Whereas, because the Harris government has now lifted the moratorium on the sale of coal-fired power plants and has set a date for deregulation of electricity, the operator of the Nanticoke plant will likely stoke up production to maximize profits which will only worsen the air quality in cities like Toronto, Hamilton, Welland, Niagara Falls and St Catharines;

“Be it resolved that the Mike Harris government immediately order that the Nanticoke generating station be converted from dirty coal to cleaner-burning natural gas.”

I sign my signature on this.

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 1, 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): We were in the leadoff I think for the Liberal caucus. There are about 15 minutes left.

Mr Sean G. Conway (Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke): I rise to oppose Bill 65 for a number of reasons. Some of those reasons have been cited by the office of the privacy commissioner, the Provincial Auditor and a number of other individuals.

I want to join my colleagues in saying, however, that we in government have done a rather poor job of providing adequate levels of service to those men and women across Ontario who by law are obligated to receive driver testing. For many years that obligation has been the responsibility of the provincial government.

In my area, which is largely rural eastern Ontario, I am hearing more and more complaints from people, young people, who are asked to pony up 100 bucks or 75 bucks every time they turn around for a test, oftentimes having to wait months for the test; in many cases, having to drive 75 kilometres to 100 kilometres for the test; on

some occasions, meeting people not very agreeable for the test. Not a very good show, quite frankly.

If you live in Wilno, in Bissett Creek, in Matawatchan, in Braeside or in Barry's Bay, you've often got a three-, four- or five-month wait and in many cases a very long drive. If you're 16 or 17, that's one thing, but if you are 80 or 82 years of age, it is not a very happy circumstance.

I want to give the department of highways, and I suppose the Harris government—my old friend, our colleague Al Palladini, gets the credit for this, that the changes in the way we test senior citizens, those over 80, have in fact been improved in the last five to 10 years. I want to be fair. I think it is, by and large, better in some respects recently than it was 10 or 15 years ago. But the number of senior citizens who stop me at church picnics or at public meetings and register their complaint about the way this system is operating is quite worrisome. I know that other members from rural Ontario—I see the Minister of Energy is here and I'm sure in South Simcoe he's hearing some of the same complaints.

My friend the minister responsible for the treasury board—is that what Turnbull does now? No, he's the Solicitor General—is quick to point out about all the government does with road-related taxes. I have the 2001 Ontario budget. I just want to remind the House and anybody watching that last year Her Majesty's Ontario government collected \$911 million under the category of vehicle and driver registration fees. We took in more money last year from motor vehicle and driver registration fees—\$911 million—and we project this year about \$925 million to \$930 million. We take in more money in those fees than we will spend on the entire Ministry of Transportation capital budget for this year according to this same budget.

I can tell you what's going to happen when we get this system privatized, particularly if you live in rural and northern Ontario, but particularly rural Ontario. The service, bad as it is now, will be worse because the private sector is going to be interested—take my area, for example. They're going to be interested in Pembroke and Renfrew, where we now operate testing centres. Who do you suppose is going to be interested in Griffith and Quadeville and Madawaska and Chalk River? Or Denbigh or Sharbot Lake? Not very many. The people in those rural communities—whether they're in north Frontenac or southwest Renfrew—pay those fees and charges just like everybody else.

I just want to say, particularly when we had this exchange today in question period about cutting taxes and fees: 925 million bucks we will take out of the pockets of drivers this year on the fee account. What kind of service are we operating? A damn poor service, especially poor in rural areas, and it's going to get worse under this scheme. Because a market-driven privatized system won't give two tinkers' dams about rural communities. And we obligate that “Thou shalt” do certain things under this system. You don't have a choice. We don't have a choice about the fact that we live in a country of four and a half to five months of winter.

The bill sets out provisions as to how the privacy provisions are going to be protected. I don't believe it for a moment. And you know why I don't believe it? I remember the POSO example of two years ago. We as a Legislature did nothing. In fact, people laughed about the fact that 50,000 provincial bank accounts were wrongly, and I believe illegally, exposed to eyes that ought not to have seen them. Was there any retribution? Was there any accountability for that? Nothing. Not a damn thing. There were some pretty prominent private sector players involved in that. I have to say to the Angus Reid Group, good for them because they blew the whistle.

Any accountability? None. Any protection? None. We have a case going in Quebec at the present time. You'll all remember the journalist Michel Auger at le Journal de Montréal who was shot in the parking lot in a gangland way. In the last press report I saw, a key component in how the gang figured out who he was was that they accessed his driver's registration data. Charges, I believe, have been laid against an official—probably a public servant, although I'm not sure—in the motor vehicle registration branch in the province of Quebec. Just a very recent reminder of how important and valuable this information is and what can happen to it when it's in the wrong hands.

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Read the auditor's report. Read Dr Cavoukian's advice. Remember the POSO case. Lovely language in section 9 of Bill 65. What's our track record? What has our attitude been? Benign neglect at best and a hearty laugh when complaints are raised about egregious misconduct, as I believe it was in the POSO case.

I want to return again to my constituents. I am constantly besieged by people who tell me about just what it is they have to do, particularly waiting periods. I know, from talking to other members, that if you're in rural Ontario you've got an above-average percentage of older people. In my county there is virtually no public transit—none. So your car and/or your half-ton truck or your neighbor's half-ton truck or car is absolutely critical if you're going to have any kind of quality of life.

If you live at RR3 Eganville, and your doctor's in Renfrew and your hospital is in Pembroke, you'd better hope you've got a licence or somebody near you has got a licence and a vehicle. The networks that are out there to make sure that older people get to medical appointments and other requirements that they have, if they live in the rural areas, into urban centres like Pembroke and Renfrew, are quite substantial.

I'm not here to defend the sorry state of public driver testing, because it's not a very happy situation and quite frankly it has been grinding down, worsening, for some years now. I just repeat: it's not because the users aren't paying the bucks—almost \$1 billion now annually to the provincial government from drivers for road-related fees and other charges. I'm not even going to talk about the \$2.3 billion we will take this year from the gas tax alone.

Do you know what's going to happen under this scheme? I'll tell you what's going to happen. Just what's

happening up on the 401. You're going to get to pay for the 401 through the gas tax and you're going to get to pay for the 407 through another tax. You're supposed to celebrate that as some kind of an efficiency.

I'm almost alone in my own caucus on this subject of road-related taxes. When John Robarts recommended 50 years ago that the way we should pay for our highway system was not through tolls but rather through dedicated gasoline and road-related taxes, all sides agreed.

Mr David Tilson (Dufferin-Peel-Wellington-Grey): Increase the gas taxes.

Mr Conway: No, that's not my point, I say to you, Tilson. I'm saying, if you're going to take on gas taxes \$2.3 billion and on fuel taxes \$600 million and on fees another \$900 million, for a total this year of \$3.85 billion, you spend more than 40% of that take on the purpose for which the tax and fee were charged in the first place.

We're cutting corporate taxes, we're cutting personal income taxes, but we are not cutting these other fees that, in a big, northern and rural province, are to some real degree a function of our geography. Do you know what's happening? The gasoline tax, in a sense a geography tax, is now being expected to carry a greater load of general revenue expenses. Is that the kind of tax policy people in Caledon want? I doubt it. I know in North Perth or in South Renfrew that's not a tax policy that people would endorse.

I'm not happy about high gas taxes, but I will pay them if the revenues are applied to the purposes for which the tax or fee was intended. I am personally sick and tired of listening to corporate executives and others say, "Cut the marginal taxes, cut corporate marginal income tax rates, cut corporate taxes, impose tolls for new highways, but don't be afraid now to take 60% of the gasoline tax revenue and apply it to general government expenditures." Do you know what? If that's the policy, then I say to Tilson and anybody else, you pare back the gasoline tax—but I say it to my own colleagues.

I find there's quite a divide here on this subject between the rural and the urban members, irrespective of their party affiliation. I repeat, at RR3 Eganville you have no public transit. At Bay and Bloor, thanks to the box and provincial, municipal and federal taxpayers, you've got a rather elaborate public transit system, as you should in an urban community as large as Toronto. But my rural constituents want to know when they're going to get \$925 million worth of value on road-related registration and fee matters consistent with what they're paying. Right now—and let me say in a fairly ecumenical way—whether you're Liberal, New Democrat or Tory, in the last 25 years you've been pretty quick to pick the pocket of the motorist and pretty damned slow to put 90 or 95 cents back into the service for which the fee or tax was intended.

There are problems, absolutely. Is Bill 65 going to solve those problems? I think not. I think it is unfair and unjust what it will do to my rural constituents—not just my rural constituents, but rural constituents across the length and breadth of Ontario. I think the bill will not

guarantee in any reasonable way the protection of privacy that it claims to want to do. I think it is going to open up the government to all kinds of commercial pressures that are going to be more about revenue and less about safety than any of us would really like. Quite frankly, I think it reminds us all, in this season particularly, that there are some places where fair-minded citizens say, "There is a role for government," and given the obligatory nature of the driving business, given the rural nature, the very large and complex geographic nature of this province, given the privacy and security issues, surely it behooves this Legislature to think again, to set aside Bill 65 and find more effective and more efficient ways of repairing and improving a public motor vehicle registration and driver testing system.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Michael A. Brown): Questions and comments?

Mr Gilles Bisson (Timmins-James Bay): I just want to say straight up, the New Democratic caucus opposed this when it was initially introduced by the government as a means of being able to move driver testing from the public sector over to the private sector, based on a number of arguments that I'll put forward as I give our lead speech on this particular issue.

I must say that we've been very consistent in our opposition to this particular move by the provincial government. We said then, last spring, when this issue was brought forward by the government, that we were opposed. During the summer months, as we went around the province meeting with people, we said we were opposed. We said we were opposed when we talked to private operators, as we said we were opposed when we talked to OPSEU. We say now we're opposed, as we're in the House, because we believe that the public sector is better suited to being able to do this job. The issue is that we have to make sure the system is adequately funded so that we have the staff in place to make sure people can get driver exams.

However, I just listened to the Liberals do their lead speech and I'm wondering a little bit what's happening in the Liberal caucus, because I remember Dalton McGuinty last spring, when this was initially introduced, standing up and supporting the government on the move to privatize driver examinations on the basis that it was going to be better for those who were trying to get their drivers' tests. Now I'm glad to see that they've flip-flopped again, because I saw three or four Liberal members get up between yesterday and today and contradict their leader, Dalton McGuinty, and actually say that they're opposed. So I say to the leader of the Liberal Party, I think you're wrong; I think Mike Harris is wrong. We should not privatize. I say to Mr Conway, I say to other members who got up, I think you're right. The arguments that you make are very valid ones.

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If the system is not working, it's not because it was the public sector's fault; it's the government that reduced the amount of staff in those offices, which led to the issue. It's the government that did not staff up, knowing there

was a graduated driver's licence system in place. And the government's response is wrong. It's not by privatizing that we'll fix this problem; it's by properly supporting the public system.

Mrs Julia Munro (York North): I think there are a couple of points here that need to be clarified. The first one is in the area of the concern over government control. There is no question about the continuing role of government in this piece of legislation. It is the government's responsibility to develop policy, introduce legislation and uphold regulation. That is what it does now, and that's what it will do under this bill.

The second issue that I think requires some response is the question of concern over privacy. In fact, the issue has been well documented in a letter addressed to the minister from the commissioner of information and privacy for Ontario. I'd like to take this moment to simply introduce into the record the kind of comments that were made. I quote, "I want to take this opportunity to commend you for the attention paid to privacy and access in the recently introduced Bill 65, the Improving Customer Service for Road Users Act, 2001."

It continues, "The manner in which private service providers have been made subject to the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act is laudable. I am particularly supportive of the provision that will require service providers to appoint a privacy officer. This will provide additional assurance that existing privacy rights enjoyed by Ontario citizens will not be diminished through this process.

"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."

This speaks to that issue.

