



No. 76B

N° 76B

ISSN 1180-2987

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)**

Wednesday 5 December 2001

Mercredi 5 décembre 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

Wednesday 5 December 2001

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO

Mercredi 5 décembre 2001

The House met at 1845.

Mr Gilles Bisson (Timmins-James Bay): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: There's no quorum in the House. Would you check for quorum?

The Acting Speaker (Mr Michael A. Brown): Is there a quorum present?

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

The Acting Speaker ordered the bells rung.

Clerk Assistant: A quorum is now present, Speaker.

ROYAL ASSENT
SANCTION ROYALE

The Acting Speaker (Mr Michael A. Brown): I beg to inform the House that in the name of Her Majesty the Queen, Her Honour the Lieutenant Governor has been pleased to assent to certain bills in her office.

Clerk at the Table (Mr Todd Decker): The following are the titles of the bills to which Her Honour did assent:

Bill 14, An Act to encourage awareness of the need for the early detection and treatment of brain tumours / *Projet de loi 14, Loi visant à favoriser la sensibilisation à la nécessité du dépistage et du traitement précoces des tumeurs cérébrales;*

Bill 87, An Act to regulate food quality and safety and to make complementary amendments and repeals to other Acts / *Projet de loi 87, Loi visant à réglementer la qualité et la salubrité des aliments, à apporter des modifications complémentaires à d'autres lois et à en abroger d'autres;*

Bill 109, An Act to enhance the security of vital statistics documents and to provide for certain administrative changes to the vital statistics registration system / *Projet de loi 109, Loi visant à accroître la sécurité des documents de l'état civil et prévoyant certaines modifications administratives au système d'enregistrement des statistiques de l'état civil;*

Bill 120, An Act to proclaim a day and a month to celebrate Portuguese heritage in Ontario / *Projet de loi 120, Loi proclamant un jour et un mois de fête du patrimoine portugais en Ontario.*

Bill 127, An Act to implement measures contained in the Budget and to implement other initiatives of the Government / *Projet de loi 127, Loi mettant en oeuvre certaines mesures énoncées dans le budget de 2001 ainsi que d'autres initiatives du gouvernement.*

ORDERS OF THE DAY

STATUS OF BUSINESS

Hon Brian Coburn (Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs): I move:

That, notwithstanding the prorogation of the House,

- (i) all government bills;
- (ii) all private members' bills;
- (iii) all private bills;

remaining on the Orders and Notices paper at the prorogation of the second session of the 37th Parliament be continued and placed on the Orders and Notices paper of the second sessional day of the third session of the 37th Parliament at the same stage of business for the House and its committees as at prorogation; and

That the order of precedence for private members' public business be continued in the third session of the 37th Parliament.

I'll be sharing my time with my colleague the member for Durham.

1850

Mr John O'Toole (Durham): I was pleased that the Minister of Agriculture was brief in his remarks and, secondly, there's more time on the task. I think he meant it respectfully, but I'm not certain if I'm supposed to share my time with the member from Northumberland. My first preference would be not to.

Hon Brenda Elliott (Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs): And the member from Guelph.

Mr O'Toole: However, the member from Guelph is anxious to enter into the debate as well.

I think for those viewing—

The Acting Speaker (Mr Michael A. Brown): Order. To be helpful, you're telling me that you're sharing your time with the member from Northumberland and the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs; right?

Mr O'Toole: Yes. Thank you, Mr Speaker. And I do that with some hesitation.

However, it's a real pleasure this evening because members viewing tonight, and I hope some of the members in the House tonight—there are so few here that I feel rather able to express myself without too many conditions, because there aren't many members. They're actually participating in a fundraising activity from the press gallery, for which I commend the press gallery.

Also, it's very important to recognize, as mentioned earlier today, the international day of volunteers. Minister Jackson spoke to that earlier today.

I think this is an important opportunity to be a little bit more light-hearted on a serious issue. I commend the House leaders, Ms Ecker, the Minister of Education and government House leader—I suspect with some concurrence from both the opposition and third parties—for making sure that there is the ability for some continuum in the business of this House so that we're able to have some continuity between the business before Christmas and sometime after Christmas. There will be no loss in the time that has been spent deliberating in this chamber on both sides of the House, I might say, on the important matters before the government. In fact, I'm pleased to say that there are matters in private members' business etc that have been brought forward by all members of the House, including myself. Not to be too self-serving, I'm going to list some of the more recent issues that have been put on the order paper, and I'm going to mention just a couple of private members' notices of motion which were introduced in the last couple of days.

I look on this notice of motion here, and I have to thank the table clerks for helping me to bring forward an important resolution at this time of year. I, like many members, have participated in the stop impaired driving and the attempt to address the issue of the holiday season and to Reduce Impaired Driving Everywhere, the RIDE program, as well as the work done by Mothers Against Drunk Driving. In responding to their correspondence, I made a resolution yesterday, which is on the order paper today, dated December 4. The point is that this resolution will stay on the order paper and potentially in the future will get a time to be debated. I'll read it.

"That, in the opinion of this House, the Legislative Assembly of Ontario should formally request that the federal government act decisively and immediately to reduce impaired driving in our country by amending section 253(b) of the Criminal Code of Canada to reduce the current federal blood alcohol concentration (BAC) limit from 0.08% to 0.05%." I filed this resolution with the table yesterday, with some support from them.

Also, looking at the bills and the resolutions that are important to members, this is their opportunity to state on behalf of the stakeholders and constituents what they might believe on behalf of the people of Ontario.

Mr Tilson, who is the member from Dufferin-Peel-Wellington-Grey, has a resolution here: "That, in the opinion of this House, the Highway Traffic Act should be amended to make the use of approved 'booster seats' mandatory for all children between the ages of four and nine years and/or weighing between 18 and 36 kilograms (40-80 lbs) travelling in motor vehicles." This was filed on November 21. That is an issue that I might have some exception with. I think infants and booster seats are not covered currently under the Highway Traffic Act. So he's trying to provoke debate on an important matter of public safety, and there can be arguments for and against.

I'm reading through here in no particular order. One that was filed on June 28 by the member Garfield Dunlop, who is from Simcoe North, says, "That, in the opinion of this House, the government of Ontario should

investigate ways to allow emergency workers, good Samaritans, and victims who might have been infected with a deadly disease to have the right to access a person's medical information to determine whether they are at risk of being infected." I might bring to the attention of the House that this paper I'm looking at is a bit out of date, because on the firefighters' day here at Queen's Park, I believe that resolution, or some part of it, was passed.

Mr Lalonde, a member of the opposition from Glengarry-Prescott-Russell, made a resolution here, "That, in the opinion of this House, the City of Ottawa Act, 1999, should be amended to implement recommendations 4 and 5 of the Shortliffe report, presented to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing on November 25, 1999." This was filed in June.

That just gives you a little flavour of some of the resolutions. These issues will not be lost because of the ability of the House leaders here to work together to bring about some continuity, to allow government business and private members' business to go forward over the next period of time.

Members, as I said, have the opportunity to introduce not just resolutions but indeed private members' bills. I'm going to spend some time of the hour that I have—well, I'm going to split that time; hopefully about 40 minutes for me and 10 for Mr Galt and 10 for Minister Elliott. That's just a forewarning for them not to prepare too much material.

I had quite a bit of feedback on an issue; it's actually Bill 49. I'm going to go through it here for members at home. I think that's still the number. It might be called Bill 99 now, because they change numbers. That's actually the cell phone bill. That bill was introduced—

Mr John Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands): No, it's still there. It's ready to die.

Mr O'Toole: It's still here. For the members of the House, who may want to pay close attention, this is a bill that crosses all political boundaries and stripes. It's a bill that I would encourage members on the opposite side of the House to take some time to reflect on.

Bill 49 is An Act to amend the Highway Traffic Act to prohibit the use of cellphones and other equipment while driving on a provincial highway—

Hon John R. Baird (Minister of Community and Social Services, minister responsible for children, minister responsible for francophone affairs): Who wrote that?

Mr O'Toole: That, member for Ottawa-Nepean, was a private member's bill.

Hon Mr Baird: By whom?

Mr O'Toole: The member from Durham. That's me.

Hon Mr Baird: A good member.

1900

Mr O'Toole: Where did it come from, though? Not to be self-gratifying, that actually came from one of my constituents. I should put on the record here tonight I heard from a constituent. They were very concerned. They observed a motor vehicle accident. They thought

they observed the person driving the vehicle that went through the stop light was on a cellphone. So they contacted my office to see if there was anything under the Highway Traffic Act, and my good staff, in duty, checked with members from the Ministry of Transportation and found that indeed there wasn't any specific reference. The only tool available was a careless driving charge, which could amount to significant amounts of fines and it could amount to significant amounts of money as well as points.

What we've tried to do with this is to use this Bill 49 for debate and for public understanding of an important issue, the invasion of technologies in the automobile, whether it's GPS, navigating systems, monitoring systems, voice systems, radios, CDs, all of the technology. Much of it is interactive, and my argument is that some of that is a driver distraction.

There's been a tremendous amount of response in the press, and with the help of my staff we sent that to other provinces. Indeed, two provinces have moved forward with that bill; at least it's in their Legislature now. A federal member from Manitoba actually moved it in the federal Legislature. Of course, you would know that the Highway Traffic Act is a provincial jurisdictional area, but they did move it for the sake of public safety, once again. I'd expect I'd have support from all sides of the House on that bill.

I am working with the Minister of Transportation, Brad Clark. He is responding. But I'm also working with driver education. It's my attempt in this debate on Bill 49 to encourage those people who develop the curriculum for the G1 and G2 licensing systems, all driver training, to introduce a module dealing with driver distraction—cellphones, paging devices, e-mailing devices, electronic equipment in the cars—and in that there should be a module to not constitute a safety hazard on our roads. I'm just going to go through how important this is to me personally and to my constituents of Durham.

Actually, I have another bill here. It's in the order paper here, if members are following along; I see many of them are scrambling to get their papers to follow along. This is government motion 52, which is the second reading of Bill 52, An Act to amend the Legislative Assembly Act. Who submitted that? That's my bill. What is the intention of that bill? The Speaker, like you, Mr Speaker, is a person who respects order and decorum in this House and has to make calls, some of them rather difficult calls, against his colleagues. This bill is to discuss and improve the standing orders and the Legislative Assembly Act with respect to decorum, naming members, having consequence for outlandish behaviour in here so that people have some respect and accountability in this House. My constituents, who have watched these proceedings on television or in other forums, were frustrated and embarrassed by the often childish behaviour in this chamber, so on behalf of my constituents, once again, we introduced that bill.

My empowerment, like any member here, comes from the people and it's humbling. Sometimes I may not

fundamentally appreciate their point of view, but it is my duty to either write the minister or communicate with the minister or introduce a resolution, in fact refer things to the Environmental Commissioner or to the Ombudsman, which I've done. No government is perfect, of whatever stripe, but it's important to put it on the record. Just looking through the record here, it's unusual that there would be so many moved by me, but it just so happens.

Another motion here, second reading of Bill 62, An Act proclaiming Physical Fitness Day. I moved that some time ago. That bill has provoked discussion on an active lifestyle. We all talk about health and health dollars. I believe that health starts with me, with each individual, having some responsibility for their lifestyle, to the extent that's possible—sometimes we have health conditions that are genetic, hereditary, environmental etc—but to the extent possible, to take some responsibility for keeping a healthy diet and a certain amount of exercise. That bill respects the fact that there's some personal responsibility in the health care debate. That's entirely what it's about.