Mr Jean-Marc Lalonde (Glengarry-Prescott-Russell): I too am concerned with the privatization of this service to the public. I just have to remember when the government decided to privatize the X-ray clinics. At the present time we opened up quite a few in Ontario, but all of a sudden they're closing them all down because they are a money-grabber. In this case, we know very often, when we look at the colleges' testing that they have to do of these students before they are admitted, very often they are asked to come back and to come back again because there's a \$100 fee every time.

In this case, I wouldn't be surprised if whoever gets the licence to operate those driver testing sections will also become the owners of driving schools and clinics, and if you don't take the courses from them, the chances of passing the test will be very, very slight.

I'm really concerned. When I look at the cost, the implementation of the cost to the people they will be trying to assess, I'm quite concerned.

Also, when I look at the LCBO at the present time, the government was talking of privatization of the LCBO. But the government is making over \$675 million a year with the LCBO and was saying that we should privatize this section.

So once again, for the security of our Ontarians, I don't think it is a good move by this government to privatize the driver testing clinics in Ontario.

Mr Bert Johnson (Perth-Middlesex): I just wanted to put my comments on the record, because I wanted to tell the member for Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke that our ridings aren't that dissimilar. He has many small locations in that huge county of Renfrew that he's concerned about getting the test for. I don't accept his argument that that will be any worse. I would hope that it will be better. When I say that, he mentioned North Perth, and I live in that part of Listowel in North Perth. I think I mentioned it before, and he probably knows well that for both the young people who are graduating from high school and are at that driving age and the elderly, the ones who are 80 years old, maybe it takes half a day for them to go to Stratford after they have an appointment, which takes a long time, to get that test. It's a burden and a hardship on those constituents.

I hope this change by Bill 65 will improve that. He's quite adamant that privatization will not encourage that, and I hope that if the process in itself doesn't, the influence this government, particularly the Minister of Transportation, has on the system makes it better, because if I'm not assured that it improves the system, then I'd be very hesitant to vote in favour of it as well.

The Deputy Speaker: Response?

Mr Conway: Very briefly, listen, I'm the first to admit that the system we've got is in bad shape. Like everybody here, I hope it gets better. It's hard to imagine it getting any worse. My complaint, as somebody who lives on the highways of the province, is that we are this year going to take over 900 million bucks out of road users for motor vehicle registration and related fees. We're sure as hell not giving them \$900 million worth of value for that tax. So, like the member from Perth-Middlesex, I hope and I pray that it gets better. I don't believe it can get any worse, although there are issues here that give me great pause.

The one example I want to reflect on is the CCAC model. I remember Jim Wilson. I'm sure he was well-motivated, that what he wanted to do when the new government took office six years ago was to get the private sector involved in an RFP process to see if they couldn't bid down the cost of a lot of the services under the umbrella of the CCAC.

It might have worked for a year or two, but if you go and look carefully at some of the really significant inflationary cost pressures in your neighbourhood CCAC today, you're going to find out that—guess what has happened? You've now got markets. You've either got private monopolies or duopolies, and the per-unit price has gone up sharply in many cases. Service has gone sideways. We are at least as far back now in many of these areas as we were five years ago. And guess what? In the rural areas, there are very few people who want to bid or offer.

And remember, under the Highway Traffic Act, in this business of concern under 65, we mandate that thou shalt do certain things.

The Deputy Speaker: Further debate?

M. Gilles Bisson (Timmins-Baie James): C'est avec plaisir que je prends la chance de donner le point de vue du Nouveau parti démocratique faisant affaire avec cette initiative que le gouvernement met devant nous cet après-midi.

Le gouvernement nous dit simplement que présentement, quand un individu de la province de l'Ontario va chercher son permis de conduire, il y a une grosse ligne d'attente pour être capable d'avoir les services. Je ne pense pas qu'il y ait un membre de l'Assemblée, sur un bord de la Chambre ou l'autre, qui n'est pas d'accord qu'il y a un problème. La question est, pourquoi a-t-on un problème? Deuxièmement, qu'est-ce qu'on va faire pour être capable de trouver une solution?

Si on est tous d'accord qu'on trouve que c'est inacceptable que les individus de cette province ont besoin d'attendre quatre, six, huit et dix semaines et, en certaines instances, 12 semaines—je l'ai vu—pour aller chercher leur permis de conduire pour avoir l'examen nécessaire avec le ministère, si on accepte que ce n'est pas acceptable, ça devient, c'est quoi, le problème?

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Le problème est très simplement ceci: si on se rappelle la raison qu'on a les lignes qu'on a comme celles-là, c'est pour deux raisons. La première raison, numéro un, c'est parce que quand le gouvernement conservateur a pris le pouvoir en 1995, si on se le rappelle, ils ont réduit par des nombres très importants le nombre de personnel qu'on a dans les ministères du gouvernement de l'Ontario, y inclus le ministère des Transports. Ça a eu un effet sur les services qu'a le public quand ça vient à leur chercher les services de la province. Donc, premièrement, le gouvernement provincial a réduit par des nombres assez importants le personnel qui est en place pour être capable de donner les services au public.

Deuxièmement, le gouvernement provincial de Mike Harris savait qu'il y avait en place une loi qui avait été passée par le gouvernement provincial NPD de Bob Rae qui s'appelait « the graduated driver's licence system ». On savait, après une période de cinq ans qui devait commencer en 1996, 1997, qu'il allait y avoir beaucoup plus de monde qui allait venir pour leurs examens parce que, après cinq ans de conduite, il était nécessaire de venir chercher un examen du ministère, et le gouvernement provincial savait qu'on était pour avoir un surplus de personnes d'appointées au bureau du ministère des Transports.

Nous, on l'a su comme gouvernement parce que c'est nous qui avons introduit la loi, et notre plan était d'introduire plus de personnel au ministère pour être capable d'aller chercher la capacité dans le système pour répondre à la demande. C'est pour cette raison que nous, on croyait qu'on avait besoin d'augmenter le personnel pour être capables de résoudre le problème.

Le gouvernement provincial a dit non. Ils sont allés dans la direction opposée. Ils ont, premièrement, réduit le nombre du personnel au ministère des Transports et,

quand ils savaient qu'ils pourraient avoir une augmentation sur la demande, ils n'ont rien fait pour être capables de répondre à la demande. À place, ils ont réduit le personnel. Là, ils nous disent, « Il y a une crise. Les lignes ne sont pas acceptables et il faut faire quelque chose pour réparer le problème. »

Mais je dis simplement au gouvernement, je dis au ministère des Transports et je dis au premier ministre, écoutez, c'est vous qui avez causé le problème. Venir nous dire que la seule manière de se trouver une solution, c'est de privatiser le système, écoutez, c'est pas mal long, ça, entendre parler de cette manière de cette solution. Moi, je dis comme sociodémocrate du Nouveau parti démocratique que la solution n'est pas de privatiser. À place, c'est de s'assurer qu'on a le personnel en place au ministère, dans le secteur public, pour faire la job, point final.

So I say to the government, it's your own fault. You're the ones who created this mess in the first place.

When the government came out last spring and said, "We will move to privatize the system of driver examinations because there are unacceptable lineups," and we all know what those lineups were and we'll talk about that a little bit later, "of people trying to get in for testing," it was really interesting how the parties reacted to that announcement.

The Premier's party, the Conservative Party of Ontario, got up and said, "We will privatize." We New Democrats said, "No, that's not the answer. The problem is that you've reduced the amount of staff at the Ministry of Transportation, causing this problem of having more lineups, and you knew there were a bunch more drivers in the system through the graduated system that we introduced, so you did nothing to meet the demand. Instead, you reduced the amount of staff. So you caused the mess and now you're trying to blame the public sector as being responsible." I say that's wrong, and it's mean-spirited on the part of the government to try to blame the employees, because they didn't create the problem. You did.

When you made that announcement, we in the New Democratic Party immediately said that the response, the solution, is not to privatize but to properly fund our public system and make sure we have capacity within the public system to meet the demand.

What's interesting is what the Liberals said when they first heard of this announcement, and I go back to the National Post on June 1, 2001. It's interesting, because there were all kinds of stories in the media the day the government made this announcement. Let's read what Dalton McGuinty had to say in his press conference. Dalton McGuinty, the Liberal leader, welcomed the change because "the current system is inadequate." So Dalton McGuinty agrees with the Premier that it is the public sector's fault. I think that is really telling of where the Liberal leader is coming from when it comes to his belief, because there is no difference. Dalton McGuinty, when it comes to most policies of the government, agrees with the Tory government because down deep Dalton

McGuinty really is a small-c conservative. He's certainly not a progressive Liberal.

It goes on to say, in this article, "The current services are inadequate" says Dalton McGuinty, 'with long lineups, limited hours of operation and uneven customer relations.' The Liberal leader said the service at provincial driver's licence offices could not get any worse. 'We've had many, many complaints about the lengths of time it took to get a test, about the way they had been dealt with over at the licence bureau,' Mr McGuinty said," and basically went on to talk about how privatization is such a wonderful thing. I say shame on the Tories and shame on the Liberals—shame on both their houses—because quite frankly that was not the response.

What is so beautiful about being a Liberal is that the Liberal leader can say to the media, "I'm in favour of privatization," but then the Liberals come into the House and say, "We are opposed." Man, they're trying to have it both ways at the same time from here to Sunday. I say to the Liberals, please make clear what your position is. I understand where the Tories are coming from. They're saying privatize. At least I know where they're going. I don't agree. It is in the wrong direction. I believe the issue is, you created the crisis so therefore you should find the solution by undoing what you've done wrong.

But the Liberals try to have it both ways. I'm sure if we listen to the Liberal position six months from now, at a board of trade meeting that maybe the Liberal leader will be invited to speak to, at a chamber of commerce meeting or wherever it might be, he'll probably say, "Oh, I'm in favour of this privatization of driver examination." It is constantly flipping. Depending on the audience they talk to, they say, "We're for it," and then, depending on the next audience, they say, "We're against it." I say to the Liberals I have a hard time trying to accept any of the points that you put forward because I don't quite believe that you guys really understand what your position is.

Mr Dominic Agostino (Hamilton East): If we were ever on the same side, we would be in trouble.

Mr Bisson: We know that would be the case for us as well.

I say to the Liberals, listen, you can't have it both ways all the time. Maybe you can. Maybe they figure they can fool most of the voters all of the time. I tend to believe that you have to have integrity in this position. You have to have integrity. You have to be able to say, "This is what I stand for. This is where I'm going to go," and be clear about your position so that the voter clearly understands what options are when they go to the ballot box and what they can expect from their politicians.

The Tories I don't agree with. I say again, man, they're going the wrong way. But at least I know which way they're going. The NDP some people would agree with, some people would disagree with. But at least they understand where we are going. But I'm telling you, when it comes to Liberals, it doesn't matter what day of the week it is. It doesn't matter if it is a Friday, a Thursday or a Tuesday. It's like one day they're for it, the next day they're against it. I imagine they'll go to

OPSEU local membership meetings, the Liberals, and they're going to say, "Dastardly. This is terrible. This is awful."

Mr Agostino: Remember the Agenda for People?

The Deputy Speaker: The member for Timmins-James Bay has the floor. No other members should be participating in the debate.

Mr Bisson: Thank you very much.

I just say the last point of this is that the Liberals will go to an OPSEU membership meeting and say, "This is awful. This is terrible. We think that privatization of driver examination is terrible." You know what's sad? Some of those OPSEU members will actually believe that what you say is true. Then they're going to go off to the chamber of commerce meeting and say, "Privatization is the answer. That's the way we've got to do it. They didn't get it right under the public system, so let's privatize." I think people, when they come to the issue of being able to make up their minds about who they should support around policies, should at least have the benefit of knowing who's consistent and who's not.

Let me go back to the examples that I want raise in regard to the whole issue of privatization. The mantra of the provincial government is a very simple one. The mantra says, "If it's in the public sector it doesn't work, and somehow or other the only way that things can be done properly is to have it in the private sector." As a New Democrat, I want to say that is not the case. I want to give you just a couple of examples, OK?