I have constituents asking me, "What ever happened to phys ed in our schools?"—just the matter of teaching children, our young people, how important it is to stay physically active. That came to me, actually, from a teacher who felt there wasn't enough emphasis being put on mandating physical education, in fact, just plain health, nutrition and activity.

All members who will speak tonight on this will bring forth similar arguments. There's a list of things here that are private members' initiatives, and considerable time is spent on those things. But then there's the whole issue of opposition motions, and there are also government motions. I think it's so important, because at this time of year, everybody's pulling certain little antics to try and delay the process.

You might know that I'm the aide to the Minister of Finance. The finance and economic affairs committee is in session right now. In fact, this evening, quite late, 9:30, 10 o'clock, we leave to go to Thunder Bay for hearings on Bill 125, An Act to improve the identification, removal and prevention of barriers faced by people with disabilities and to make related amendments to other Acts.

That bill, substantively, is an initiative, a commitment, a promise by this government to deal with barriers and the removal of those barriers, to recognize the barriers—attitudinal, physical and other kinds of barriers—for people with special needs. These are people who have what I prefer to call special abilities, not disabilities. They have special abilities.

Minister Jackson introduced this bill, I might say, on November 5, after six-and-a-half years of consultation on this bill. It's difficult to find the right balance. We've had quite successful hearings. Of all the people who have attended whom I've heard, it's been very respectful. There are those who strongly believe there need to be more teeth in the bill. I'll go on the record in a minute on the four issues I've heard. The issues in that bill we heard

about in Ottawa, and we heard it in Windsor on Monday, we heard it yesterday and today in Toronto, and we're going to Thunder Bay and Sudbury. I'm sure there'll be further consultations, and then after that there'll be the resolution.

But the potential risk of losing this bill, after all the work of the stakeholders and others, would be a shame, because there has been considerable effort by many stakeholders from all different sorts of needs areas.

The four key areas I've heard: there are the timelines this bill has for setting up the directorate and the consultation committees; the resources supplied within the bill; the enforcement mechanisms in the bill to require government to require the private sector to remove barriers; and the fourth issue that I suspect is important is the enforcement mechanism as well, in making sure the private sector is encouraged, not just voluntarily but to put some further teeth in that.

So the government does listen. There is a bill that I think it would be a shame to lose because the House is trying to find a way to adjourn in the next couple of weeks so people can spend time with their families. Many members here have to travel around.

Another very important bill that just passed today, a bill I'm proud to have had some involvement in, quite a significant bill, is Bill 127, An Act to implement measures contained in the budget, Minister Flaherty's economic statement from November 6. It just passed today, fortunately.

1910

I'm looking at another one here, a private member's bill, Bill 129, by my colleague Julia Munro. This one is An Act to amend the Ontario Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. This is our member's response to the whole puppy mill concept. I think it's extremely important. She's consulted widely with many, many groups that have specific regard for the quality of life of animals and pets.

Bill 130 is another one, introduced here by Minister Helen Johns on November 7. Bill 130 is An Act respecting community care access corporations, CCACs. You've heard Minister Johns respond to numerous questions on that and she has explained it to some extent. The government recognizes that people recover quicker and much more comfortably in their own home, so we've put about initiatives to further enhance the funding available to community supports: nursing supports, therapy supports, homemaking supports and other supports—a very, very expensive model, but it is the longer-term right thing to do.

In fact, the federal government made commitments in the election to do something about national home care and national farm care, but I'm afraid it's like their vacant promises—and I hate to just go off on a tirade here. They promised to cut the GST, they promised to cut free trade, they promised the helicopters, the airports. A promise made by the federal Liberals is absolutely a vacant promise.

This government has made significant choices about setting up these coordinating agencies called CCACs. There has been considerable time spent on Bill 130. I must respect the volunteer board in my area; I'm quite satisfied with them. They recognized that the government doesn't have an endless pot of money, yet they have to make difficult decisions about aligning the level and kinds of services they provide in a community. My riding of Durham region is a large geographic area, not as large as yours, Mr Speaker, but quite diverse. To get the people and systems to those remote areas to help and support those people who have been discharged from hospitals—very treacherous ground. How do you equalize the level of service everybody gets? In Toronto, their level of service is going to be higher and more accessible than the level of service in northern Ontario, for instance. So this is a very, very important bill. It would be a shame if Bill 130 doesn't pass; for certain we wouldn't like to lose it on the order paper.

Another bill that I feel is extremely important that just passed—I'm pretty sure it passed; as I say, I've been on committee hearings—is the Oak Ridges moraine act. Minister Hodgson tried to find, as with all legislation, that balance between property rights issues while at the same time respecting the environment. Now, we are a pro-jobs government, but we are responsible for public safety. That includes environment and it includes having Smart Growth. Minister Hodgson has worked so hard to get people to rethink.

Under the leadership of Mike Harris, as well, he's taken back some of the transportation issues that municipalities at all levels have been unable to deal with, whether it's at the Toronto level or the GTA level or the GTSB, the Greater Toronto Services Board. The province has taken that back and committed, it's my understanding, about \$9 billion. We're still waiting for the federal government, Mr Collenette, to make some commitment.

Minister Hodgson is here and I'm just going to ask him to nod. Has the Oak Ridges moraine bill passed?

Hon Chris Hodgson (Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing): It's in second reading.

Mr O'Toole: And it's Bill 122? My point is this: it's a shame if that bill is lost. Of course it's going to be a complex issue. People have bought land on the moraine and have moved some distance on development. People have rights. They may not gain the success of their application at the end, but they have rights to apply for rezoning and for whatever. You can't stop that. This is a free country. But at the same time, he set up a framework to move them out of that. Very little development will occur on the moraine, yet there will be pressures on part of Durham and the Seaton lands as part of that transfer takes place. It's a very complicated process. I'm convinced though, because this government is public and this government is accountable, they will find the right way. The first achievement—let's look at the positives—will be to put obstacles in place that significantly restrict development and land use issues on the moraine for our common good.

I really feel that I reflect on that. The minister's here. I'm pleased to say that I don't want that bill to die, nor do my constituents. I can think of names and faces—at the risk of forgetting one or two—who have worked for a generation. When I was on regional council and local council in Newcastle and Durham, this issue was an issue for the Liberal government; it was an issue for the NDP government, who developed the strategy document on the Oak Ridges moraine. This has been around for 10 years. No government in the last decade—and I'm not being partisan, because I sat on council—had the intestinal fortitude to actually move forward with that bill.

There's an example, a small array of bills. There are just a couple more things I've heard about. I'm going to wind up at 30 minutes, because that would make it fair. I get half and you get the other half.

An Act to facilitate the making, recognition and variation of interjurisdictional support orders: this is the Family Responsibility Office issue. Our constituency office, like many, spends an inordinate amount of time dealing with interjurisdictional support orders. It's Bill 131, moved by the Attorney General, David Young, on November 8. That's another bill that needs to be discussed, needs to be debated. We don't need to back away. This government needs to solve that problem, and I know this is the government that will take on the difficult issues.

Another very important one is by a good friend of mine, a private member's bill moved by Mr Wood, the member from London south or around London somewhere. Pardon my disrespect there—London West. The member from London West moved that. It's An Act to amend the Public Inquiries Act. It's a private member's bill. But because of the lack of time—the member for Northumberland is getting frustrated and the member from Guelph is also putting some pressure on me. I respect them, but I would ask for unanimous consent that I continue.

Bill 133, An Act to amend the Optometry Act, by Mr Kormos: well, I hope his vision improves, so I'll be supporting his right to talk on that bill.

Another one, by Minister Snobelen: this minister has worked tirelessly; actually, he's exhausted from the work he's done on An Act to recognize Ontario's recreational hunting and fishing heritage and to establish the Fish and Wildlife Heritage Commission. This minister is trying to leave another trademark in this province, a footprint in the forest, some might say. This was moved by the minister on November 19. It's part of his grander vision of Lands for Life, the right to the heritage of this great, wonderful province, indeed this wonderful country. I'd hate to see this bill die and him move to the United States. That would be a shame.

Bill 138, An Act to amend the Arthur Wishart Act, the franchise disclosure act moved by Mr Martin on November 21: I was the PA to the minister when the Art Wishart Act was adopted. There was unanimous consent by the Liberals and the NDP on that bill. Now we've got the current dispute on the franchise act that my con-

stituents are affected by. I support that we need to respond to some of those issues as well.

My last comment is that Minister Stockwell, the Minister of Labour, has moved Bill 145, An Act to amend the Occupational Health and Safety Act. It's quite a small bill, but a very important bill.

These are just some examples, and I'm sure the other members will trudge out their litany of important issues.

I appreciate having this opportunity and this time, to share the limited time I've been given with the member for Northumberland and the minister from Guelph-Wellington, one of the more spectacular intergovernmental affairs ministers we've had in the last year—well, in fact she's the only one. I don't have a lot of time to spend on the issues. With respect to the other members' time, I'll stop now. Thank you for the time to put my constituents' concerns on the record.

Mr Doug Galt (Northumberland): It was very thoughtful of the member for Durham to take the first half of the hour and leave the other half of the hour for the member from Guelph-Wellington and myself. That seems quite fair, in this Legislature, the way the member from Durham divides it up. It was very thoughtful of him to stop halfway through.

This is the Christmas season we're into. Christmas is approaching, and it seems very logical that we should ensure that the bills presently on the order paper remain there should the House prorogue, and probably will prorogue, on the evening of the 13th, probably late that particular evening. We're really debating a motion to carry over business notwithstanding prorogation.

1920

Mr Gerretsen: You've lost all your leverage.

Mr Galt: Who's to know? There are probably a lot of negotiations on the part of the House leaders. When it comes to House leaders, it's two to one and so they carry a lot of weight, the NDP House leader and the Liberal House leader. There's only one Conservative House leader. If there's a vote taken, the opposition obviously is going to win. That's just the way it is.

Mr Gerretsen: On a point of order, Speaker: The member well knows that the government House leader calls all the shots.

The Acting Speaker: That's not a point of order. The member for Northumberland.

Mr Galt: Thank you very much, Mr Speaker. Certainly the member for Kingston and the Islands is aware of the situation we find ourselves in. The Premier of Ontario, the Honourable Mike Harris, has made a decision to step down. He's been a tremendous Premier and has led us through some very difficult times. He has taken us from those difficult, impossible 10 years, the lost decade, and has turned this province around. As a result of his stepping down—and I'm guessing—probably the House will prorogue. If it does, then this will be protected.

Also, we know that the selection of the next Premier of Ontario is not going to take place until March 23. Probably the new Premier will need a month, five weeks,

six weeks, before the House is called back. Consequently it's important that there be business on the docket, such as these bills, so that when the House is called back it can proceed right into business and will continue at that point in time consistent with the policies that have been developed by a great Premier, Mike Harris.

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker: Order.

Mr Galt: Thank you very much, Mr Speaker. It was getting to the point I could hardly hear myself.

As we move into this time, I respect that the private members' bills brought forward by the opposition parties, both the official opposition and the third party, should be recognized as well as government members' and government bills that are presently on the paper.

I'm particularly concerned, because I have one that's sitting there, Bill 33, the outside riders act. It's my private member's bill. We got it through second reading and committee. Unfortunately it was blocked from getting unanimous consent last June. As you're aware, to get a private member's bill through third reading we must have unanimous consent, and those kinds of things are negotiated on the last evening we sit. That bill was in memory of Jay Lawrence and Bart Mackey, two young men who were flipped out of the back of a half-ton truck along with another individual. These two were killed and the other one was seriously injured on a curve very close to where I live—as a matter of fact, a little south of where the Big Apple is along Highway 401. That's Percy Street going down into Colborne, a tremendous business that's been set up by entrepreneurs in my riding. Actually it was very close to Hoselton Studios. That's the studio that makes these aluminium geese that sit on a stone. You see them in all kinds of gift shops—just a tremendous business. Actually, he came from the little village of Bath, where I grew up as well. He has developed this business as an artist, shipping all over the world. The accident happened right in front of his home.

I would certainly like to see this bill see the light of day. Certainly the Minister of Transportation, the Honourable Brad Clark, is extremely supportive of this particular bill. I think it was very unfortunate that it was blocked last June. I hope that on the evening of December 13 it will be recognized and will get approved on this occasion. I know that their parents would be very appreciative of this Legislature if that bill were to be passed. I look forward to having third reading take place on the 13th, so that we can recognize them.

That's one particular bill. I know how I feel about my bill, and I'm sure that other members feel similarly about the private members' bills they have sitting and waiting through second reading or possibly through committee, and they want to see them flow as well.

Also very close to my heart is a government bill, Bill 81, the Nutrient Management Act. I trust it will make it through before the end of next week, but should it not, it's very, very important.

Interjection.

Mr Galt: Well, many names have been used on the bill, but it's pretty important to looking after our water. That member is one of the first to complain about concerns with water, and it would be in order if he would support this particular bill to help protect the waters of this great province of ours.

The member from Haldimand-Norfolk-Brant and I spent considerable time two years ago touring this province, consulting. Farmers and environmentalists alike came up with some great information. This bill has been consulted. If there's any criticism of it, it's that it's been held up because of consultations and we should get on with getting it through the Legislature. We even went out, Mr Speaker, after first reading; we had first reading last June, as I'm sure you'll recall. We went out on the road in late August and September and made some nine stops, I believe, across eastern Ontario, western Ontario and even into the north as well. This bill has been consulted and has been looked at and has had hearings. It's time that we got on with it, and there's a commitment from the minister and his staff that there will be thorough consultations on the development of regulations that will come through very, very quickly once this particular bill is passed. But should it not get through by the 13th, it's so important that it at least be on the order paper and we wouldn't lose the time.

I know that farmers support this and eagerly await it. They want some regulations to work within, to have some standards across the province rather than the piecemeal, patchwork type of municipal bylaws. That's not a criticism of municipalities and individuals who are doing the best they possibly can. But some of the large operations try to zero in on municipalities that have the weakest bylaws and want to set up operations there. This would give standards all across the province. A consistent nutrient management plan would be approved by the ministry, or possibly its designate, down the road and there would be some consistency there, at the same time recognizing the need for flexibility because of the kinds of seasons we have in, say, New Liskeard versus Chatham—very, very different—or the soil types around Chatham, with the tremendous depth of clay there, versus, say, Kemptonville or, down in eastern Ontario, in my own riding, Brighton, the rolling hills of Northumberland—quite sandy, very, very different kinds of conditions. Therefore, the bill incorporates the nutrient management plan that would be approved, and therein would lie that flexibility.

I would really hate to see this bill in particular die on the order paper if it doesn't get through by the 13th. What's better is that it would be through by the 13th.

Looking around behind me, I see the member from London West, who has Bill 6, the Protection of Minors from Sexually Explicit Goods and Services Act. I'm sure this member would want to see that bill carried through and be available for debate next spring, once the House comes back. I think he'd be very disappointed if the House prorogued and that bill ended up dying. I think of Frank Mazzilli's Bill 50, the Improved Safety on 400

Series Highways Act. If I remember correctly, that bill has to do with people occupying the left-hand lane and being so inconsiderate as not to let other people around.

Bill 76, the Farm Implements Amendment Act, brought forward by Toby Barrett, so that no large farm organization could force an individual implement dealer to carry only one line, and that they could carry other products. Also, they run into some real difficulties when they're obliged to carry lines that no farmer in their area is interested in. In my area or in eastern Ontario, if you're obliged to carry, say, equipment for tobacco country or equipment specialized for potatoes, it's of very little use. They find themselves in those kinds of situations, and Mr Barrett has brought that bill forward. From what I hear from farmers and implement dealers in my area, this is a pretty important piece of legislation, and I hope that maybe, just maybe, the opposition parties would see it similarly and let that particular bill go through on the 13th.

1930

I look at a bill like Bill 78, by a Liberal, Pat Hoy, the Occupational Health and Safety Amendment Act (Sexual Harassment). I would think that party would similarly want to see a bill such as that go through.

Bill 106, the World Teachers' Day Act, by Rosario Marchese, a beautiful speaker—I'm so entertained when he speaks in the Legislature. He really has a lot of content and puts a lot of physical effort into his presentations. He's one of the better speakers we have in this Legislature. What a shame if that bill would die on the order paper.

Then I think of Bill 128, by Rick Bartolucci from Sudbury, the Highway Memorials for Fallen Police Officers Act, another bill recognizing some very dedicated people who look after law and security in our country, and again an act that I think would be a shame to have die on the order paper.

I've been talking about a lot of responsible activity, but I kind of think in terms of what I read in today's paper about irresponsibility that's been going on, some \$16.3 billion in grants and contributions that the federal government approves on an annual basis and can't seem to keep track of. Some 7,500 dead Canadians received heating rebates. What a shame. Another 4,000 people living abroad also received the rebate, and some 1,600 jail inmates got a rebate for heating. Now, maybe it's getting chillier in jails than I realized. Worse still, those dollars were sent out just prior to the last federal election. Were they buying votes? I don't know, but you really begin to wonder. Very unfortunately—it was for low-income earners—less than \$350 million of the \$1.4 billion that went out actually went to low-income earners. Where did the rest go? I really don't know.

Last month, I was roundly criticized by the member from Windsor West for comments I made—

Mr David Caplan (Don Valley East): No.

Mr Galt: Yes, I was, and it was most unfortunate. I was commenting on the lack of response of the federal government to the September 11 incident. In fact, the Auditor General is saying basically the same thing. She

goes on to point out evidence that Canada's military has to literally beg for spare parts to keep their equipment in a state of readiness. This is from the Auditor General. She said that urgent requests for parts are only filled 34% of the time, and often parts received are defective, which leaves soldiers to fend for themselves.

Mr Gerretsen: On a point of order, Mr Speaker: I would suggest to the member that if he's going to talk about an auditing report, he should—

The Acting Speaker: That is not a point of order. Sit down. The member for Northumberland.

Mr Galt: Thank you very much, Mr Speaker.

I was going to comment on some of the things that were not enforced by the federal government. It isn't enforcing income taxes for non-residents. As a result, more than \$800 million in capital gains was moved to Barbados—

Mr Caplan: On a point of order, Mr Speaker: The member is inciting me, but I want to know if we have a quorum present.

The Acting Speaker: Is there a quorum present?

Clerk at the Table (Mr Todd Decker): A quorum is not present.

The Acting Speaker ordered the bells rung.

Clerk at the Table: A quorum is now present, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: The member for Northumberland.

Mr Galt: Thank you very much, Mr Speaker. When I was so rudely interrupted, I was speaking about the taxes that have been lost from this country because of people moving those dollars to Barbados. It sounds like a good place to move it, but then I wonder how many other Caribbean islands and how many other countries dollars have been moved to.

Then I look at the employment insurance. They increased the surplus, the reserves, by \$8 billion in one year, up to \$36 billion when they only need \$15 billion. This is a tax on employment. It drives away jobs. I hear it over and over again in my riding. They compliment our government for reducing payroll taxes, but here's the federal government leaving tax on payroll. Maybe if they wanted, they could roll some of that \$8 billion into health care and put it to good use, but no, they're just leaving it in surplus.

I think of Human Resources Development Canada, HRDC, and the mess that was in a couple of years ago. At least that's straightening out just a little bit.

The Auditor General talks about the problem with health care and the fact that Ontario's is increasing but the feds continue to drag their feet.

There were also comments—and I wouldn't want to be too awfully negative on the feds, but I look and I think about the solidarity that has occurred recently with the "Canada Loves New York Day," when thousands of Canadians went down. Lo and behold, the Prime Minister was there. He didn't go when he should have, shortly after September 11; he went to a Liberal fundraiser instead when he indeed should have been in New York

supporting the mayor of New York, supporting the President of the United States, but instead he went to a Liberal fundraiser, which was most unfortunate.

Just looking at some of the clippings, coming across comments—when we talk about security, I just want to look for a moment here in the Toronto Sun. Stephanie Rubec is talking about how “Canada’s military is so hard up for spare parts that soldiers have had to go begging for them, the Auditor General says.” It goes on to say:

“But until steps are taken to manage equipment readiness more adequately, these claims should be taken with a grain of salt.

“Fraser said that urgent requests for parts are only filled”—I mentioned that.

It also talks about how “in Kosovo, when CF-18 fighter pilots had to beg the Spanish military for replacement batteries because the Canadian order arrived depleted.

“And the lack of a central inventory caused Canada’s four destroyers to stock a whopping \$29 million in spare parts on board, enough for 20 years.”

Mr Speaker, I know you think that maybe I’m just a little off topic. I was going to mention for a moment the Safe Drinking Water Act that Marilyn Churley has brought forward, and it has received second reading. I know that the third party would be concerned if a bill such as that one didn’t make it through. I appreciate Ms Churley’s concern for safe drinking water, and I think every member of this Legislature feels the same way.

Then there was one that Mr Hastings brought forward, the Saving for Our Children’s Future Act (Income Tax Amendment), a private member’s bill. It’s been through second reading and has received amendments from committee.

There’s just another one in here I wanted to comment on and then I’m going to turn the rest of the time over to my good friend from Guelph-Wellington. This is one is from Steve Gilchrist, who is the member for Scarborough East, the Ontario Natural Heritage Act, 2001. This bill has been carried through second reading and is waiting to go to committee, again a very important bill.

1940

In conclusion, I recognize the importance of this debate on a motion to carry over business notwithstanding prorogation. I also look forward to a motion that will indeed approve some of the committees, particularly the select committee on alternative fuel sources, that will be able to sit this coming winter prior to the House coming back.

In recognition of the leadership race that’s on, we wish all five candidates well, and possibly a sixth one, if he or she comes aboard, decides to join in this race. We know that in the end only one will make it and I look forward to a united party to lead a government through the remainder of this term.

With those comments, I look forward to the comments from my good friend from Guelph-Wellington.

Mrs Margaret Marland (Mississauga South): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: There is a fundraiser going on in aid of the United Way, and I think it’s very unfair

because it’s for all of the members to support, and for Mr Caplan to call a quorum is unfair.

The Acting Speaker: That’s perfectly in order. You are out of order.

Mr Gilles Bisson (Timmins-James Bay): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: Would you check to see if there is a quorum?

The Acting Speaker: Is a quorum present?

Clerk at the Table: A quorum is present.

The Acting Speaker: The Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs.

Hon Mrs Elliott: I’m pleased to rise and speak in support of the motion before the House this evening. My colleagues from Durham and Northumberland have been speaking about the various bills that are before this House and have been presented for debate. What this motion before us tonight is about, I would remind those who are listening—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker: Order. Only one person can speak at a time. It is highly unusual for government members to heckle another, so let’s let the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs have her 11 minutes and 2 seconds.

Hon Mrs Elliott: You’re very kind, Speaker. Thank you.

The motion—

Mr Bisson: On a point of order, Mr Speaker: Let’s check it again for quorum.

The Acting Speaker: Is there a quorum?