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The government says to us, "Listen, Hydro is a mess. The only way that we can fix the Ontario Hydro problem that's happening in that public corporation is to, first of all, deregulate the system and get rid of it and put it into the private sector." That's the position of the Tory Party. I say it's wrong. Don't just believe me. Take a look at all other examples out there where they've gone out and privatized and deregulated hydro. The Tory government says to us, "By privatizing, we are going to be able to provide for better prices to consumers." Let's take a look at what happened in the United States. Hydro prices in the United States, depending on what jurisdiction you're in, are anywhere from 20% to 140% higher than they were before hydro deregulation started in the United States—and in Canada as well. So it's been completely the opposite effect. Privatization in itself has not been the solution.

Were there problems at Ontario Hydro? Sure there were. Ontario Hydro, prior to the 1990s, I would argue, had made a number of serious mistakes. One was Darlington. The construction of Darlington was way over budget, as far as what it was supposed to cost and what it came in at. The New Democrats, in opposition at the time to the then Tory government that decided to build Darlington, had said that you shouldn't go ahead with that project because of the big uncertainty that there was around the whole issue of cost, and as well that building the project well had some environmental concerns at the time.

The government went ahead and did it, and as a result we ended up with the largest debt at Ontario Hydro in the history of that crown corporation. As a result of all that, hydro prices started to rise in the province of Ontario—yes, under a public system. But when the Rae government got elected in 1990 and inherited that mess from the Tories, what did we do? We didn't say, "The answer is to privatize." No, we fired the CEO—or got rid of the CEO; let's be nice—and brought in Karl Morin-Strom in order to be able to set directions within Ontario Hydro so that we could break down some of the culture that existed at Hydro that caused many of the decisions that were made which were making Ontario uncompetitive to do business in because of hydro prices.

We in the New Democrat Party understand the basis of having a good economy is making sure you have a strong infrastructure and that those basic things that you need to do business with are available, are constant in supply and are as cheap as humanly possible to provide.

We gave direction to Hydro to get their act in order. Our ministers of energy, Mr Bud Wildman at one point and then Mr Brian Charlton, played significant roles in working through the problems at Ontario Hydro within a public system to be able to find a way to get that house in order.

Were the unions happy with us when we did that? Of course not. I remember the Power Workers' Local 1000 were mad as heck at a number of initiatives we had at Ontario Hydro. But if you look at what happened to Ontario Hydro from 1990 to 1995, the whole industry, the whole corporation was turned upside down. We managed to break the culture within Ontario Hydro, fix the problems within that public corporation and, in fact, froze hydro prices in 1992. They were never increased again until the Tories came to power—pardon the pun.

That was built up by the Conservatives building Darlington. The debt was there when we got there as the NDP and we're the ones that got it under control. I say there are options a government can take to deal with what are problems within the administration of services they're responsible for. I use Ontario Hydro as an example. We didn't privatize Ontario Hydro as a government because our belief as social democrats is that the crown does have a positive role to play when it comes not only to providing services to its citizens, but providing basic infrastructure to its society and its economy.

We fixed the problems within Ontario Hydro to deal with the issue. We didn't privatize. As a result, hydro prices were stabilized in the province of Ontario. We did not have a hydro rate increase from, I believe, 1992 until the time the Tories took power. I think in 1999-2000 the Tories then allowed power prices to go up as they moved toward a private competitive system.

Why did they do that? Because they understand that the example of what's happened in the United States has led to higher prices in hydro. So they're allowing the prices to go up under the public system now in order to be in a position to say, "Those increase weren't just because of the private sector. They're because of what's happened under the public sector."

So it's a question of ideological belief. The Tories believe the private sector can do it best; we believe the private sector, yes, does it best in many circumstances. I agree that the private sector should run private corporations such as mining outfits, lumber companies, car manufacturing plants and small businesses. Those are best run under the private system and nobody in my party argues otherwise. But we believe as New Democrats that the government has a role to play when it comes to providing basic infrastructure to citizens and to business. Many times that does mean, yes, to do that under the guise of a crown corporation or under the public service. So I say to the government there are other options.

The point I make with Hydro is we had a choice in 1990. We could have privatized or we could have fixed it. We decided to fix it and it worked. You guys have a choice with Ontario Hydro now, and your choice has been to privatize. Mark my words: hydro prices will increase. In fact, this summer Falconbridge, the largest utility customer for Ontario Hydro in the province of Ontario, is deathly afraid of what's going to happen to their hydro rates next summer as we move into the private system. They've had a taste of it this summer, because they're buying hydro on sort of real-time pricing. Because of the size of customer they are, their prices aren't the same, as far as rates, as the normal consumer; they buy real-time pricing power. So it means if Ontario Hydro, the public utility, is able to provide power to the customer at X dollars per kilowatt, four cents—it's actually about seven cents a kilowatt—that's the price they will pay. But if Ontario Hydro doesn't have the means to supply that out of our system and they buy it through the United States at a higher rate, they must pass the entire cost on to the private corporation. In this case, real-time pricing at times pushed hydro prices for that corporation up significantly. They went from paying seven cents to 12 cents a kilowatt to over \$100 per kilowatt this summer and had to shut down the mill operation because they couldn't afford to operate with those types of hydro prices.

Why did they pay higher hydro prices? It wasn't the public Ontario system that caused the problem; it was our having to buy power from the private system in the United States that has been privatized and deregulated. It didn't work. Hydro prices have gone through the roof. You just have to look at all the other jurisdictions in the States to know that.

I have a lot of respect for and work well with the people at Falconbridge, with Claude and others who are there. I have a good relationship with the management and workers through CAW over there, people like Ben Lefebvre and others. But both the union and management are telling me the same thing on this issue. They're saying, "Once you move to privatize and we end up in the private system next summer, we're very fearful that the price of hydro is going to go through the roof and be in a position where it could shut down part of the operations in the city of Timmins and we'd be forced to move our operations to Manitoba or Quebec, where there is a constant supply of power in a better system."

I use that as an example to say it's not necessarily by moving over to the private system that we're going to be in a position to provide better prices.

I want to give you another example of where private versus public is not necessarily the case. This is an example where the province of Ontario has moved to privatize highway maintenance in Ontario.

Interjection.

Mr Bisson: I hear the Minister of Energy across the way coming into the House. I'm glad he was watching TV and saw what I was saying. I know he had a bit of a problem.

Hon Jim Wilson (Minister of Energy, Science and Technology): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: There isn't one thing he has said about the system that's accurate.

The Deputy Speaker: That is not a point of order. Sit down. Member for Timmins-James Bay.

Hon Mr Wilson: First of all, get the company down here—

Mr Bisson: First of all, Mr Speaker, it's not even a point of order, but it's not true. He says, "Get Falconbridge to come and tell me that." I'll give you the letters from Falconbridge. Those are the people who are telling me exactly what's going on. They're saying they are fearful of what's going to happen once we move over to the private system. They understand what that means to their bottom line, so—

Interjection.

The Deputy Speaker: The Minister of Energy will come to order.

Interjection.

The Deputy Speaker: Minister of Energy, I'm going to name you. The member for Timmins-James Bay.

Mr Bisson: Thank you very much, Mr Speaker.

Anyway, I made my point about Ontario Hydro. What I'm saying is that you do not necessarily fix a problem by moving it over to the private system. I'm saying, along with my leader, Howard Hampton, and other New Democrats, and along with people who work for companies like Falconbridge and others, that the move to privatization in Hydro will not do what the government says it does. It's not going to lead to lower prices; it won't lead to stable prices. We fear it's going to lead to higher prices. It's not just me saying that; it's companies like Falconbridge and others. If the minister doesn't like that, he has the power to do something about it. Let's fix it.

The point I'm making related to this is that the government wants to privatize driver examination. So they say we're going to save money and the private sector will do a better job. Well, let's look at what the Provincial Auditor of Ontario had to say in the 1999 auditor's report when it came to the privatization of highway maintenance, something that the Ministry of Transportation is responsible for.

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Here is how the system used to work. Prior to the government's privatizing the highway maintenance system, that is, snowplows that go out to clear the snow

off our highways, we had a mixed system: 50% of the work was being done by the private sector and 50% of the work was being done by the public sector. Why did we do it that way? There was a reason. We said, "The government of Ontario does not want to be in a position of holding all the equipment that it needs at all times to be able to clear every eventual snowfall that we may get across the province of Ontario, so let's put some capacity in the public system so we can do the more or less routine maintenance that we need to do on our highways, be able to respond to what we would normally expect, but then keep the private sector on standby to do other work so the ministry doesn't have to shell out the capital dollars to buy plows and hold on to staff and do whatever." So we had a mixed system. We had the private sector and we had the public sector, in co-operation, doing the maintenance of our highway, snow removal.

Here's the beauty of that system: by having the private sector in competition with the public sector, there was a bit of a friendly competition that went on. The public sector knew, "Hey, we've got to do our job better because we're being watched not only by our own bosses within the provincial government, but also the private sector is there and they are being measured on the work that they're doing and we have to stack up against them," and vice versa to the private sector.

The other point was that by having the private sector in competition with the public and not having a monopoly, they had to keep the prices in check. They didn't have us as a hostage, where they are the ones with the snowplows and when the snow comes the private sector operator says, "Cough it up. There's a snowfall." The government says, "We don't like that." They say, "Go get somebody else." We say, "There is no one," and there is nothing we can do about it. So the prices were kept stable by having that mix of private versus public.

The government moved to privatize the entire system. The interesting thing is this: the then Minister of Finance, Ernie Eves, stood up in this House to answer a question that I put to him, which was, "How much are we going to save by moving to the private sector?" It was a very simple question. They eluded the question. They didn't want to answer it. I said, "What is your goal?" I was told by the Minister of Finance, by the Minister of Transportation and by the Premier, "If we can't save 5% for the taxpayers of Ontario, it's not worth privatizing."

Let's take a look at what the auditor had to say when he did his report back in the 1990s.

Mr Rosario Marchese (Trinity-Spadina): You believe the auditor, don't you?

Mr Bisson: The auditor is the fellow that we in the Legislative Assembly hire, along with his staff, to go out and audit the books of the province of Ontario but, more importantly, to measure the performance of the ministries to find out if they're doing exactly what they say they're doing.

Let's take a look at what the auditor had to say. In that report, I thought the auditor was very conclusive in his

comments. He basically said the following—this is on page 236 of the public auditor's report: "The ministry had not achieved the target savings of 5% on the four outsourcing contracts we reviewed." This is two years later, and you haven't managed to even save 5%. "Subsequent to awarding highway maintenance contracts, the ministry engaged the contractors to perform additional work without tender"—this is for additional work above highways maintenance—"and offered these contractors surplus ministry vehicles and equipment without going through the required public auction," which is a different issue. The point is there was not accountability within the system, but the more important issue is we didn't save the money for the taxpayer.

If you go on to read the auditor's report in some detail—go back and read this—on page 241, under "Potential Alternative Service Delivery Savings," it goes on to say, "Estimated Potential Annual Savings." Get a load of this. For area maintenance contracts in that year, there was an increase of 11% to the taxpayer. We didn't save money; it cost us more money.

I say to the government members and I say to the Minister of Finance of the day, who is now on Bay Street: man, that's the most interesting bit of finance arithmetic I've ever seen. He stood up and said, "If we can't save 5%, we're going to keep it in the public sector." Two years later, the auditor comes back and says that with those contracts costs have gone up 11%—and somehow privatization was a good thing?

Mr Marchese: Who was he helping?

Mr Bisson: "Who was he helping?" my friend Mr Marchese says. I have to wonder. Does he have friends who are contractors who stand to make money on this? I don't know. I don't want impute motive. I don't know if that happened. But I have to say, it's either complete incompetence on the part of the government to move the system over to the private sector and have it increase by 11% in costs to the taxpayer, or quite frankly their friends on the contracting side are very friendly to them. I don't know which one it is. I think people have to make that decision themselves.

The other thing I thought was interesting with the highway maintenance was that you say, "OK, if we're paying more money, if Mr and Mrs Taxpayer are paying 11% more to get it done by the private sector, maybe we're getting better service. If we're getting better service, then, OK, I don't like it but I understand why I'm paying 11%." My Lord, in northern Ontario, where I come from, it was a rare, rare occasion when you had a snowstorm and you couldn't get in your car and drive from point A to point B on the Queen's highways. Mr Deputy Speaker, you live in Manitoulin; you remember what it's like: If you went to an event on Saturday night somewhere in Elliot Lake, and you had to drive back to Gore Bay or wherever you might be going and there was a snowstorm, prior to the privatization of highway maintenance, how often were you stuck and not able to get out? It happened once every two or three years. It would be a real freak storm, and you had to wait a couple of hours. Do you know how many closures of highways

we've had on Highway 11 just last winter alone? I got stuck at least four times in Hearst or Kapuskasing, not able to get out for a day because they had not been able to respond to the need to clear the snow off the highways. So we are not only paying more money, 11% more, to maintain our highways under a private system; we are getting worse service.

I say to the government across the way, don't come to me and say, "We're going to privatize driver examinations, and it's going to help us save money and we're going to get better service," because the examples in your own ministry tell us we're paying much more money.

Mr Marchese: Very good. Gilles, en français, s'il te plaît, parce que c'est important.

M. Bisson : C'est toujours le point qui est important. Il n'y a rien à avoir en allant dans le système privé quand on voit ce qui est arrivé avec nos routes quand on a privatisé le système. On paie 11 % de plus qu'on payait quand le système était public et les services sont beaucoup pires. Donc je me dis que c'est incroyable, ce n'est pas acceptable et ça ne marche pas.

The other point I want to make on the issue of the auditor's report is that it's the other things he says in that report that I think are pretty damning of the government. I say what's interesting here is that the Tories love to stand up and say, "We're the good managers of the province of Ontario. Only we have the God-given right to govern. Only we," say the Tories, "have the competence to govern the province of Ontario and the God-given right." It amazes me. They forget to read the auditor's report. Every time the auditor comes out and reports on something you guys have done, it has been a disaster. Then you stand there and say it's wonderful.

Mike Harris the other day—I had to laugh—went to announce money for GO Transit. The government downloaded GO Transit on to the regional municipalities. The GO Transit system was funded by the province and it was basically run by the province through the GO Transit authority. The government turned around, moved it over to the regional government and said that we were going to get better service. The municipalities couldn't deal with it. They couldn't deal with the expansion issues, they couldn't deal with maintaining the rolling stock in the condition they had to and they couldn't meet the demands of the commuters. Finally the province of Ontario had to agree to take the system back, because what they transferred over didn't work.

What's the Premier's line? I thought it was brilliant. Mike Harris was absolutely brilliant. His line was, "We are a victim of our success. That's why we have to take it back. Because we have done such a good job with the economy of the province of Ontario, we have to take back GO Transit, because GO Transit can't meet the need." What poppycock. You guys created the crisis by transferring it over to the regional municipalities, it didn't work and you've had to take it back. Be square. That's what most of the media realize. My, my. I have to say, boy, you really took a leap when you went down that one.

So I say yes, you should subsidize GO Transit and you should subsidize the TTC and, yes, you should subsidize the Timmins transit system, because a good transit system, Minister of Energy, is important not only to the people who use it but to the economy of the province. We are not well served as an economy or a people by having that in the private sector. We see the transit systems across this province that are now struggling to maintain service at a basic level. There's no capacity for expansion with the increasing numbers of people living in Ontario, especially in cities like Toronto, where most of the immigration happens, and most of the economic activity, to be fair to the city of Toronto. They don't have the mechanism to deal with the expansion.

The only expansion we've seen in the TTC is what was announced under the NDP government under Bob Rae. The Sheppard expansion was done by us because we believed, as we do now, that government has a role to play when it comes to providing good infrastructure. The Tories got elected, they cancelled the Eglinton expansion, filled the hole full of sand and then went back and said, "We'll do Sheppard." I guess half of our job is better than not doing any of it.

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Mr Marchese: They just give away all of our money.

Mr Bisson: Basically that's exactly what they did. They gave away the money. It's a good point.

But I want to get back to what the auditor says, because I think it's important. We need to look at what the auditor says about the actions of this government when it comes to their exercises of privatization. Like I said, they try to get good marks for being really good managers. Let's take a look at some of the stuff they've done and how it has not worked.

The Ministry of Transportation is trying to say, "Don't believe the auditor. The 11% extra that we're paying is really not true." The auditor is kind of mistaken is what they're trying to say. So the auditor goes back and looks and says, "We were informed that the estimated savings in the pilot district," because they had a pilot district when they started the highway maintenance, "were \$900,000 but the ministry could not provide us with any documentation to support its calculation." It's like the ministry went in and said, "Oh, we saved \$900,000," and the auditor said, "Good, excellent. We're glad. Let's report how you made those savings." "We don't have the papers to show it, though." Like, excuse me.

So the auditor goes on to say, "We reviewed the other four AMC contracts that were awarded during the 1998-99 fiscal year and noted a number of costs which were included in the ministry's estimates that required either adjustment or updating. For example, the ministry either double counted or overestimated its own cost of equipment maintenance, service crews and miscellaneous expenses."

They fudged the books. That's what he's saying. The ministry fudged the books. They said, "The government said we have to save 5% and the minister says, 'You'd better come up with it or else we'll look like a bunch of

dinks,” so they said, “Come up with the numbers.” So the ministry goes out and does the best it can to play around with the numbers, and it turns out that the government fudged the books in order to try to make the case that they’ve actually saved the taxpayers some money. The auditor caught you dead in your tracks and caught you red-handed. It’s really damning.

It goes on to say, “Additionally, the ministry based overhead cost for two districts on 1995-96 data whereas 1997-98 data were used to calculate the overhead costs.” They were trying to play with equipment that they had costed in 1995 and move it over to the books of 1996-97. “Excuse me, you’re fudging the books,” is what the guy was saying. It’s damning to go through the whole thing.

He goes on to say, and this is the auditor again, “In addition to estimating savings from these contracts, the ministry calculated net one-time savings of \$2.35 million for the four districts from the sale and lease of equipment and the closure of facilities for \$5.1 million less severance pay and other one-time costs of \$2.75 million. Despite these one-time savings, outsourcing may ultimately result in a significant increase in the cost of highway maintenance for these contracts.”

He looked at the numbers for districts A, B, C and D. In district A, where you fudged the books real good, you managed to show a decrease of \$296,000. This is where he catches you on the first one. In the very first area maintenance contract, where they fudged the books by \$900,000, you show in district A a \$296,000 savings. Then he goes on to say in district B the area maintenance contract cost us \$864,000 more than it did when we did it under the public system. When the private system took district C, we had an increase of \$386,000. Get a load of this. District D, when the private sector took it over, \$1.09 million.

Mr Marchese: They’re doing OK, right?

Mr Bisson: They’re doing really, really well, I’ve got to say.

Basically we ended up paying more for the private sector to do what the public sector does. There are all kinds of interesting things that they do. For example, when the private contractor goes out to do summer maintenance on the roads, replacing the pylons, the signs, the posts, fixing up the grades on the ditches and whatever, they don’t have to tender through the ministry; they just go out and do it. Nobody knows if it has been done or if it needed to be done. It’s amazing. Can you imagine having a blank cheque where you can go to the person who gives you the contract and say, “Oh, by the way, you’ve got to pay me an extra \$1.2 million.” You say, “What for?” “Oh, well, I did all this work.” You have no way of verifying if the work has been done, you have no way of verifying if the work needed to be done, and the contractor itself generates the work.

Mr Marchese: The private sector is really good, right?

Mr Bisson: Yes, the private sector does a wonderful job. Now, is this to say that the private sector doesn’t have a role to play in highway maintenance? Of course

not. I believe the private sector can provide a role to the public system in the way we used it before: that it’s monitored by the public system; that it’s our ministry inspectors that are the highway patrol people. They are the ones who say when the plows have to go on, if they’ve done the job properly, if they’ve put enough salt on the highways, if the work that’s being done is needed and if it should be tendered—it’s always tendered—and if tendered, what’s got the best price? Somebody has to watch over these people. But instead we have a provincial government that has basically let these contractors go amok, and then they say to us, “Trust us. We’re going to privatize driver examination. We’re going to be better off.”

The other thing the auditor had to say, and this is the last point I want to make here, is on the whole issue of monitoring and maintenance of services. The auditor says on page 251 of the report, “Maintenance coordinators generally do not maintain detailed records of their monitoring efforts.” Can you imagine this? “Such documentation is important to support evaluation of contractor performance and to assist in any legal cases involving alleged negligence by the ministry in maintaining safe highways. In addition, minutes of meetings with contractors were often not detailed enough to determine the resolution of any apparent deficiencies in the contractor’s work.” So he says, “Maintenance coordinators generally do not maintain detailed records of their monitoring efforts.” Just get rid of all the paperwork; I guess that will make the problem go away. The taxpayer will be well served.

So I say to the government, we’re to trust you when it comes to the privatization of driver testing? Not at all.

Let’s look at what has happened in the driver examination system. Most members in this House won’t know this, and I didn’t know until I went out and did the research: it used to be a private system. Did you know that prior to 1961 the driver examination system in the province of Ontario was run entirely by the private system? They did it for a number of years. But there was such a problem with the system that the then Conservative government of the day moved to put it into the public system. Why? Because there was a real scam going on where, for example, if people wanted to go get a driver’s licence test and there was a lineup, “Give us a little bit more money and maybe you can pass ahead of the line.”

Mr Marchese: You grease the wheel.

Mr Bisson: Yes, grease the wheel and maybe you’ll get ahead of the line. The whole issue of standards, of why a person should get a driver’s licence—and Timmins was different than what you would get if you were getting it in Ottawa or Toronto—they were really not maintaining the type of public standards or provincial standards that needed to be maintained in that system. The government of the day—

Interjection.

Mr Bisson: We just heard from Bert that’s not the case, but let’s just take a look here. In the research that

I've done, prior to 1961 the system was in the private sector, and it was the Conservative government of the day in 1961 that moved it to the public system. Those are the facts; that's what happened. I know the Acting Speaker doesn't agree, but I would argue that if he goes back and looks in the legislative library and looks at what happened, that's exactly the case.

Mr Marchese: That's when you got your licence. OK. So what?

Mr Bisson: So Bert got his licence in 1961. I bet you Bert didn't even know what a public sector worker was in 1961.

Mr Marchese: That's unfair.

Mr Bisson: I don't mean it as a derogatory comment. When you're 16 years old walking in for your driver's licence, you don't know if the guy who's giving you the driver's test is a public sector employee or a private sector employee. How would you know unless he shows you the badge?

So Bert, that's a heck of a defence. The reality is, it was a private system.

Mr Johnson: She showed me her OPSEU card.

Mr Bisson: She showed you the OPSEU card. If she'd only known where you would end up, she would have done more than that.

Anyway, the point I make on that particular point is that the system was private, and it was moved over to the public system. Why? Because the government was not able to keep it accountable, as they wanted, the standards provincially were all over the map and it was not any more expensive to maintain it in the public sector. The government of the day moved it over directly to the public system for those reasons.

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I want to turn to a comment that Minister Clark made, I guess it was in June, when the announcement was made to move this over to the private system. I think this is a really telling point about why they're doing this. In an interview he did with the Hamilton Spectator on June 2, it says the following: "Transport Minister Brad Clark said privatization will solve a driver-examination system plagued by backlogs that cause long waits for a road test." OK, we agree there's a problem. Let's fix it.

Why is the problem there? "The province hopes the move to privatize driver testing will cut waits for a test from eight months to six weeks, a goal Clark said"—get a load of this—"can't be achieved if the testing remains in the hands of unionized public employees."

I said to myself, "Why would the minister say that?" Why would he say, "if we keep it in the hands of unionized public employees"? Is there something with "unionized"—say the words with me, Conservatives: "unionized public employees." Do you dislike them? Do you figure that just because they happen to be public and are unionized, somehow they're not competent to do the job?

I wonder, when the minister says that—if the minister was to say it in a different way, I would say, well, you know, he figures that private is better than public. But the

issue as far as better or worse is not even private-public for him; it's that you can't do it because they're unionized public employees, as if unionized public employees can't do anything right. Give me a break. Nothing could be further from the truth.