Clerk at the Table: Quorum is not present, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker ordered the bells rung.

Clerk at the Table: Quorum is now present, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: The Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs.

Hon Mrs Elliott: Thank you again, Speaker.

We’re here tonight to debate, “That, notwithstanding the prorogation of the House,

(i) all government bills;

(ii) all private members’ bills;

(iii) all private bills;

remaining on the Orders and Notices paper ... be continued and placed on the Orders and Notices paper of the second sessional day of the third session.”

My colleagues have been talking at length about all of the bills that have been presented before the House for debate. There are three kinds of bills: the bills that are considered long and hard, with great consultation, and brought forward by various ministers for presentation and for the better governance of the province as a whole; private bills, which are special bills designed to meet specific needs in our constituencies—an example from my constituency would be a private bill such as put forward by The Elliott which needs a change in its governance structure; and of course the third kind are private members’ bills, which are special bills that each backbencher is allowed to bring forward. There’s a ballot system to determine when those bills are able to be brought forward.

If this motion passes, the order in which people will be allowed to bring forward bills will not change. We will not have to start all over. Some folks have been waiting for some time to have the bill of their choice brought forward and presented to the House, and this motion will allow all of that to continue.

My colleagues have listed some of the bills they think are very important in ensuring that we have continuity and completion of legislation that's been presented. Some of the important government bills that we want to see continue and proceed to their completion are of course the Ontarians with Disabilities Act, a very important bill presented by my colleague the Honourable Cam Jackson, who has worked long and hard to try and respond not only to the needs of the disabled community but to the community at large in Ontario, recognizing that we all feel a need to do something better for the disabled community; the Oak Ridges moraine bill has been debated; literary proceeds; student protection; the Heritage Hunting and Fishing Act; the victims' rights act. My colleague mentioned the Nutrient Management Act. There are many acts that have been presented and are on the order paper that we do not want to see die at the end of the session.

There were a number of points of order here a few moments ago to check on quorum. Obviously there's a special event going on tonight. The press gallery is sponsoring a fundraiser for the United Way. That is often the case down here at the Legislature. There will be many receptions, with community groups and organizations coming in to meet members of the Legislature, to talk to them about issues. Often ceremonies are occurring, and of course during the Christmas season there are some very beautiful things occurring.

It's a challenge to be able to attend all of them, but there was a very special one that I'd like to draw to the attention of those who may be viewing, and that was the Order of Ontario, which was presented last night by Premier Harris and by our Lieutenant Governor, Hilary Weston. It was her last official function for the Ontario awards system. Last night, 27 outstanding Ontarians were being properly and officially recognized for the marvellous contributions they've made to the province in many capacities: sports, the arts, literature, the health field. It was not only a very beautiful ceremony held on the steps of the grand staircase down below, but it was of particular importance to constituents in my riding of Guelph-Wellington. We had two marvellous individuals who were thrilled to be honoured, quite frankly, and I'd like to mention their names.

Ken Danby, who I think is known internationally for his art, was recognized and awarded the Order of Ontario. It's actually a pin and a special medal that they are given. Ken has delighted people for years with his marvellous, realistic art. I happen to have one of his prints in my constituency office of a carousel that he did many years ago. In this painting, the little boy standing at a carousel in Guelph was actually Ken's son.

Another outstanding Ontarian and another outstanding person from Guelph, Terry Daynard, was honoured. Terry has been renowned in the agricultural field and was particularly recognized for his work in crop production research, teaching and advocacy. He is actually a founder and executive vice-president of the Ontario Corn Producers' Association. Terry has been a very valuable constituent in that from time to time he has come to see me to give me advice on agricultural issues. He has also provided some very interesting advice on meeting some environmental challenges we've been facing in the nation, and spent a lot of time talking to our ministry and the Canadian ministry of environment on carbon sinks, for instance.

1950

I would like to point out two other people who won the Order of Ontario last night, Signe and Robert McMichael of Belfountain, very near to my riding of Wellington, who are the renowned builders and donors of the McMichael Collection for the Group of Seven located in Kleinburg.

It was very interesting that Mr Danby was honoured last night, because when the McMichael bill was being presented and debated in this House and went through the committee hearings process—we're here tonight talking about how important it is to maintain continuity of the bills and to make sure we have an opportunity for them to come to fruition. Ken actually participated by presenting at one of the committee hearing meetings we had in support of the McMichaels. It was a lovely feeling last night to see Mr and Mrs McMichael and Ken there receiving honours all at the same time.

Another person who has been a great support to us in Ontario was Lewis W. MacKenzie. He's the major general, retired, from Bracebridge. He is the Ontario director of ICROSS Canada, the International Community for the Relief of Starvation and Suffering, which assists AIDS orphans and the poorest of East Africa. He has been an adviser to us here in Ontario in matters of security resulting from the terrible tragedy of September 11.

That is often what has happened here; we have gone to people who are experts in their field to seek their advice. It's how we create the bills that are presented here. My colleague from Durham indicated that the ideas for one of his private member's bills came from a constituent who saw a problem, discussed it with him, and it ended up being a piece of legislation that was presented here. This is why it's important to be able to take that advice that's received, formulate it into a bill, and present it for debate, discussion and refinement so that we make Ontario work better at the end of the day.

It seems like there are always more bills presented in this House than we ever seem to have time to debate. That's because we have a lot of people here in this Legislature who have marvellous ideas, and on both sides of the House I would say that is the case. We sometimes differ greatly on how things should proceed. Obviously with the Liberals, the New Democrats and the Conservatives here, we have very different principles by

which we operate and by which we think the world should work, and work better in Ontario.

On this side, we are of the view that government has a tremendous role to play in the province, that this is the vehicle by which we undertake to do things for people and institutions that are unable to do things on their own, and for the greater public good. We are here to make sure that organization or that institution or that service is delivered. Here on this side of the House, we do not believe it is the role of the government to do everything for everyone all the time. I would put to you that many of us came to this place in 1995 with the Common Sense Revolution, under the leadership of Premier Mike Harris, because we felt that Ontario was beginning to suffer under the thinking of entitlement, which in the long run is neither good for the individual nor the province as a whole.

These are the kinds of things we talk about when we're here debating. We talk about consequences that will come from a bill, we look to try and find ways to prevent unintended consequences, but most of all, when we present something here in the Legislature, we are looking for ways to make the province better.

Today I met with the Ontario Principals' Association, for instance. They were coming as a newly formed organization, coming out of a bill that we passed in the last Legislature, Bill 160—great upheaval, great upset. In fact, at that point in time the principals were complaining that we were doing a terrible thing to them by taking them out of the teachers' unions. At that time, we felt it was the right thing and we proceeded despite the hue and cry. I thought it was very gratifying today that the principals came to me and said, "Brenda, we think that legislation was actually the right thing to do. It has been beneficial for us as principals, as managers." But they were taking some time to talk to me about things they thought could be done better, some improvements to the system that I was grateful to receive. Quite frankly, the day that we don't have groups and organizations coming before us for change and for new ways of approaching things will be a sad day here in Ontario.

So I add my voice, with my colleagues from Northumberland and Durham, to say that I am pleased to support this motion. I hope my colleagues from across the way will also do the same. In the interests of continuity and in the interests of good government for the province of Ontario, I hope they will support this motion.

Mr Gerretsen: I'm very pleased to join the debate tonight. I'll be sharing my time with the members for Essex and for Don Valley East.

I would like to congratulate the minister. It's one of the few times in the last six years that I've actually heard a government member say publicly that members in the opposition, somebody other than their government, may actually have some good ideas about something. I firmly believe that good ideas can come from anywhere and any side. If we took the good ideas that float around from side to side from time to time, we'd have a better province, we'd have a better government and we'd probably

be a lot better off than we are. Congratulations, Minister, for acknowledging the fact that sometimes good ideas come from the other side.

There are just a couple of points I want to make at the outset. Over the last little while, particularly tonight with the member for Northumberland, it almost seems to me that the government members on that side of the House ran at the wrong time in the last election. They are so totally dominated by federal issues that maybe they thought they were running federally the last time and they weren't running provincially.

Mr Caplan: For the Alliance?

Mr Gerretsen: For the Alliance, probably. It seems like when they haven't got anything else to say, they take a swipe at the federal government.

Let me be the first to say that some of the items contained in the federal Auditor General's report were damning of the various government departments. Any wastage of money anywhere within the public sector, whether it's provincially, federally or locally, as I stated earlier today, is something we should all condemn. We all put our hard-earned tax dollars into the system somewhere along the line and we expect to get value for those dollars. The last thing that we need is for anybody at any level of government to waste that money. If the money is wasted, whoever's involved, whichever ministry is involved at whatever level of government, run by whatever party is involved, should be called to task. I don't have any problem with that at all. But we are a provincial Legislature. You would think that if anybody is going to talk about an Auditor General's report, he would stick to this document that our own Provincial Auditor came out with last week. It was very damning of the government in a number of different ways.

One issue I am very concerned about—I raised a question on this earlier—dealt with the fact that one of the ministries did not, in any way, shape or form, cooperate with the auditor. He had to comment on that, for the first time in nine years. By doing that, I think we are all not well served. We're talking about an officer of the Legislature, not somebody who has been employed by the government or by the opposition but somebody independently appointed in a process built around consensus, who does a study into a particular department and the way the ministry is run and comes to the conclusion that he's not getting the correct information or that the information is being denied to him. I would think all of us would condemn that kind of situation.

My point quite simply is this: if we're going to talk about accountability in government, why don't we stick to our own level first? Once we've got a perfect system here, where every tax dollar is being spent properly, then maybe we can start worrying about the other systems. But if you want to say something and want to get that deeply involved in the federal system, I strongly suggest to you that you run federally the next time.

The impression left by one of the government members is that somehow these are negotiating sessions between the House leader, the opposition House leader

and the third party House leader. I had the privilege of being involved with that group for three years when I was whip of our party during the last Parliament, and let me tell you, the word “negotiation” is grossly misused in this place. A negotiation takes place when you’ve got three individuals who have equal power, equal authority, equal decision-making ability and can actually say, “OK, you give a little and I’ll give a little,” that they’re of equal power and authority etc and something can be negotiated. In the system we have here, where you’ve got a majority government with the majority of members, there is no such thing as negotiation. What the government House leader decides ultimately happens, and if it doesn’t happen voluntarily, as a result of the other two House leaders backing off, then the government just brings in a time allocation or a closure motion. This government has used that tactic over the last six weeks with just about every bill it has brought in. Just about every bill it has brought in was time-allocated.

The real sorry part about that whole situation is that at one time the media and the people out there were outraged if a government used closure to stop the debate that takes place in our forum for democratic discussion. I can remember that a government fell on that back in the 1950s, a federal Liberal government, as a matter of fact, because they had used closure to cut off the pipeline debate. The unfortunate part, if I could just carry on with my thought, is that now we’re using it almost on a daily basis and the media doesn’t care and the people out there don’t care. People shrug their shoulders and say, “Well, let’s get on with life.”

2000

Hon R. Gary Stewart (Minister without Portfolio):

They like it.

Mr Gerretsen: Now this member says, “Well, you know, they like the legislation. They like it.” That may or may not be so, but sir, you are totally missing the point. We live in a democracy, and in a democracy—

Hon Mr Stewart: We’ve made our decision.

Mr Gerretsen: Yes, you can make your decisions. You’ve made your decision. But in a democracy, it used to be that the only way a government would act was if in effect a bill was talked out. That doesn’t happen any more. You, sir, your government—I don’t mean this personally but collectively—have used closure since 1995 more often than all the other governments before that from 1867 to 1995.