The reporter said, "Well, give us an example." And he said, "There are a lot of problems with the collective agreement." Well, first of all, who the heck negotiated the collective agreement? It's the government. If there's a problem with the collective agreement, why are you blaming the union? It's the government that negotiates the agreement with the union.

I always get a load of employers who come by and say, "We've got a problem with our collective agreement." Well, excuse me, but it takes two people to bargain a collective agreement. If an employer does not want to give something to a bargaining unit, he says no. If the employer says yes, then it's put in the agreement.

Just last summer we negotiated with our employees, both in our constituency offices and among the staff here at caucus. Our unionized employees asked for a number of things I as an employer couldn't accept. So what did I do? Did I say, "Oh, it's the union, so I've got to give them everything"? Go talk to the people I bargained with. They said, "Jeez, you know, this Gilles guy is a pretty tough negotiator. He told us no on a whole bunch of our demands." I couldn't have managed with the conditions they were trying to impose on me as a manager. I recognize I have a responsibility as a manager to make sure I negotiate an agreement that, yes, is fair to employees, but at the end of the day is fair to the employer as well, so that he or she is able to manage his organization effectively.

For the minister to say, "There are a lot of problems with the collective agreement, problems the private sector won't face," what he's basically saying is he's negotiated a collective agreement—not him personally, but the government and governments before negotiated a collective agreement—and he doesn't know how to fix the mess, so let's just strip them of their unionized rights, take away whatever rights they have in their collective agreement and throw them in the private sector. That'll fix the problem.

What a weird position for a minister of the crown to take: to say, "I've got a problem, and I'm going to blame the union contract. The only way that I can fix it is by getting rid of the contract."

It goes on: "Clark said privatization will mean driver testing could be done in the evenings and on the weekends. This type of scheduling is prohibited under the collective agreement." What poppycock. Excuse me. Really. If I'm an employer, and I go to my employees and say, "Listen, does anybody want to work overtime? I'm prepared to pay time and a half," in most workplaces I come from, people are willing to do that. If it is the case that the collective agreement says it's not there, I'll tell you, in this day and age, if you run to the table and try to negotiate an overtime clause with the bargaining unit—most people are struggling for a living; they want to work overtime.

As a person who negotiated on both sides of the table—I've negotiated for employers and I've negotiated for unions—the one issue I used to hate most as a union bargainer was overtime. My position always was that we as a union should try to limit the amount of overtime our workers work. Why? Because if we allow overtime to happen whenever, it means that a manager does not have to manage the issue. In other words, instead of hiring the proper number of staff to do the job, he or she can just get workers to work extra hours and basically be in the position not to manage the issue.

So I used to say to the bargaining unit people I represented, "My proposal's really simple: we should pay unionized workers on overtime 50 cents an hour." Back then, we were paying \$20 an hour to unionized workers. They said, "What are you doing that for?" I said, "Because you guys won't work overtime if I pay you 50 cents an hour." At least that way the employer can go out and hire more employees, so we can have more members within our bargaining unit, yes, but more importantly, give jobs to those people in our communities who need them. Do you know what the unionized workers used to say to us? "Get out. No way, man. I'm not accepting that. You take that off the table or else I'll take you off my bargaining committee." So we used to have to back down, and our approach to overtime ended up being what the members wanted, and the members wanted better premiums for overtime and more overtime if they could get it.

I say to the government, for the minister of the crown to say, "It's because we can't get people to work overtime on weekends and at night to provide driver examinations, and the only way we can do that is in the private sector"—excuse me; I've worked in both the public and the private sector, I've worked in unionized and non-unionized organizations, I've managed and I've been the employee and I've been the bargaining rep. It's the employer who decides the hours of work. It's not the union and it's not the workers; it's the employer who decides.

Even where you've negotiated the hours of work in a collective agreement, if a situation changes and it's a question of survival of the organization, the union and the members will go to the table and renegotiate the hours of work. A good example is what happened at Spruce Falls in Kapuskasing. When Spruce Falls was going down the tubes back in the early 1990s because of what was happening in the paper industry and the economy generally, there were conditions in the collective agreement that were an issue of cost for the employer. The employer said, "Hey, listen, we need to restructure in some way." The Bob Rae government came in, put in place the employee ownership plan, and part of it was the union had to come up and negotiate concessions to their agreement. The employees didn't like it, but they understood. The union didn't like it, but they understood, and they negotiated concessions to issues such as hours of work in order to give the employer some flexibility so they could operate in a way so they could make money.

So for the big, powerful Ontario government to say that you can't deal with giving people driver tests at night or on weekends because you're barred by the collective agreement—excuse me; if it is the case in the collective agreement, I'm sure the union and the members are willing to negotiate. My argument is I don't think there really is anything that holds you up. I haven't read their agreement, and I should have before coming into this debate, but I would argue it probably is not even the case.

It brings me to the conclusion that the minister, quite frankly, is moving on the privatization initiative not out of a desire to save money for the taxpayers of Ontario, not out of a desire to provide lesser waiting lines to get driver examination tests, but on the basis that he believes, along with his government, that only the private sector can do it best; the public sector is no good. That means all you ministry staff back there, you're not worth the paper you're written on, is what they're saying. I disagree with that. I think we have some of the most competent people within our civil service.

I know from my time in government, when I've had to deal both in opposition and government with MTO staff, they're among the best in the business. People from around North America would come to Ontario to talk to our engineers at MTO. Why? Because they were recognized as the best. We should value that and we should boast about how well we do things in the province of Ontario and how good our ministry employees are and how good our programs are, rather than have a Minister of Transportation in the government who does not value public service, who does not value unions or unionized workers, and says the only way to do it is to move to privatization.

I think the intent of the government is not so much to save people money. I don't believe that's the case, because if you look at the auditor's report, it's completely the opposite: where we have privatized, we get less service and we get a higher cost. I believe it's a question that they believe ideologically that privatization is good and that they don't like unions. This is a way for them to be able to get at those two issues.

One of the concerns I want to raise in the time I have left in this debate is an issue that happened in the province of Quebec when it came to the issue of access to information, where people in the private sector, or the public sector in that case, could have information that's contained within the databases that hold all the driving records. My colleague Michael Prue, the newly elected member from Beaches-East York, raised it in his question today. That is, what assurances do we have that we're going to be in the situation, when we move this to the private sector, that a private contractor or an employee of a private contractor does not utilize the information in the drivers' database in a way it shouldn't be used, for example, to identify where people live in order for people to do all kinds of nasty things to them?

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It brings me to this point: in the province of Quebec they have a bit of a hybrid system. Quebec, like Ontario,

has a public database of drivers' records that's maintained by the workers of the province of Quebec. That's how I understand the system works. By and large, it's the public sector that maintains the driver examinations, but there's a bit of a hybrid where the private sector also is in competition and provides some of those examinations.

There was a case that happened a while back—this dates back to May of last year—where an individual reporter in the city of Montreal was basically found and somebody attempted to take his life because he was a reporter reporting on biker gangs and organized crime. When the police went in to investigate how they were able to find this guy, what led to the bikers finding him, they found the following—and this is out of an article from May 31, 2001, out of Montreal. I know it was in the National Post, but unfortunately I don't have the name of the paper this was actually in. It says, "Investigators trailed Ms Martineau"—Ms Martineau, just so you know, is an employee who worked for a private contractor who was giving driver examinations to the citizens of the province of Quebec. It says:

"Investigators trailed Mrs Martineau after determining that she had made an unauthorized inquiry of Mr Auger's file." That was the reporter. "It was discovered that Ms Martineau, who was suspended by her employer last fall, had checked the files of 25 people who were of interest to the outlaw bikers last year.

"Of those 25, three from a rival gang were murdered and four survived murder attempts."

What happened was the biker gangs were basically at war with each other. One particular biker gang got access to the Quebec government's database of drivers' licences in order to find out where these people lived. What happened was that the information was given by one of these employees working for that contractor. They found that 25 names were released, along with the addresses, to the biker gangs. Out of the 25 names that were given, three people were killed and, it says here, four people survived murder attempts. That's scary.

I know a government member is going to get up and say, "That could happen under a public system." Yes, I guess it could. To be fair to the government, I guess it could happen. But there are much stronger safety provisions in the public system than there are in the private, because of the way the system is set up. We know we can secure our databases, because they are our own databases and we're the ones who basically maintain the database system—something the province of Quebec does—but we want to move our database system over to the private sector.

I worry, as a citizen of Ontario, that it could happen that the names and information about drivers across the province of Ontario could be released to other people who want to use them for different reasons, like maybe marketing companies. I know you're going to say, "That couldn't happen; that will never happen." But the issue I see is that under a public system we're able to monitor the system. We're the ones who designed the system; we're the ones who make sure there's security on the

system, and in the public sector there's a much more stringent safeguard as to the safety of that information.

It makes me a little bit worried when I read what happened in the situation in Quebec, where 25 names were given out to biker gangs by an employee who worked in that system and it resulted in three people being assassinated and four people having attempts on their lives, out of 25. I worry what happens if we move that database entirely over to the private sector so that we basically have a situation where the information could be more easily gotten to by people who want that information in the private system, because there's really no way of our making sure we protect that information in a way that we are comfortable with when we move it over to the private sector.

Could you imagine if the CPIC system, the system that basically keeps all the information about criminal charges and about driving offences, the dossiers of Canadians, were moved from the RCMP out to the private system, how worried we'd be? Presently, as you know, if the police officer pulls you over in your community, he looks over on his computer. He goes to the CPIC system that's managed by the RCMP. In fact, my brother is the guy who runs the department that manages the maintenance in that particular division. I would be a little bit worried if we were to move the system from the RCMP and give it to a private contractor, because that means all the information that people have on me—my address, my phone number, if I've ever had any other criminal offences, my medical condition—is in that record. I want to know, as a citizen, that that information is kept safe.

I know, for example, that our Sergeant at Arms worked for the RCMP for a number of years. The RCMP are an organization that I have some confidence in. They basically are there to serve and protect the public of Canada. They do a good job at what they do, and I know that the information in those databases—I have to believe—is very closely guarded, because the RCMP is under public scrutiny all the time. If we take that information and move it over to the private sector, they're not under the same kind of scrutiny as a public organization. If we move the information from a database that is managed and safeguarded by the public sector over to the private sector, I worry about what that means to the security of individual Ontarians.

Mr Marchese: Every citizen ought to be worried about it. They are.

Mr Bisson: That's a good point. I just say to the members across the way, let's review why we are in the situation we're in. The government in 1995, when you took power, knew there was a graduated driver's licence system that was put in place by the NDP. You knew there was going to be an increase in the number of people coming for driver exams. We as a government had told the civil service that we had to move to be able to meet that demand when that demand would come five years after the graduated driver's licence system was put in place. You did not do that. Instead, what you did was you removed, you fired, you terminated the employment of a

great number of people at MTO. As a result, they were not able to meet the demand.

It is a little bit of the Snobelen syndrome. You guys created a crisis. Once you had created that crisis by diminishing the capacity of the ministry to respond to the demands of the driver examination system, you turned around and said, "Now that we have the crisis, this is the backdrop that we need in order to go out and change the system according to our ideological belief." I say to the Tories across the way, I believe you're wrong. You were wrong under highway maintenance, I believe you will be wrong when it comes to Hydro and I say you're wrong when it comes to this.

I just want to close on the last point that I made at the beginning: the position of the Liberal Party. I am glad there are Liberal members who are prepared to stand in this House and vote against this legislation at this point. I'm glad there are Liberals who are prepared to speak against it, but I say you should talk to your leader, Dalton McGuinty. When this initiative was brought out initially, Dalton McGuinty stood and said it was a good thing. He believed in privatization. Now he's flip-flopped and has gone the other way. So I say what I said at the very beginning: I understand where the Tories are going. I don't agree with it. They understand where I'm going. They don't agree with it. The public has a clear decision.

But when it comes to Liberals, my Lord, they can flip-flop 10 times from here to Sunday and they would still feel that they're consistent. I say to the Liberal Party, would you please take a position so we can understand where the heck you're going. I don't know; you're confusing a lot of people around here by the inconsistent positions you're taking, saying, "Privatization is good," one day and the next day coming in and saying, "It's a bad thing." The NDP says this is wrong, we will vote against it and we stand by our convictions.

The Deputy Speaker: Questions or comments?

Hon Mr Wilson: I in jest say I enjoyed the remarks from the honourable member. As I said before, I appreciate his opinion. I want to tell him that not exactly telling the facts about Falconbridge and what we are trying to do to introduce competition in the electricity sector really isn't helpful, especially in this time when everyone across North America, and indeed the industrialized world, is worried about a downturn in the economy. I say to him, have the president of Falconbridge come and talk to me about this, because this is not what the management of Falconbridge talks about. They know that the increase in power that we had to put in place this year was a result of the auditor's report of last January, when he said that because we've spent \$2 billion over the last five years in this province on new pollution control equipment on our plants, that was \$2 billion less we had to put toward the \$38-billion debt that the Liberals and the NDP left us in the old monopoly, government-run system, a \$38-billion debt—bankrupt. I inherited, we inherited, a bankrupt Ontario Hydro.

1700

We have no choice. The banks would give us no more money. Bob Rae ran out of money. Mr Peterson put us on

the road there during his five years—a \$38-billion debt. So if we want new plants, and we don't want to become a California and we don't want to become an Alberta and not have enough supply, we need the privateer sector. It might be in partnership like the union is with Bruce Energy and the public sector, or it might be privatization deals where they build the next generators.

Falconbridge knows that this year's increase, after almost eight years of no increase, frozen electricity prices in this province, has nothing to do with deregulation, has everything to do with missing a payment on the debt—which the auditor said in a special report in January—of \$687 million. Because we spent \$2 billion on the environment, we had less to pay on the debt. We missed principal and interest payments, or we were in danger of doing so, and so we had to raise prices to pay off—

Mr Agostino: I listened to the member for Timmins-James Bay with great interest. The last party anybody in this province can ever have to listen to when it comes to consistency in principle is the third party, a party that is becoming irrelevant, a party that no one in this province is listening to, and there's a good reason for that.

Remember the consistencies. When they came to power, remember public auto insurance, the cornerstone of the Agenda for People, what they came to power to do. They scrapped the idea. So much for consistency and principles. We remember very well Sunday shopping. The irrelevant third party fought against Sunday shopping. They came to power and what did they do? They brought in Sunday shopping. That's a party of principles.

They're irrelevant for good reason across Ontario. Remember casino gambling? They fought against casino gambling. What did they do? They supported it and brought in expanded casino gambling in Ontario. Then the cornerstone, their relationship with labour, the sanctity of collective agreements, the sanctity of contracts: what did they do when they were in power? They brought in the social contract. They ripped up contracts. The unions had agreed to negotiate across the table and roll back their wages by 5%.

That is why they're irrelevant. That is why they have the support of 10% of the people in Ontario. This is a party that is void of any new ideas. This is a party that has not had a new idea in 20 years. This is a party that is struggling desperately to hang on for survival. They're not here to govern. They're here to try to survive. I can tell you clearly that their track record from those five difficult years of chaos in Ontario speaks well to what the NDP is all about: a party of no principles, a party that is absolutely void of any new ideas, a party that stands up for nothing.

The last party anybody would take any lessons from when it comes to principles, when it comes to standing for something, is that irrelevant third party, that rump here in Ontario.

Mr Marchese: What a beating. I'm still hurting. Did you hear that? He was indefatigable, inexhaustible, a resource of venom. But I don't have time for Dominic today because I only have a minute and 45 seconds. I'll

have to return to him when I have more time. A party of no principles? Us?

Mr Agostino: Yes, the social contract, Rosario.

Mr Marchese: Dominic, I only have a minute and a half. I'm so sorry.

Mr Agostino: What about the social contract?

Mr Marchese: But I want to talk about my friend from Timmins-James Bay and his hour.

Interjection.

Mr Marchese: Dominic, I'm sorry. I've only got a minute and a half, please.

One of the points he has made is that we need a strong role of government, that governments need to be there, robust, in defence of people, citizens and taxpayers. That's the argument he was making. I can't wait for the Liberals and the next election because I want to hear what kinds of promises they're going to make, if they're going to make any.

Mr Agostino: We're looking forward to it as well, Rosario.

Mr Marchese: I'm looking forward to that debate, Dominic. So the arguments of my friend from Timmins-James Bay are that the Tories drool every time they think about privatizing. You can just see the drool streaming out of their mouths every time they think of privatizing because somebody's going to benefit from it, do you see?

Like my friend said, remember when they privatized highway maintenance? There was big money to be made. The private sector did well, because this government said, "We can help you out. We can privatize so that you, my buddies, can make some dough"—and they did, didn't they?

Mr Bisson: They made lots of dough.

Mr Marchese: The Provincial Auditor has proved as much. Of course, they privatized Highway 407 completely and the rates just jumped right up. Because the taxpayers needed to be whacked again by you, didn't they? They want to privatize health care and they want to privatize Hydro so the rates can go up again. That's what it's all about and that's what my friend commented on.

The Deputy Speaker: Questions and comments?

Mrs Munro: There are a couple of issues that I would like to comment on that the member for Timmins-James Bay raised. One of them deals with the question of the security around the records that will be kept. I want to just remind the member that in fact in this piece of legislation, very careful attention was given to that particular issue.

In the comments that were made, I think it's important to note that the Information and Privacy Commissioner has identified this piece of legislation as one which, "as well as the process through which privacy has been addressed, will serve as a good example to other government institutions, in the event that they decide to provide services through private service providers." I think it's important to draw attention to that, because everyone is naturally concerned with the issues of privacy and the protection of those records.

I think that speaks to another issue that the member raised, and that is the essence of the government's role in

this legislation, which is simply to maintain that control which is inherent in developing policy, developing legislation and, finally, regulation.

One of the other points that the member made was the question of providing service to the community. I just want to remind the member and others that there has been a huge investment in driver exam centres. In 1999, it was unprecedented.

The Deputy Speaker: Response?

Mr Bisson: First of all, to the parliamentary assistant, thank you for your comments. Yes, you are investing heavily in the system to upgrade the computers on the desks and driver examination systems and the database. You're going to hand it all over to the private sector for a song. You're going to give it away. Yes, you've done it, but I don't know if that's good news for me, the taxpayer.

Mr Peter Kormos (Niagara Centre): Just like the taxpayer built the jails so that the private sector can operate them.

Mr Bisson: Very good.

To my friends in the Liberal Party I have to say, it's almost as if I was a dentist and I was drilling into a tooth and I forgot to administer the Novocain before I started the operation, because they've been jumping and yelling all afternoon. I know why: because it hurts. It didn't bother me, what Mr Dominic Agostino had to say. Yes, we introduced casinos. No, we were not inconsistent in our position. There was no position in the party that said casinos shouldn't be done. We had individual members who had a problem with it; as a matter of fact, my good friend Mr Kormos didn't like the idea. But it was never a position of the party not to do casinos; there was a position to do it.

Mr Agostino: How about public auto insurance?

Mr Bisson: The public auto insurance we didn't do with the economic times that we were in. I wish we had done it, but it wasn't a question of turning back.

On the social contract—I'm glad you raised the issue of the social contract, because I've got to say the Liberals are absolutely amazing on this one. When you look at the positions that the Liberals have taken when it comes to labour, it's the same thing as highway privatization. They go to the union halls and they say, "OPSEU members, I'm with you. I'm against this privatization thing." Then they go to the chamber of commerce and the board of trade and they say, "I'm Liberal leader Dalton McGuinty. I think privatization's a great thing. It's wonderful." They flip; they flop. It depends what audience they're talking to. Man, oh, man, weave and bob like you wouldn't believe.

So I understand where the Tories are going. They're going down the road of privatization. I disagree and it's wrong, but at least you know where they stand and you know where we stand. The NDP are opposed to privatization.

The Deputy Speaker: Further debate?

1710

Mr Joseph Spina (Brampton Centre): The accusation that the NDP are not a party of principle—I think they are a party of principle. I agree with my esteemed

friend from Timmins-James Bay, of course, because what he says is exactly right: not only do they speak out of both sides of their mouths, but some of them even leave one party to join the other because they've been given a cabinet post.

Interjection: No.

Mr Spina: No. Of course, and he knows of whom I speak.

In any case, today I am supporting the Improving Customer Service for Road Users Act, 2001. As members know, this bill permits the Ministry of Transportation to transfer the delivery of some of the road user programs and services to new service providers. Let's bring the service a little closer home to the user.

This legislation is designed to allow some Ministry of Transportation services to be delivered by other service providers. Let the members of this House be assured that through this transfer of services the government would continue to protect the privacy of all Ontarians. This bill includes important provisions to protect the privacy of individuals and to safeguard the confidentiality of their personal information.

Under this 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. That's on behalf of my ministry, the Ministry of Consumer and Business Services.

Additionally, alternative service providers would be mandated to create the position of a privacy officer. The privacy officer would be responsible for securing all the customer records related to that delegated business. Additionally, we commit to ensuring that road safety would not be compromised under this legislation. We must, and will, continue to safeguard the public interest by regular monitoring and auditing of new service providers to ensure compliance with all legislative and contractual obligations.

We believe that ultimately transferring some services and programs to other service providers basically improves customer service. The demand for driver testing services in this province will continue to grow as our population increases; that's thanks to the successful economic growth of this province and the echo, the baby-boom kids that are coming on and more and more people getting drivers' licences. As we get farther across this wonderful province of Ontario, it's important that people in smaller communities have that opportunity to access these services.

The Ministry of Transportation has already made some significant customer service improvements to address that growing population of drivers in this province. In 1999, members will recall, my colleague the Honourable David Turnbull, the previous minister, brought in a package of measures to address the customer service problems at the provincial driver exam centres. In this initiative, the ministry hired more than 300 driver examination staff on a temporary basis and also opened temporary driver testing facilities, and in addition expanded

the hours of operation at a number of provincial testing centres. As a result of this initiative, more road tests were offered and the average waiting time across the province for driver examinations was reduced. I can support that. My own daughter went through this process and is witness to this improved service.

This new bill now supports MTO's intention to find a new 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.

As members know, Ontario is committed to the highest level of customer service possible in all facets of operations. I hope they carry some of these initiatives forward to the road-building part of that ministry, because I'm waiting for service in Brampton, and I look forward to that part of MTO bringing that service to my city so that we can get some projects done. That's my own little bit of lobbying. I drift from the focus of the debate on the bill, so I'll now return to that.

By engaging the private sector in the delivery of driver examination services, the government would continue to maintain and in fact even exceed those high standards for excellence in customer service. The key of course is to find the right service provider for the job. To ensure that the right organization is selected to undertake this task, the ministry has established an open competitive process, which is critical to ensure that we do have the best potential candidate to deliver that service. That successful bidder would be required to prove their capability in a number of areas before earning the right to be a driver examination service deliverer here in Ontario. It's a process that demands all candidates for this role meet a very specific predetermined set of criteria that is critical to the quality of the service.

If a successful candidate is chosen, the ministry would then develop a detailed service delivery contract with the winning bidder. I believe that the people of Ontario simply cannot lose with this process, because the whole point of this exercise is to provide them with better service.

If that 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. I think this is something that is absolutely relevant to this process, particularly when we want to ensure and engage the private sector delivery agent. The goal here is the improvement of customer service. The people of Ontario are the key beneficiaries of this type of service.

Others have already spoken to the bill's benefits with respect to enhancing government accountability, but from my perspective, the real importance of this bill is simply that it will bring better, more efficient and cost-effective services to the people of Ontario.

In this Legislature, as members and elected representatives of the people, I believe we all have an obligation to support measures that will result in better

service to the public. MTO has worked hard toward the goal of improving customer service across this province in the existing driver examination centres. As well, this work strongly supports the government's goal of achieving smaller and more efficient government and improving customer service through alternative service delivery. It underscores the government's role as a manager as opposed to a deliverer of services. I think it's an example that other ministries could take from the Ministry of Transportation.