I know the argument sometimes used is that back in the late 1980s—you say, “We’ve got more debate on a bill. In those days a lot of bills were only debated for an hour.” Well, they were debated for an hour because nobody else wanted to say anything any more, presumably because they either realized they weren’t going to get anywhere or they thought the law was good. But closure was not invoked as frequently as it is today. Just check the records on that.

If a government member tells you, interest group out there, “We would pass your bill if only the opposition would let us,” I want you to be absolutely sure, members

of the public, that the opposition does not control that. If the government wants to pass a bill which you and other people have an interest in, they control the whole process and they can pass that bill any time they want because they invoke closure any time they want. So don’t ever let them try to convince you, “Oh, we’d pass that bill if only the opposition would let us.”

Now, there are ways in which the opposition can sometimes delay the passage of a bill, but even a lot of those powers have been taken away. Just look at your standing orders. People are now limited to debate for 20 minutes and then, after seven hours of debate on a particular subject matter, it goes down to 10 minutes. Debate can in effect be finished on any item a lot earlier than it was in the days when Peter Kormos stood in this House for 24 hours to talk about a bill. Basically, a bill couldn’t be shut off for debate back then unless closure was invoked. The rules of this House have become such that it’s much easier and quicker for a government to pass a bill. No question about it.

Please, please, general public, don’t be fooled into the notion that “Well, the bill would be passed if it weren’t for that awful, awful opposition.” As demeaning as it may sound to those of us who are sitting in opposition, we don’t control. All we can do, at most, is delay and hope that during that time the government will come to its senses and maybe make some changes as a result of what they hear at public hearings, or as a result of what they hear here or whatever. They control the system.

As far as this motion is concerned, let me first of all say that I agree with it. An awful lot of hard work has gone into the 147 bills currently on the docket, both government bills and private members’ bills, and it would be a tragedy if it were decided that when this House was prorogued—and people have to understand. What does proroguing a House mean? It basically means this session of Parliament is finished and a new session can be started at any time when a new government comes in. We’ll have to wait until the Conservative leadership race has been decided on March 23, so it will probably be some time after Easter. Obviously, a new government, with a new Premier, wants to come in with a throne speech, so proroguing a House starts afresh. That used to be the system.

With this kind of motion here, of course, you don’t start afresh. You already start with 149 private members’ and public bills on the register, as it were. The question then becomes, why are you proroguing? You know why you’re proroguing. Lay it right on the line for people. I want the member for Oshawa to listen to this. If we did not prorogue, it means that according to the House calendar we would have to be back here on March 18. That’s what the House calendar says. You don’t want to come back on March 18 because you’re having a leadership race on March 23. That’s the reason. And you want to give whoever wins on March 23 a certain period of time, let’s say a month, to get a new cabinet and to get a new direction and to have some sort of throne speech ready. That’s why you’re proroguing, but at the same

time you don't want to have all these bills die on the order paper.

As I indicated before, I'm in favour of that. A lot of hard work has gone into this by the government and by private members. Some of the bills I like, some of the bills I don't like, but at least all that work hasn't gone totally to waste by doing this.

I've got to congratulate you on coming up with this motion today. Normally, this kind of motion is passed in the wee, dark hours of the last day, at a quarter to 12, and some people know what's going on and the others don't; somebody comes up with a motion like this and sometimes some bills are forgotten and aren't included in the mix. At least by doing it now, a week beforehand, we can all be pretty well assured that we're out of here next Thursday, December 13, and we will not be sitting the week after that.

But why not tell the people that? Why all this cloak-and-dagger manoeuvring? It's like saying, "We'd pass this bill, but it's the opposition that won't let us." Everybody down there on the government side and on this side knows that is nonsense. You can pass any bill you want, pretty much at any time, especially in light of the fact that you've moved closure as often as you have.

In the few minutes I've got left, before I turn it over to my colleagues, I want to talk about one particular bill on the—

Mr Caplan: Bill 134.

2010

Mr Gerretsen: No, I'm going to talk about Bill 5. I've got a great self-interest in that bill because it's a bill I proposed to the House. I make no bones about it; it's self-interest. I want to talk about this bill because the draw number I have for discussing my private member's business—Speaker, I don't know whether you ever saw that list, but I think I was the last person to have my name drawn, or if not the last, almost at the bottom, something like number 75, which probably means it'll never, ever come up unless I make a trade with somebody else.

I will probably never have an opportunity to speak about this bill, so tonight I want to take the opportunity to speak about it. I know this bill has a certain interest with the members of the government as well. Bill 5, which I introduced last year and again one of the first bills introduced just when we came back, is an amendment to the Audit Act. It's not a very sexy bill, not a very glamorous bill, but I think it's a bill that is highly needed. The amendment I'm proposing is very simple, that is, that the Provincial Auditor be given the right and the authority to follow the money.

Our budget is somewhere in the neighbourhood of \$62 billion to \$64 billion nowadays in the province of Ontario. That's what we collect in taxes, in other revenues, in fees and in corporate taxes. It's about \$64 billion. About two thirds of that money, almost \$40 billion if not more, is being transferred to transfer agencies: the hospitals, the universities, the colleges, the school boards

and other agencies. Basically, the auditor currently does not have the right to follow that money.

Maybe some people on my side don't want me to introduce that, because they'd say, "That's a government bill. Let them talk about accountability." But I am a true believer in accountability. As I mentioned before, I don't think that any dollar we put into the system ought to be wasted at any time. The Provincial Auditor is an officer of this assembly who acts on behalf of all of us—not the government and not the opposition. He does all these studies and comes up with reports like this, which the government of the day, and government, may not like because it shows great deficiencies in particular areas. I think the auditor we have in that position should not be limited to being able to audit only what the government itself spends, about a third of the budget, but should have the authority and the right to see how the universities, the colleges, the hospitals and the other transfer agencies spend it.

I can tell you, a lot of these organizations don't want it. I've heard from universities, colleges and hospitals, and they basically say, "Why are you messing around in that? That's none of your business. We know what we're doing." And undoubtedly they do, undoubtedly they know what they're doing. But I still think the Provincial Auditor should have the right to follow the money that we pay out to these various institutions.

A lot of these smaller organizations that get a \$5,000 or a \$10,000 or a \$20,000 grant are saying, "Does that mean the government can come in and audit my books and do all sorts of things?" Maybe yes, but is the auditor likely to do that? Probably not, while there are still many large organizations to audit.

What I find interesting about that—I would love to say this is a unique idea, that I came up with this idea and nobody's ever thought about it before. If I were to say that, I would not be telling the truth, because other people on that side of the House have come up with that idea as well. The member for Niagara Falls introduced it as a private member's bill. As a matter of fact, Mr Eves made a great statement about wanting to do that in his 1996 budget. He wanted to amend the Audit Act so the auditor could go after the money that was paid out to the transfer agencies.

Did it ever happen? No. He wrote letters to the public accounts committee at the time that he wanted that done. Did it happen? No. The government talks a good line about public sector accountability. They even talked about it in the last budget. They were going to pass a Public Sector Accountability Act. What was interesting about that is that they wanted to hold everybody accountable but the provincial government itself wasn't accountable.

If you try to look into the Public Sector Accountability Act from an unbiased viewpoint, it puts all sorts of reporting requirements on other organizations but at no time did it hold the provincial government itself accountable. So nothing happened. The bottom line is that this government, which likes to make people believe

it runs the affairs of government in a businesslike fashion and holds people accountable etc, and loves to tell other people what to do, really isn't putting its mouth where its money is. It really isn't holding itself accountable.

I'm willing to give up this private member's bill. I don't care who gets the credit for it. We're talking about spending a lot of money out there. If you want to take credit for it, fine; if a government member wants to introduce it, then go ahead if you think it has a better chance of passing. Why the heck aren't you passing it? Why the heck aren't you following Mr Eves's lead? He used to be in the leading position in this race that's going on right now, if the newspapers are to be believed.

Interjection: Who's leading now?

Mr Gerretsen: Mr Eves. He seems to have the support of half the caucus over there. But that's totally beside the point. The point simply is, why didn't he pass it earlier? Why does he talk a good line on accountability and then in the long run not produce at all?

Finally, as I'm about to sit down and relinquish the time to the member from Essex, I say to the government, yes, you've got 15 or so government bills on the order paper that you want to save, and it's a good thing that you're saving them. You could have passed a few of these before; I don't know why you didn't. Then you have a whole group of others that have been given first reading and second reading; none of them have been given third reading so far. All I would say to you is that I sincerely hope this may actually be a positive move by the government, that we will carry some of these bills over—some of which we totally and absolutely disagree with. But let's hope that whoever gets elected leader of their party will show a little bit more compassion and understanding of the more vulnerable people in our society.

You know, the people who are doing all right economically don't need government help. I firmly believe that what government is really all about is to try to give people an equal chance in life, as much as possible, whether we're talking about using the health care system, whether we're talking about getting an education. I think this is something that, unfortunately, the group of people who have been running this province over the last five or six years have totally missed the boat on. They love to talk about tax cuts—and who doesn't like a tax cut? I like a tax cut too, but there's more to life than tax cuts. The only way we will ever build a compassionate, understanding society here in Ontario is if we start thinking about all the people, particularly the people who are more vulnerable. I hope that whoever leads this party after March 23 will not only understand that but actually do something about it.

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Mr Bruce Crozier (Essex): It's a pleasure to follow my colleague from Kingston and the Islands. I will speak for a little bit and then you'll hear from my colleague from Don Valley East.

We all know that every year at this time it's rush, rush, rush. But I'm not talking about the Christmas rush. I'm

talking about the rush to get legislation passed in this Legislature. The Ontarians with Disabilities Act, for example, has been recently introduced and is now out for public hearings. But I've been told by some of those who are appearing before the committee that they are afraid the government just wants to ram it through along with as many other bills as they can before the end of this session. In fact I was told, and I truly hope this is not true, that the Ontarians with disabilities committees that are appearing before the committee reviewing the bill have been told that if it isn't passed before Christmas, they may not get that bill at all. I hope that's not the case.

Not surprisingly, though, the Ontarians with Disabilities Act is not the only one that's being hastened through its passage. What is surprising is that there are a number of pieces of government legislation that are being rushed. Bills that the government touted as being imperative—absolutely imperative—during the hype and fanfare of their introduction are still awaiting third reading, and in some case even second reading; for example, the Nutrient Management Act, the Waste Diversion Act, the Municipal Act, the Community Care Access Corporations Act. They were all publicized as necessary—absolutely necessary—pieces of legislation. As of today, these bills, among others, are still awaiting debate and passage. It goes without saying, I think—but I'll say it anyway—that each of these bills will be passed and voted on because, as my colleague from Kingston and the Islands says, this government, with its majority, controls the legislation that comes before this House, that's debated before this House and that's passed by this House.

For example, the government's Limitations Act, 2001, was introduced back in April to amend the current Limitations Act and still hasn't moved beyond first reading. If this were a two-car parade, I'm afraid the government couldn't organize it, because they can't organize their time. The nutrient management and food safety acts have been awaiting second reading since the middle of June. The food safety act finally received third reading today. I think you get the idea. It's as if, after all the pomp and circumstance of a bill's introduction, the government simply turns its back, moving on to the next publicity campaign and so on. Sometimes it's almost as if passage has become some sort of afterthought.

If the bills on the order paper, the important bills, are not passed before we break for Christmas, the House isn't scheduled to return till about March 18. In fact, it was told to us by a government member tonight—and I don't know whether he let it slip or not—that we would not be coming back until about five weeks after the leadership campaign. That puts us into the month of May. So we're talking about almost five long months of inaction on these supposedly critical pieces of legislation. And that's only if the government doesn't make a mess of affairs the way it did last year when it prorogued the Legislature and lost all its legislation. Frankly, I think we're debating this tonight because there is a concern on their part that they are going to lose this legislation.

There's only one reason for all this, in my view, and it's mismanagement. The government just hasn't figured out how to budget its time. For most of each session, members are in the Legislature in the evening, and this week and next we'll be around until midnight. We have what are scheduled to be five sessional days left, and there are 23 government bills to be dealt with. Many of the bills we debate of course have been and will be time-allocated, if they want to get some of this legislation through.

Speaker, you and I know that time allocation is just a fancy word for choking off debate. It was mentioned earlier by the member for Kingston and the Islands that during the terms of this government, democracy has been limited in this Legislature to a great extent. Now, after a bill has been debated for three sessional days, they can bring in time allocation. After a bill has been debated nine hours, I think, the time that members have goes from 20 minutes to 10 minutes. It's a frustrating process, quite frankly, to be on this side of the House and be faced with those kinds of barriers.

Had the government only planned ahead, it would not be desperately ramming legislation through at the end of the session. In fact, had it planned ahead, we wouldn't even be spending what might be five hours tonight debating this resolution. We could be debating some very important—in the view of the government—legislation. I'm certainly not saying I agree with all of the government's legislation, but I do believe a government should do what it says it's going to do.

It shouldn't have its members, let alone the members of the opposition, scrambling in the last days to pass legislation when it very easily could have been done a lot earlier and given everyone ample opportunity to debate the issues. This is really a process that's limiting our time and frustrating everybody in the House, because I'm sure there are government members who would like to get up and speak on their own legislation. It should be the government members who want to get up and tell us why that legislation should be passed. It's unfair to your members, it's unfair to the opposition and it's mostly unfair to our constituents, the people of Ontario, because they don't get an opportunity to hear the legislation debated to its fullest.

I don't believe that a government that can't properly manage its time is able to manage health care, education, the environment or any of the other laws it's elected to oversee. If the government's incapable of handling simple things like the timetable in the Legislature, how can it be trusted to handle anything else? As I said earlier, I compare it to a two-car parade. I really don't know whether this government would be able to manage that.

I agree with the principle of this motion, because with the time, effort and money that have been put into bringing legislation before this House, with in some cases public hearings having been held, it should stay on the order paper and shouldn't be lost just because we pro-
ogue. The problem, in bringing in this motion, is that the

government has also said, at least to this point, that no committees will sit, so these important pieces of legislation that have already received second reading can't go out for public debate.

In other words, quite frankly, folks at home, there isn't anything that's going to happen in this Legislature or with this government, possibly for the next four to five months, except the leadership campaign. That's why I think this resolution is short in its objective. It should also have included the ability of standing committees to meet, to discuss the legislation if it's had second reading, and to go out for public hearings.

There is one exception to that, and I'm pleased to say it's the committee I'm Vice-Chair of, the public accounts committee. We will be meeting during the intersession for two or three weeks, and that's good because we're going to be discussing the recent report of the Provincial Auditor.

As an example of how democracy, and I use that word loosely, is handled around here, and the fact that there can't be any committee meetings in the next three or four months with the exception of public accounts, I'm going to be meeting, along with others—I think government members and third party members—a delegation from Ethiopia on Monday. They're coming here to see how our government works. They're coming here to see how our committee system works and how our committees can be transparent, how they can be effective.

2030

Now what do you think I'm going to have to tell them on Monday? That our committees, with the exception of one, aren't going to meet for the next four months, and that there is government legislation—23 bills on the docket—that we're going to do absolutely nothing with for the next four months. How can those delegates from Ethiopia think we have an effective, transparent, responsible, accountable government if we tell them that starting a week from today we're not even going to be here, that we're not even going to be doing anything for the next four or five months? I'm going to have some difficulty in explaining to them that our system may be better than some others they're looking into.

I want to re-emphasize something my colleague from Kingston and the Islands said: we're in this mess because the government put us in this mess. The House leader of the government knows what the agenda is that they want to carry out. The House leader of the government knows how often we meet, how long we'll have to debate, what days we'll sit and what days we won't sit. All they have to do is sit down and plan how they're going to carry out their agenda. But no, we're going to be left with 23 bills or thereabouts—as I said, we do have five more sitting days—somewhere in the neighbourhood of 20 bills on the order paper.

What we've offered to do—I'm ready to do it and I'm sure my colleagues on this side of the House are—is to sit up to December 20. We can go another week. In fact what we can do, if this government chooses, is come back in January. Notwithstanding the leadership race, we

can continue on with government business and discuss the bills Mike Harris and others want to discuss. But for whatever reason, they're simply going to walk away from it, with this safeguard in place that after the leadership campaign, if they choose to come back—goodness knows what we're going to do. The member for Northumberland let it slip out tonight that it would be five weeks after the leadership that we would be coming back. He let it slip tonight that we're actually going to prorogue. I don't know when we're going to get the opportunity to—

Mr Galt: Read what the motion says.

Mr Crozier: The motion doesn't say we're going to prorogue; it says if we prorogue. You'd better check Hansard. You left more of the impression that we are going to prorogue.

In any event, what it's going to leave us with is an inactive government for four or five months. I would hope we do come back at some point and discuss these important bills, because if we don't, you know what has to happen, folks: they all get wiped off the paper; they all have to be reintroduced; we have to go through second reading on those we already have; we have to go through public hearings again, because goodness knows the legislation may change, as the new leader may want to change it.

There's going to be a lot of time and effort wasted, and yes, there's going to be a lot of money wasted. When I was here during debate last night, there was some concern on behalf of government members that money was being wasted while the bells were ringing on some of the motions that went through the House last night. This government will have wasted a lot of money if, even after proroguing and carrying these bills over on the order paper, we don't come back and deal with them.

Just to give you an idea, Speaker, I know you know but to give those at home some idea of what there is left to do in five days, because the government has told us how important this legislation is, there are 23 government bills. Bill 30 is the Remedies for Organized Crime—for goodness' sakes, this is the government that wants to fight crime. They've got a bill sitting at the third reading stage and it's only received two days of third reading debate. Bill 60, the Victim Empowerment Act, for victims of crime, is only at the second reading stage and has received three days of second reading debate. It still has to, hopefully, go through committee hearings, public hearings and third reading debate.

Bill 69, the Prohibiting Profiting from Recounting Crimes Act: it's at third reading stage and has received no third reading debate. These are important crime bills to this government, and they've left them sitting on the order paper till the last minute and in all likelihood won't even be dealt with.

Bill 81, the Nutrient Management Act that my friend from Northumberland is so interested in, is at second reading stage. It was sent to the justice and social policy committee after first reading so they could deal with it quickly, but the committee hasn't reported back to the

House and it's received no debate. Well, it must be an important bill if your government is treating it that way.

Mr Galt: Which bill?

Mr Crozier: Bill 81, the Nutrient Management Act, second reading.

Mr Galt: We debated that last night on second reading.

Mr Crozier: Well, then, thank you. So it's still in debate at second reading. I think that's what I said. It's at the second reading stage.

Bill 86, the Rescuing Children from Sexual Exploitation Act: it's at second reading stage. The justice and social policy committee has not considered it or reported it back to the House.

Talk about crime. It's a crime that they haven't debated and dealt with these bills long, long before now.

Bill 90, the Waste Diversion Act, is only at the second reading stage. It was sent to the general government committee after first reading. The committee has not reported back to the House. I think it did receive some second reading debate the other night.

The Student Protection Act: an important bill when it was brought forward to us. It's at third reading stage. It's only received a day and a half.

The vital statistics amendment act: I think that may have been dealt with as early as this afternoon.

The Municipal Act is only at the second reading stage. It is time-allocated and there will be 90 minutes of third reading debate when it's brought forward.

I spoke earlier of the Ontarians with Disabilities Act. That's out to committee now, and it's under threat that if it doesn't get passed before Christmas, they'll get nothing. Quite frankly, the bill doesn't do an awful lot anyway. There are no timelines to it. The only penalties in it are for parking in a handicapped space; that's good, but it's a \$5,000 maximum and I really wonder whoever is going to get ticketed and charged \$5,000.

So there you have it. There are 23 important government bills, five days of debate left, and then nothing is going to happen for four or five months. This is a government that just isn't able to manage its time.

Mr Alvin Curling (Scarborough-Rouge River): I just want to say that this opportunity for me to speak tonight on this issue is something I didn't look forward to, but it's quite necessary. You see, I have summarized this government in the last couple of weeks and I think I have come to a conclusion of what it's all about. I think this government has demonstrated that they do not wish to govern any more. The psychological profile of this government is that they are tired, they are leaderless, they've run out of ideas. They just don't know where they are.

The people of the province gave their confidence to folks as a government, that they would lead us forward and understand their issues and make sure their concerns are addressed. But they've found a very bland approach by this government. They have directed their thoughts really only to Bay Street and forgotten about Main Street or the community itself. They have run out of ideas.

It's a government of destruction. The writing was on the wall from the beginning. When they came in they said they had the Common Sense Revolution, and the emphasis was on "revolution," a war mentality. What they did was easy. They found out how easy it is to destroy things. They talked about the grand old ideas of building, but when the time came to build, they had no ideas whatsoever. They were going nowhere. They attacked the poor, they attacked the disabled, they attacked anything that looked like democracy.

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On one of the bills they brought in earlier, they did not even listen to the people when they tried to amalgamate the city and force this marriage, this forced marriage that said we must all get together and be one big, happy family, but with no ideas at all. When the people of greater Toronto said to them, "No, we don't want that. Let's have a referendum," they proceeded and rammed this thing through. You remember Bill 26, Mr Speaker. You recall it very well. It was a huge omnibus bill, giving the people's representatives no time at all to read, and they rammed it through the Legislature, hurrying the process of wrecking this province. Everyone thought it was a great idea to tear everything down. In this great anticipation, we said, "There must be something behind all this destruction. There must be some creative ideas of building. There must be something better coming."

Today, we look at the faces of the Progressive Conservative Party of Ontario. They have no leader. They're confused and they are just rudderless, going nowhere. Even in question period, people should know, we can't even find who is the acting Premier of the day. There is no leader.

So now they want to shut this place down without doing any work. They say, "Let us shut this down so we can get our focus together again." Well, let me tell you, nothing has come from this tired group. This group that has run out of ideas is going nowhere. What has this done to this great province, the richest province in this country? If it was a country, it would be one of the richest countries in the world. Yet we have no leader.

We're here to work. I'm here to represent the concerns of the people of my constituency. I can't recall how often I've spoken in this House in the last six or seven months, or even the last year. I've been restricted to very short durations to express the concerns of my constituency of Scarborough-Rouge River. Scarborough-Rouge River has concerns about affordable housing which we want addressed, but this government has no answer to that. As a matter of fact, there is no Ministry of Housing any more, just in name. I wanted to address concerns about the disabled, concerns about the environment. But the time we are allowed here to discuss these issues is quite limited, because closures are the order of the day.

In committees, we know exactly how all the Conservative members are going to vote: according to the directions of their leader or their whip or the House leader telling them what to do. There are no creative ideas. But when they were destroying, it was easy. They

brought sledgehammers around. They attacked the poor in every fashion and called them all sorts of names. They attacked the teachers in the classrooms. They attacked the nurses. They attacked the hospitals. We can go on endlessly in what they have done to this province. They have destroyed the morale of the people. They felt the people would be whipped into shape, with no reaction.