In this day and age, customer service is a highly specialized field. Companies not good at it don't do so well. Companies that are very good at it are generally extremely successful. 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 the transportation modes and the dimensions of provincial policy, planning and management.

In terms of Ontario's policies, fees and standards, this proposed act makes it crystal clear that MTO would continue to effectively manage the delivery of these services. I reiterate that: effectively manage the delivery of these services. The bill would allow us to engage our private sector partners in the development of flexible, creative and innovative approaches to customer service, and 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 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 a service provider that can do a better job. This proposed legislation reflects this important government commitment and our desire to bring better services to people throughout the province.

1720

We want to 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 that they expect, things that they deserve.

One of the little summary points I think we should ensure is remembered is that privatizing road safety and driver examination services does not risk safety. Road safety cannot and will not be compromised. Under new service providers, the ministry would continue to develop policies, legislation and regulations just as it does today—no change from the past.

We would continue to safeguard the public interest at all times, regardless of whether the services are delivered by ministry staff or other service providers. It's relevant, it's key, it's important that we don't have to be the actual

deliverers of the service, but rather manage it in a cost-effective way, in a safe way for the consuming public. We would maintain the strong oversight role to ensure that those service providers meet all of the legislative and contractual obligations.

We must continue to establish standards and set curriculum as well as train the service providers' trainers. There are highly qualified people out there, not all of whom would qualify or would necessarily want to become an employee of the government; however, who are qualified to be able to deliver the services on behalf of the government, given the guideline, given the structure, given the hierarchy, given the regulatory environment under which they could deliver the services on an ongoing basis.

One of the opposing points that we mentioned earlier is that privatizing road safety and driver examination services would risk privacy. As the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Consumer and Business Services, the protection of the consuming public is paramount in our ministry, and the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act would require new service providers to abide by the provisions of that act. The privacy of the people of Ontario is paramount and must be protected. Any personal information collected by and made available to new service providers to conduct business on behalf of the ministry is governed by that act, and it must support the contractual provisions.

As well, contracts between the government and these new service providers would provide that each employee sign a confidentiality agreement with the service provider. This can seem quite stringent on behalf of the delivering agents or on behalf of the individual employees, but the reality is that it's important in order to protect that confidential information that we provide as the consuming public, whether it be our name or address, our telephone number, our gender—frankly, I don't know that that would be much of an issue beyond looking at us—but other kinds of information that tie in with our particular elements of disclosure and privacy.

Interjection.

Mr Spina: Sorry, Speaker. There are some people here who find this humorous. Thank you, member from Kingston.

New service providers would be required to create a privacy officer position within their organization, and they would be responsible for securing those records directly related to the delegated business and for liaising with the Minister of Transportation on those freedom-of-information requests.

Some people have indicated this was just a job-slashing exercise. I know particularly members of the third party indicated and seemed to follow this particular attack on this issue, on this bill. The goal of transferring service delivery to other providers is to improve customer services, as stated earlier, while allowing for greater innovation and flexibility in service delivery. There is no reason for anyone currently involved in the delivery of these services to feel threatened. They will

not lose their job. This service is in fact being expanded across the province.

It supports the government's commitment to be a manager, rather than the deliverer, of services.

All staff affected by the transfer would be treated in accordance with their rights and entitlements as set out in their current collective agreements. 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 staff may find job opportunities with new employers that may be enhanced from their current position.

People have indicated a loss of access for rural residents. As I indicated, transfer of the driver exam would ensure that drivers—in both rural and urban areas—have access to the driver exam services within six weeks or less everywhere in Ontario. Being a northerner, as I know you are, Speaker, you can fully appreciate the fact that there are many parts of our wonderful province, particularly in northern Ontario, where the population numbers just don't justify a full-blown government office. But in fact we do find the relevance to address the needs of residents who live in those areas, to deliver that service in a timely way. If we can reduce access to driver exam services to six weeks or less, I know it would be really appreciated by people in places like Wawa or Chapleau or your hometown of Gore Bay, perhaps.

Interjection.

Mr Spina: Sorry? I didn't hear, Speaker. I forgot. I apologize, but I know it's the north shore of Manitoulin Island, Algoma-Manitoulin.

It's important that people in those areas get access to driver examination services in a timely manner. In the northwest, of course, we have all kinds of places that could be helped. I'm not saying these are areas that would get these services, but it would be an opportunity for them to pursue it in places like Sioux Lookout and Red Lake and Ear Falls—isn't that amazing, Ear Falls? Those would be great places to consider delivering these services.

We are currently providing driver exam services in 92 communities throughout Ontario. There are 55 driver exam centres and 37 travel points. We would continue to provide services in these communities under the new service provider, either the existing service or a modified service.

"Customer service will suffer, not be improved, under this legislation," claim the opponents of this bill. The fact is, the goal of this initiative is to improve customer service. We believe that the alternative service delivery would help sustain the significant customer service improvements we have already achieved, while supporting greater innovation in service delivery.

I'm pleased we are able to provide these increased services and broaden the scope. As I said earlier, sometimes it seems like a very difficult regulatory structure, but it's important for the protection of the public of this province. It's also important to be able to better deliver those services to the residents of our province.

I think an example could be taken in other ministries, in the consideration and development of their own better customer delivery services for their own ministries, to look at the model that has been created in the Ministry of Transportation. There are some within that ministry who will be astounded at this member making that kind of statement, but nevertheless I am, because I think this is an excellent model for us to carry forward to deliver customer service to the residents of Ontario.

It's an amazing choice of words, I think, for government to use the phrase "customer service." It's something that was unheard of many years ago, and it now becomes part of the everyday mindset of any ministry in delivering services to their customers in this province: the taxpayers, Speaker, you and me.

1730

The Deputy Speaker: Comments?

Mr James J. Bradley (St Catharines): The one part of this that has not been guarded against is the opportunity for political patronage, which obviously is a significant component of this bill.

I don't think the private sector should be involved in public services of this kind. I'm a strong supporter of the private sector doing what it does best. I give an example: they make automobiles. You don't want the government in the business of making automobiles. They're involved in the pulp and paper industry. Government shouldn't run the pulp and paper industry.

But this is a public service, and it seems to me that this is going to be open to the Tories simply ensuring that their own friends get yet another lucrative contract. It happened in road maintenance. It certainly is going to happen with the Liquor Control Board. We have Mr Sterling, the Minister of Consumer and Business Services, saying he's going to dole out some of the liquor stores in some of the communities. Believe it or not, I have some good Conservative friends in many communities, and I'll tell you, they're rubbing their hands. They can't wait to get their hands on this patronage to make all kinds of money out of it, something that should essentially be a public service.

I'm very concerned as well about confidentiality. I know you have the assurances you give us about confidentiality, but I assure you that is a problem today with the present minister selling the lists to people—the MTO does sell its lists, or provide the lists to somebody. We saw what happened with the Province of Ontario Savings Office. Just watch what happens with this.

Mr Marchese: I was listening to the member from Brampton Centre, and he talked about the taxpayer at the end and his concern for the taxpayer. I'm concerned too. He and the government argue that the government thinks the solution to long waiting times for driver exams is to privatize.

I remind you that these people drool over privatization. Picture drooling, if you can, good taxpayers, because that's what privatization is all about. When you privatize, the drooling connection has to do with how much money you can make. And the person who suffers

is the taxpayer, the very person the member for Brampton Centre is trying to help—you too, Minister of Labour. All of you want to help the taxpayer.

When you privatized highway maintenance, the taxpayer got whacked. The Auditor General said you didn't save any money; it cost the good taxpayer that you people pretend to support big bucks. Highway 407, completely privatized by this Conservative government; rates, user fees, skyrocketed.

Jails, built by the good taxpayer, are now being privatized, given away to the private sector—built by us, public money, taxpayers' money, given away to the private sector—because that's what people like the Minister of Labour love. They drool over these things, because the people who benefit make money, and they support each other—fundraising activities and all of that—and ideologically they connect to each other.

They want to privatize hydro, give it away. Rates are going to shoot up, but that's OK, because the taxpayer likes it. Hospitals: we're going to privatize more and more of that, although they're having a difficult time, so somebody can make money.

Hon Chris Stockwell (Minister of Labour): The member for, I think, Fort York—I'm not sure what it is now—is on to hospitals. Where is he coming from? We're talking about driver testing programs.

I remember being on council in the early 1980s, and you were privatizing garbage collection. The same kind of thinking, the same old hackneyed, tired arguments, day in and day out about garbage collection: "You're going to give it away to the friends of the government, and everyone will be making money." Where are we today? The private sector produces a far better service at far less cost.

You hear the members opposite, like the member for St Catharines. You've got to give him one thing about speaking: he's consistent; he says the same thing about every issue. There's never any different speech. It is one speech with different-coloured paper. He gets up and he talks about the friends of the government. The friends of the government don't get this. It is called "tendering," a proper tendering process. They sit here and laugh. I don't know how your governments worked. I do; they didn't work at all, frankly. I don't know how your governments worked, but you people tendered all kinds of things.

For instance, I say to the member for Fort York, when you were going to go out and tender that union song you paid \$55,000 for, you put a tender out and asked all the union people to write in and tell you who could write the best union song for \$55,000. See, that's how it worked. Now, you got a lousy song. I didn't claim it worked well on the song side of things, but in the process of governing, you put a tender out and the competitive bidding process bids on it. We've been doing it for years—garbage collection at municipal levels. We are finally getting into it provincially, and we get the same tired, hackneyed quotes from the member for St Catharines. It is so tiring.

Mr John Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands): I think the people of Ontario realize that we are not just

talking about the privatization of driver testing services but that it could open the door to the future sell-off of a lot of other programs as well.

There's one program I want to talk about. In Kingston we have a rather large MTO office. It subcontracts out, on an annual basis, contracts to different groups of individuals, mainly private co-ops or corporations that are run by mentally challenged individuals who have been doing work for MTO for the last number of years. This keeps a number of people well-employed. It gives them dignity in their lives. It allows them to do some very meaningful work either in the licence reissuing program or the destruction of old licences etc. Having visited a number of these different co-ops, the people who work there really look forward to going to work on a day-to-day basis.

One of the concerns I have—and there may be in total about 100 mentally challenged people involved in that program in these different co-ops—is that a lot of these people will lose their jobs. I will give the Minister of Transportation credit that when this was brought to his attention, he sent them a letter and basically guaranteed them those contracts for one more year. The question I have is, what's going to happen after that year? What's going to happen to those individuals who were given a very meaningful job in their lives in working in these subcontracts for MTO? I would think that we should consider those effects as well. I would really seriously ask the government to take that under serious consideration. Rather than passing this bill, let's do something for people who are handicapped in our society.

The Deputy Speaker: Response?

Mr Spina: Thank you, Speaker, and I was most remiss in not recognizing your hometown of Kagawong on Manitoulin.

Thank you to the members from St Catharines, Trinity-Spadina, Kingston and the Islands and of course my good friend and colleague the Minister of Labour. I don't want to be a PA in that ministry, I'll tell you that for sure. But what I want to reiterate is what the minister said: that as this is an open, competitive tendering process, the successful bidders would be required to prove their capability in many areas before earning the right to deliver those services in Ontario. It is a process that demands that all candidates for this role meet the very specific, predetermined set of criteria. I can assure you that one of those criteria will not be their party stripe.

I want to make one last reference particularly to my friend from Trinity-Spadina, who keeps talking about the taxpayers getting whacked by this government. The truth, my friend, is this: every budget that was ever tabled in this Legislature by a Liberal or NDP government whacked the taxpayer on the head with raised gas taxes, raised tobacco taxes, raised sales taxes and raised any other kind of tax that you can imagine. That's how the taxpayers got whacked in the head in this province. This government's budgets that are tabled reduce taxes. We reduce government; we make it more efficient. And you know what? We try to improve the quality, delivery and

efficiency of the service to that taxpayer, our customer. That's how this government functions.