But then they beat up on themselves. When they looked around, they had no leader. The Premier himself got so frustrated and tired, he threw his hands in the air in the middle of it all and said, "I quit." They were in complete confusion over there. They were saying, "I can't believe this." They were leading along with this individual with a sledgehammer, hitting and beating up people all over the place, and they said, "Now we have no leader." So what are they going to do? "Let's shut this place down to see if we can find someone who can lead us."

Guess what I've started hearing, Mr Speaker and the people out there who are listening? They say, "We have to be more compassionate. We have to be more caring. We've got to make sure now we include consultation," when there was none inside here. The people are saying, "Is this the same government, are these the same people, who had no concern about affordable housing?" My colleague from Don Valley East almost daily attacks the government on the issues of housing. Nothing was coming forth. He put forward proposals, he put forward a private member's bill. Nothing was coming forward. But you know what? Maybe we were trying to squeeze water out of a stone, the stone heart of this Conservative government that had no compassion.

All of a sudden, they found themselves without a leader, without an agenda, without anywhere to go and nothing else to destroy, and they said, "Let us stop now, because our leader has thrown his hands in the air." Their leader, their Mike Harris, has thrown his hands in the air and left them running all over the place. So now we are going to stop the House and find we have, in the midst of it all, 23 government bills to be debated in five working days.

What are we going to do? Are those adequate days? No, that's not adequate. I may even disagree with my colleague from Kingston and the Islands. My feeling is that we had the time to do it but we're shutting this place down because they lack leadership and ideas. They're tired and frustrated and getting nowhere because they're out of any kind of thought or structure. There is nothing else to kill, nothing else to destroy.

I spoke with the principals today in my office and they were expressing to me some of their concerns about the lack of consultation. They were expressing to me the shortage of teachers coming into the classroom because no one wants to come forward to be a principal any more. They can't understand the rush and the push of this government. While they accept that changes must happen, they have no direction from this government, just a matter of change for change's sake.

Therefore, today, as we speak on the eve of the conclusion of this Parliament time, when we have about five more days and 23 government bills to be debated, they want to get out of here to get their heads together. But they also have to get their hearts together, because the people find them rather heartless in the way they have treated the most vulnerable in our society.

That was the mandate the people of Ontario gave this government, to make sure that those in need are looked after, that when they collect the revenues from the people of this province they make sure there are affordable houses, that there are hospitals to which one can go and be cared for, that our seniors are looked after without being rushed around with nowhere to go, that our schools are places where people can be taught and teachers are not frustrated and bullied. The people gave them that mandate, and what have they done? They have destroyed that.

Even their leader himself found himself against this cul-de-sac and said, "There is no other place to go." He has no energy to even hit his head against the wall. What he's going to do is say, "You take it over now." They're going to scramble around—I think there are five wannabes who'd like to carry this government and this party forward.

But there is nowhere else to go. Democracy and the people are much greater than any individual we have in here or any ideology we have, and they have seen through this government which does not want to govern. As a matter of fact, they have plainly told you that. Premier Mike Harris has stated that he's not here to be government anyhow. What he was doing was palming off most of his responsibilities, abdicating his responsibilities elsewhere: download it on to the municipalities, blame the federal government for anything they should be doing and saying, "It's not our responsibility." All of a sudden, where is that mandate the people have given this government? That mandate has been wasted, wasted by a lot of egotistical individuals here who are just trying to feather their own caps and look important. They've forgotten the most important part of the mandate, that the individuals in our province want us to carry forward and advocate for their responsibilities and some of the needs.

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Go to the hospitals. I get concerns coming into my constituency office each day, telling me about the crowdedness of the emergency rooms or that they can't find a doctor to see them or get an examination for maybe five or six months. People are waiting for affordable housing, a seven- or eight-year wait.

What has happened is that this government has lost its direction completely. It's nice to talk the talk, or even to talk the walk, but they have not walked that talk. When they realized they had to walk that talk, they said to themselves, "Let's get out of this place and find ourselves a leader. Let's prorogue. If we can get through these 23 government bills in a couple of days, good; then we can pass it over for the next time we are able to debate that." But that time will be five months down the

road, while this place will continue to be rudderless, leaderless. You know, maybe the people won't see any difference whether or not there is a Parliament sitting or a Premier in place for four or five months. They may not see a difference, because there's no leadership over on that side, none whatsoever.

I know some of my colleagues over there on the Conservative side would like to express the views I'm expressing, but they're not able to do so. They've been whipped into shape to follow the rules. It's a shame, a shame that we have such a great province and, at a time when we need leadership, there is none, that where Parliament could be effective, it is not so. That concerns me, because I know, as I go to the schools each Friday and talk to the young people, they're hoping there is some sort of structure there for them to fall in line with. I'm telling them that if this government continues the way they are, there's not very much hope in that respect—as a matter of fact, a greater challenge for them to develop a caring and compassionate society, a society where we could get a proper education and look after our elders.

But as always, I'm a person of hope. As I speak today and realize that for the next six months or so there won't be much leadership over there, I know that Dalton McGuinty and the Liberals daily put forward plans and structures and directions showing leadership on where we should go. I know that with that kind of direction, people are hoping that democracy will take its place, because within a few months thereafter, when they do find themselves a leader through their process, an election will be around the corner. People will have a choice to go back to the kind of province we all wish for, a society we want to live in, a society in which we want to be educated, a society that will care for those who are disillusioned, disabled or discouraged, to know that a compassionate government will look after them, and they themselves will be able to move on to contribute to society.

It's a sad day to know that here we are, willing souls, representatives to debate and carry on the issues of this province, but the government of the day has seen fit to throw in the towel and go and hide, huddle somewhere else, hoping they can find some sort of leader among themselves. But let me tell the people of Ontario, a Tory is a Tory is a Tory. No matter what they look like or talk like, the compassion will not come from that government, because they have one ideology, to reward their rich friends.

Mr Bisson: I am pleased to participate in this debate on the motion before us, a substantive motion that basically deals with the government process by which they're going to prorogue this House. So that people who are watching understand, it's 9 o'clock at night on Wednesday, and we're live from Queen's Park. I'm Gilles Bisson, MPP for Timmins-James Bay, a member of the New Democratic Party. I figured, what the heck, eh? May as well start that way.

I want to first of all explain what the process is. The government, as we know, is in the middle of a leadership race. We understand that. Mr Mike Harris has resigned, will be leaving politics, I imagine, shortly after, and they need to select a new leader. The problem the Tories have is that once they've got a new leader, that person becomes the Premier, and that person, he or she, is going to want to do a throne speech. We understand that—no argument. We understand the process. I'm not going to politicize that whatsoever.

Mr Caplan: Are you sharing your time?

Mr Bisson: I should say upfront that I am sharing my time with the member for Nickel Belt. Thank you for reminding me of that.

But the government has a bit of a problem in this process. If the government wants to come back after the leadership race, the new leader is going to want to give a throne speech, because the new leader, he or she, is going to have to set out the direction that the new government takes. We understand that. Ideologically, I don't agree with most of what the Tories have done, but I understand the process and understand, quite frankly, why this has to be done. So what the government has today before us is a substantive motion that says all the bills that are before the House on December 12, if we rise on that day, will basically carry over; private members' bills, private bills and government bills will carry over to the new session, and that will become the third session of the 37th Parliament.

For that, I guess we can count ourselves somewhat lucky, because a number of private members have bills. For instance, the member from Ottawa West, for whom I have great regard as a member, has a private bill, and he's going to want to bring that bill over to the next Parliament in order to advocate and advance that particular bill. Liberal members from over here have four bills—three bills; I thought for a moment you were missing a finger. Mr Levac has bills he wants to be able to do the same with. So I guess to an extent we can count ourselves lucky, because the government could have said, "That's it. All bills are dead after the session. If you've got a bill in the hopper, too bad, so sad, it's gone."

So I say to the government, it's not a bad way of dealing with it. I'm going to give you some credit. I'm one who believes that when you're wrong, I should tell you you're wrong and I will fight to the nth degree, but when you've done something right, I believe it's incumbent upon members of the opposition to say the government has done something right. On this one I can agree. All right? That's the end of that.

Interjection.

Mr Bisson: No, no. It's because now I don't want to take any of my time talking about what the government's doing wrong. If people watch this Legislature and know me, there are many things, about 80% of what you've done, that I don't agree with, but I don't want to spend the time I have for this debate focusing on what you've done wrong.

Rather, I want to talk about what I think should be in the throne speech when the government does come back in probably March, or more likely April or May, of the year 2002. I want to talk about what I think this Parliament, the third session of the 37th Parliament, should deal with. If I were the Premier, here are some of the things that I think we should do.

First of all, there's an overarching theme to what I want to talk about. I really believe, as a northern Ontario member—and I think there's a whole bunch of rural members and members from eastern Ontario and western Ontario who feel the same way. There is a move to depopulate rural and northern Ontario. We are depleting rural Ontario to a large degree. This is not just the fault of the Harris government, and I don't want to spend any time saying it's their fault. But the issue is that we see communities across Ontario, except for the larger communities like Toronto, the GTA, Ottawa, where everybody is moving away from the smaller communities in rural and northern Ontario and into the larger communities. The reasons for that are many: employment, corporate policies. Corporate Canada is making decisions to centralize much of their activities, and many of the good jobs, the high-paying jobs and the jobs that have career paths are in the big cities.

2100

I'll give you just one little example. It's not a big one, but it's one that really bugs me: MCTV in our part of the province, northern Ontario. CTV has decided that they're going to collapse all the newsrooms in North Bay, Sudbury, Sault Ste Marie and Timmins and put them all in Sudbury. What they're doing, in effect, is taking all those good-paying jobs we had in our communities in Sault Ste Marie, Timmins and North Bay and centralizing them in Sudbury for now. We're losing all the managerial jobs that were associated with that. I imagine my good friend Len Gillis, who was the news director, will be gone in fairly short order. A whole bunch of people who worked in the newsroom as editors, writers and journalists are going to be losing their jobs.

What we're doing is moving those people out of the communities I mentioned—Sault Ste Marie, Timmins and North Bay—and moving them into Sudbury. It's a form of depopulation, as I see it, of the outlying areas in northern Ontario. I don't think it's going to stop there. I think CTV at one point is going to shut down the Sudbury newsroom and they're going to say, "Oh, by the way, we're going to produce somewhere. It might be Toronto, it might be Vancouver, it might be Montreal, but we're going to serve northern Ontario well by having newsrooms in some large centre somewhere outside northern Ontario."

What you've got is corporate Canada and corporate North America and the corporate world saying, "For reasons of efficiency, we have to move all those things into a larger entity." When they say that, they normally end up in larger communities in Ontario, when we're talking about the Ontario economy. I say that's a huge

mistake, because we're taking away the vitality that makes Ontario Ontario.

A lot of people over the years have lived in the city of Timmins. It provided many good-paying jobs. The communities of Hearst, Kapuskasing, Smooth Rock Falls, Mattice, Opatika, Moose Factory, a number of them, have provided good jobs to citizens in those communities, with a great style of life. What we've done by way of policies is move people out of northern and rural Ontario and force our kids to make the decision to live in southern Ontario in places like Toronto.