1740

The Deputy Speaker: Further debate.

Mr David Ramsay (Timiskaming-Cochrane): I'm going to share my time with the member from Windsor-St Clair. He's a great speaker, and we'll be waiting to hear his speech tonight on this also.

It's interesting listening to this debate, because it's a debate that I guess governments have had over probably the last 15 years, since people like David Osborne in the United States have written books like *Reinventing Government*, where governments have had to—in order to stretch the taxpayer's dollar—find better, more efficient ways of running government. Osborne is certainly a disciple of privatization and cited in his book examples of—starting with American cities; that's where it really started—privatizing services. As the member from Etobicoke has just said, garbage was one of the first ones American cities did, and so had Toronto.

Being in government, you've obviously got to be open to all ideas about how government functions, how you're going to deliver services to taxpayers, who are the customers of the government and the clients, using the business language of this government. It really makes you have to look at how government works and the public versus private delivery. I suppose you have to look at the first fundamental aspect of this, which is, how much service should government be delivering at all? Should the role of government really be to steer the ship, basically set the policy, or should we be rowers—using the terms from David Osborne—and actually delivering services?

In the end, there are some basic functions of government that government will have to deliver, and in those, you have to look at different aspects of government to decide what aspects of government should be held in the public sector and what services could be privatized. On this, I think you have to apply common sense in that you can't be an ideologue and say that everything must be delivered by the private sector, or on the other side say that everything has to be delivered by the public sector.

It was when I was the critic for correctional services and the Harris government decided to privatize jails that first really forced me to think this through and to think about which functions of government could be privatized and which couldn't. It came to me at that time that any function of government that dealt with safety or law and enforcement of law should remain in the public sector, and that certain functions that are strictly clerical or administrative, you could take a look at those. Maybe some of those can be privatized. I know this government has gone and done some of that. But I think we need to make a stand on issues such as enforcement: that any area where a government empowers an individual to have force over an individual—as in the jail situation, to coerce an individual—has to remain in public hands. The reason is for public accountability. There has to be a direct linkage between those powers that a government

would bestow upon private companies and the government itself, those elected officials. Therefore, those functions should not be privatized.

When you start to think that through, you see that therefore any function of government such as policing, jailing, inspections of any sort where you're enforcing law, and in this case testing for safety standards—again for public safety—must remain in the public domain. That's the train of thought or guiding principle that I use when I look at functions of government to decide which areas of government maybe could be privatized and those that certainly should be remaining in the public domain. You can certainly get into the other areas that a government controls, such as health care, and really start to debate whether there should be profit built in to health care at all.

But certainly when it comes to enforcement areas such as jail, police, inspections—some of the inspections that government carries out involve the environment, whether it's checking rivers and streams or checking our factories and different plants to make sure they're not putting out pollutants greater than the standards set—and of course driver testing, which this bill is about, you have to get into the reasons why you would want to keep that differential there. I think the reason is because the *raison d'être*, the rationale, the will of the public sector is to do good, is to do the public good, and that's why you have to keep the administration of those functions in the public sector.

The rationale of the private sector, of course, is to do well, and rightfully so. The rationale is to make a profit, and so it should be. We all glorify in the capitalist system. The private sector has a role to play, as the member from St Catharines says, in probably most activities in our society. But when it comes to safety and enforcement, we must keep a direct link, that accountability, through the public sector so there is that direct link between the elected officials.

In order to do well, as companies should, they start to look at the process of what they're doing. Of course, to do well, what you want to do, as much as you can, is to cut corners. You want to find efficiencies, and to do that you will try to cut corners. Again, when you're in a free society and you're producing a product, you can only cut corners so much, because if you start to produce a deficient product then of course your competitor is going to do better, so that keeps you honest. But in a system like this, where you have now given away the right to test new drivers to a certain company, there is no competition any more. You've given one company in the private sector, for a certain period of time, the right to do this, and they can start to cut corners. They can start to make sure they hire people at very low cost. They can certainly find savings by cutting out training. So you end up with a low-paid, low-trained workforce, a workforce then that could be more susceptible to corruption.

I know people sometimes get alarmed about that when one may bring that up, but I think Mr Murdoch would remember that it was the 1961 Conservative government that brought the public sector into driver licence testing

because of the corruption that was there in the private companies of the day. I'm surprised that the institutional memory of this Conservative government isn't there back to 1961, to remember what had happened: the government of that day, of John Robarts, brought in a public system to get rid of the corruption. That was the remedy they saw, of that day. I'm sad to say that we're going back to that, but that's what we're appearing to do.

As a northerner, I'm very concerned about the type of service that we're going to be getting, because it's going to be very difficult for a private company to make a profit in many of the smaller centres and to provide the service that I know is required across northern Ontario. I know that as a fellow northerner, the Speaker would agree with me. That's always a concern, just like when the government flirted with the privatization of the LCBO, which I will fight to my last breath, because every so often they keep bringing it up again. I could just see the type of selection we would have in small towns in northern Ontario compared to the wonderful system that we have today. I think that's again analogous to this, that we will not get the service in rural areas and in small communities that are not densely populated, as we've seen today.

The reason we're at this point now is because the system is not working because the government has created the crisis by underfunding it. I think they do this, quite frankly, on purpose, so they can bring the private sector so-called solution to this because that is their ideology and that is their drive.

I am very much against this bill. I look forward to the vote, and to being able to stand up to vote against this bill.

I will cede my time now to the member for Windsor-St Clair.

Mr Dwight Duncan (Windsor-St Clair): I am pleased to join the debate on Bill 65, the privatization of road safety.

First of all, in my brief remarks I'd like to address what I would call initially the theoretical underpinnings of this bill, some of the concerns I have with it, and then I'd like to address some of the specific problems with this bill.

1750

I think it's fair to say, and I think most people in this House would say, and I would recognize, that this government does believe extensively in the provision of public goods by the private sector. Other levels of government have gone a great deal further in privatizing. I think specifically of our federal government, which has done that, because frankly, over the years, the federal government got into a whole range of activities that it was not appropriate for governments to be in. They realized that, and everything from the sale of Air Canada on down they privatized.

This government has a natural bent toward the privatization of certain services. Upon assuming office, they didn't proceed. They haven't moved very quickly because they discovered that, unlike most other juris-

dictions where there have been other privatizations, extensive privatizations, Ontario did not have a whole range of public services that lent themselves readily to privatization and there were compelling reasons not to privatize. One thinks of the LCBO and TVOntario. Frankly, the areas that they looked at—the LCBO is very profitable to the government, so there was a natural disinclination to do that.

Privatizing road safety, or privatizing the driver testing function, is, for the reasons cited by other members, not an appropriate item for privatization. Let me just address what my specific concerns are. First of all, the bill is silent about further privatizations in the role of inspections and otherwise. When you privatize a service of this nature, you are running certain risks around safety. It's been argued by other speakers before me that safety must be our primary concern in these matters.

The second issue that I have on a theoretical and practical basis is potentially higher costs for drivers. Driver testing companies will set their basic fee as set by government, but they will be able to offer additional services that, by the way, may invite fees. We're concerned that people taking drivers' tests may feel compelled to buy these additional services in order to pass the test.

My colleagues from the north and rural areas have spoken about a reduction in service for those rural and northern communities that they represent. I can tell you now that, because of this government's starving of this particular function, even in a community like mine, Windsor, waits are very long even though it's a cash generator for the government.

The final concern that we've identified is the access to confidential information. We've heard the stories. In the current climate particularly, the notion of the private sector involvement with all this confidential information is troublesome to us. That's why we have decided not to support this bill.

There must be certain services that are public. There are services, particularly when you're dealing with questions of safety, that ought, in our view, not be privatized because of those safety concerns. My colleague from Timiskaming put it best when he talked about the natural inclination of private sector companies to cut corners in the interests of profit—not that there's anything wrong with profit. This is not an argument about whether or not a company should make a profit. It's an argument about whether it's the private sector or the public sector that is best positioned and best able to deliver a certain service.

In this case, we're talking specifically about driver testing, something that I think we all take very seriously because we all drive. There are thousands of vehicles on the road, thousands of drivers, and all of us want to be sure that that testing is the best possible available and that we're not cutting costs. This thing generates lots of cash for the government. We've all waited in line on our birthdays to renew our stickers; we've all been through drivers' tests; we've all been through licence renewals, and those services have been drastically cut.

The final note I wanted to make with respect to privatization is that I believe, and this government did not—and it's one of its very first bills, Bill 7, way back in 1995, which took away successor rights from our public service employees. Governments had to downsize at all levels and there were tough decisions to be made, and we all agreed with that. I don't think anybody disputed that. The previous NDP government had already begun the exercise to some extent. But to not afford those public sector workers successor rights, that is, the ability to keep their job whether or not it's privatized, in my view is a very fundamental problem with this government's approach to the whole issue of privatization.

Again, one must be very careful when one considers privatization initiatives. I remember when this government decided to privatize road maintenance. They started with about 1,200 kilometres in southwestern Ontario and the government repeatedly put the argument that there was a cost-benefit to the province of doing this. But again, in his 1999 report, the Provincial Auditor showed that the privatization had not saved any money and, I'm quoting the auditor now, "It may ultimately result in significant increases in the cost of highway maintenance." Why? I think there's a whole variety of reasons. To my way of thinking, the main reason for that is that the nature of that particular function was such that there are only three large conglomerates that could actually bid on this service. So what you did was you effectively created, for all intents and purposes, a monopoly situation. Companies can't just move in and out of this service. It's a 20-year thing. So once you've got them, they've got you, because you can't just replace them quickly. In the case of driver testing, it has more to do specifically with road safety.

Personally, I believe that if an opportunity exists for government to offer a service in a better and more efficient fashion through the private sector, and if those public sector employees who would be dislocated maintained their successor rights and a compelling case can be made that it's in the broader public interest to do that privatization, then I think we all ought to look seriously at that. This particular bill fails on all three counts. It fails because, in our view, this is a public safety matter, one that is best protected and guaranteed by the public sector. Second, there are no successor rights for the public sector employees who will be dislocated as a result of this initiative. Third, it is a cash generator, it makes us money, and the government has not, in my view, put a compelling case that the service will be better offered.

In fact, it's our view that the service will be not as well offered, particularly in those northern and rural communities. Governments do have an obligation to provide

that service to those communities where it's not simply the bottom line or the most efficient operation, because providing those services, by definition, to rural communities and northern communities particularly may not be efficient. In fact, it may be that only government can provide it because it's not a profitable undertaking. It costs more to run a small rural office than that office might take in, in terms of fees and so on.

The province of Ontario, the government of Ontario, this government, a government that readily subscribes to these ideas and one that campaigned on them and has been consistent, when they came to office they didn't embark on all those privatizations that they talked about because they discovered they weren't necessarily in the public interest. I believe in the integrity of the members opposite, that they want to do what is in the public interest. As a result, they haven't moved quickly in that whole area, and I'm thankful for that and I'm thankful that they looked at those cases and have slowed down.

Ontario under successive governments, and I include the Davis government, the Peterson government and the Rae government, did not get into the private sector the way, say, our federal government did over the years. The federal government was into all kinds of businesses they've now divested themselves of quite appropriately. Ontario never got to that situation.

The government's view is that this will provide a better and more cost-efficient service. Our view is the opposite. Our view is that public safety is very important here, that overall it is not going to enhance service and it will cause significant dislocation to public servants.

The proper direction—

Mr Bill Murdoch (Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound): But the question is, would you change it?

Mr Duncan: Yes, to address the member for Grey-Owen Sound—would be for the government to invest money in those offices—they're net cash generators—and to invest in public safety in every community, particularly those rural communities that are badly serviced now and will likely have even less service available to them, and an essential service. That, in our view, is the proper way to go.

Therefore, like my colleagues, I'll be voting against this bill. At the end of the day, in our view, our roads will be less safe, the government will have less opportunity to manage this system and service will be reduced for our constituents, particularly in the northern and rural areas.

The Deputy Speaker: It being 6 of the clock, this House stands adjourned until 6:45 of the clock.

The House adjourned at 1801.

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