I would like to see in a throne speech policies that speak to that, a policy that says, "We will put in place economic development tools for those communities to be able to help themselves develop their economies in such a way that we give opportunities to the young entrepreneurs in our communities and others who would, by way of their sheer will and genius, develop business opportunities in our communities." Why? Because if somebody opens up a business in, let's say, the town of Kapuskasing and says, "I'm going to open some sort of fabrication shop," or "I'm going to open up some sort of electronic shop," or whatever it might be, you'll have to have an accountant somewhere in the community who is doing the books for that company. You'll possibly have to have salespeople, if it's on the retail side. You'll have to have technical people, if it's on the technical side. You'll have to have a number of people working in that business in order to make it operate so that the business owner—he or she or the group of them—is able to go out and participate in the business activity they've chosen. I think that's good.

The problem we have is that there are no programs provincially, or near none federally, to really make a mark when it comes to rural economic development and northern economic development. If Gilles Bisson was the Premier of Ontario, as a New Democrat, I would do a couple of things in a throne speech that I think would really send a good message and give those communities tools. One of them is to develop loan guarantee programs. We need to seriously think about the issue of capital. One of the problems we have is that it's becoming increasingly difficult for entrepreneurs to get money from the banks, for all kinds of reasons, about which we can talk at length here. But I think we can all agree—Conservatives, New Democrats and Liberals—it is becoming increasingly difficult for entrepreneurs to leverage money from a bank. I see Mr Wood shaking his head, but let me tell you, come to my community and I'll show you a number of projects that are having huge problems trying to get money. I've got a mushroom plant up in Opatika, I've got a cedar shingle mill in Mattice and a number of other projects around the community that can't capitalize themselves. There's a huge problem. I would make some changes.

I know the Tories don't agree with me, because their laissez-faire economic style of doing things is, "Leave it to the private sector. Government shouldn't be involved because, after all, if the private sector can't make it work

on its own," so the Tories say, "it shouldn't happen." The problem with that is the big banks and others who lend money, the institutions, by and large, are concentrated in the larger centres in Ontario, and it's not as easy for entrepreneurs in smaller communities in rural and northern Ontario to access that capital. Sure, we have branches in communities like Timmins, but I'll just give you an example: much of the institutional lending that's done in the community of Kapuskasing now is being conducted out of Timmins. I don't think that's a good thing to do. I think you have to have local people in a community who understand the community, know the players, understand the local economy and are able to make some decisions based not only on a business case but also on what is the reality in that community.

So one of things I would put in the throne speech if Gilles Bisson was the Premier—or, more specifically, if Howard Hampton was the Premier, because he's the next guy, right?—would be a risk equity program. I would do two loan-type programs. One of them would be a business start-up program that says that if you go to a bank or a caisse populaire or a credit union and you don't quite have enough money to make the bank comfortable when it comes to lending you money, the province would guarantee part of the loan.

Traditionally—and Mr Wood will probably acknowledge this by a nod one way or the other—10% to 20% is what a bank is looking for when you're trying to start up a business. You have to prove you've got a good business case, you've got to prove you have the ability to manage the business, to convince the bankers and make them comfortable, and you've got to come up with 10% to 20% equity, generally; sometimes more, but it depends. It depends on the project, obviously. We could get into the whole under-a-million, over-a-million thing, but basically you've got to come up with a certain amount of equity.

I propose that first of all we shouldn't guarantee loans to start-up businesses where all the money being put up as a guarantee is by the government. I wouldn't argue that for two seconds. I believe the local entrepreneur has to show a serious commitment to the project by putting forward a certain amount of equity themselves. So let's say, just to use a number—and Mr Wood was saying it's higher—that if the banks are looking for 30% and all the individual can come up with is 10%, get the provincial government in areas where the economy is lagging and needs to have a bit of a boost—and that's the rule in northern Ontario, believe me—and come in with a loan guarantee program that says the individual has to at least match 10% or 15% equity in the business, and the province will bring in the other 10% or 15%. I wouldn't want to get the province on the hook for the whole thing, but by giving the bank a little bit more comfort you're able to get them on side.

When my good friend Shelley Martel was the Minister of Northern Development and Mines and the chair of the heritage board, we did all kinds of projects like that, which paid huge dividends to our communities. Some projects that were started up were failures. I will not say

all programs that were done on the part of the heritage fund were successes, but neither are all the programs the banks finance, right? Let's admit it: I don't have the numbers in front of me, but I think that for every 10 businesses that start, after two years only seven of them survive. There's a huge amount of failure over a period of two or five years; I forget exactly what the numbers are. Anyway, I'll defer to Mr Wood, but I think he knows what I'm getting at.

That is also true when it comes to projects that went through the heritage fund. In fact, we had a higher success rate than the banks themselves. I think the reasons were that there was good scrutiny done on the part of the heritage fund and there was a real commitment on the part of the individuals to make the projects work. I think they were really cognizant that the heritage fund and the minister of the day, Shelley Martel, and our government were giving them a break and they didn't want to let us down. I think most people are honest and are willing to give it a shot. So one of the things I'd like to see in a throne speech is basically a loan guarantee type of program to assist new start-ups to get off the ground.

The other side of what we have to do is risk equity programs. I was talking, for example, to an individual not too long ago, about a month ago. The person has been in business for the better part of 10 or 12 years. The person is in the delivery business and has a good revenue stream coming into the business and very good contracts. He did a very good job of managing the business for 12 years. It's a family-run business; a very few employees and the family are running it. Unfortunately, what happened was that he had a huge amount of vehicle breakdowns all within a short period of time—he had older vehicles. It got to the point where he was throwing so much money at repairing his older vehicles that he had to replace them.

2110

So he went to the bank and said, "Listen, I need from the bank about"—I think the numbers were something like \$35,000, in order to replace two of the vehicles that he needed to replace. The bank couldn't touch him even though the bank wanted to because the amount of equity that he had to guarantee the loan was nowhere sufficient to make that loan happen. The bank manager tried everything to get that loan through. The bank, which will remain nameless, basically said, "No, the risk is too high for the bank. We wouldn't be sufficiently secured."

The loans manager, who happened to be the manager of the bank, called me and said, "We need some kind of program to assist this individual, because here's a person who I know has a commitment to running a business, knows how to run a business. He's got the contracts. I know he's going to be all right. It's a question of me refinancing him to a certain extent, but I can't do it because the amount of equity that he has doesn't match." So one of the things that he asked for was a risk-equity type program that basically says the government would come in and guarantee 10% or 15%, again, in order to be able to assist with that particular loan.

There are a number of things that we need to do on the side of loan guarantees in order to assist new businesses on start-up and existing businesses that are having difficulty and need to restructure.

The other thing that I would do and that I would put in the throne speech—and I know my leader, Howard Hampton, is excited about this particular initiative; I've talked to him about it a couple of times, and we in the caucus have certainly discussed this—is the whole issue of mentoring programs. In fact, we were talking about that just two weeks ago. That is the whole issue of how many people go into business, have a great idea, have all the will, want to get things going, but don't have the kind of experience they need to make the sound business decisions that they'll need to make along the way. One of things we are suggesting is that there are all kinds of people who have been in business for years, who have the experience of running a business and would like to transfer some of that knowledge back to the business community. We could make partnerships through chambers of commerce or whatever way you would do it in order to provide for these retiring or retired business people who want to go back and transfer their skills back into the younger business community, the ability that they have in running a business.

John Doe wants to start up a restaurant in the community of Mattice, knows how to make really great food, knows how to give really great service, but is not very good with the books. So you match that individual up with somebody else who knows and has a track record of running a business. That person becomes a mentor for the new business person so that they are able to learn from the years of experience that the mentor has, who can transfer those skills and that knowledge back to them.

Those are a couple of things that I would put in the throne speech and that we as New Democrats would call on the government to put in the throne speech that would assist businesses in getting off the ground and assist them once they are there.

The other thing I would just say shortly on the business stuff, and I know we do this to an extent, but not enough by far: I would really start a major initiative in order to try to organize our exports in the province of Ontario so that we don't put all our eggs in the United States basket. Our problem now is that we're beholden to the American market. Yes, we're lucky on the one side to be blessed in having a huge trading partner to the south called the United States, but it's also a bit of a curse because when the economy of the United States goes down, we basically go with it. One of the things that I think we need to do, and I know our leader, Howard Hampton, and others are excited about this, is to look at the issue of ways of diversifying the Ontario economy when it comes to exports. Presently over 90% of what we produce by way of GDP in this province—or goods, I should say—is exported to the United States. We need to look at the Asian market, we need to look at the European market, in order to be able to cushion the effects of recessions that happen in various parts of the

world. It's not going to happen overnight, but it's got to start somewhere, and this party, the New Democratic Party, is the party of ideas, proposing new ideas in a new millennium.

I would also say we have to bring some fairness to workers. That's the other thing that I want to talk about very quickly. My leader, Howard Hampton, has gotten up I don't know how many times and called on this government to increase the minimum wage. It is a scandal that in this province in the year 2001, the minimum wage is lower than it is in most of the United States. It really is a scandal. We haven't raised the minimum wage in almost, what, eight years now?

Ms Shelley Martel (Nickel Belt): Six or seven.

Mr Bisson: Six or seven years. The last time that the minimum wage was raised was by way of the NDP government. We had a policy that every year we increased the minimum wage by a certain amount in order to be able to keep up with the cost of living, because those workers need money just as much as anybody else and they are the most vulnerable in our economy. Who are they? They are the young; they are women, by and large; they are the immigrant population. They are people, by and large, who are the most vulnerable in our society. They need to have some protection and they have to have somebody speaking for them.

I want to say today categorically that in the throne speech, if Howard Hampton was the Premier come this spring, we would raise the minimum wage automatically to \$7.25, I believe it is, in the first year, and then put in place a mechanism in order to increase the minimum wage. We believe it's important for workers to have fairness. It should not just be a one-way street where the corporate world gets everything and the workers get nothing. That is one of the things that we are committed to, and we would dearly love to see the government put in its throne speech an increase on the minimum wage.

The other thing that our leader, Howard Hampton, has spoken about within the caucus, and we'll be talking about this some more, is the whole issue of pension reform. There are many people in this province, including the members of this assembly, by the way, who don't have pensions. I think that's a bloody crime, and I'm going to say a bloody crime because it is. I don't believe that we as members should have a special deal over everybody else, but I think that we should have a pension of some type for those of us who are in this business for 10, 15, 20 years. We're in a position where, once we get out of here, there's not going to be any kind of pension income for us when we retire, and that's a real problem. It's going to become, at one point, difficult to attract members to the House.

But we've got to go beyond that. We can't have special deals for MPPs and not one for the citizens out in the province of Ontario. I say, Howard Hampton says and the New Democrats say there needs to be pension reform.

There are a couple of principles, things that I think we need to do. We need to go back to 1962 and look at what the pension commission did. I forget the royal commis-

sion, but the royal commission that looked at the issue of pensions had a decision to make. What they recommended to the government of the day, the Tories, was that there should be legislated a minimum pension so that every employer in the province of Ontario of a certain size—15 and up, let's say—is mandated by legislation to provide a minimum pension to the workers who work for them. It should be a defined-benefit program, not a deferred-income program. The defined benefit, just so people know, is a type of pension that when you retire, you know you're going to get a cheque every month. When we call it deferred income, it's an RRSP-type program. We New Democrats believe it should be a defined-benefit program.

So I would propose, along with my leader, Howard Hampton, and our finance critic, David Christopherson, that what we need to do is have pension reform. We have to say a number of things. The first thing we have to say is that by way of legislation, we would mandate a minimum level of mandatory pensions as a defined-benefit program for all employees in the province of Ontario for certain classes of employer. I'll talk about exempted classes of employer later, but basically everything 15 and up would be under this mandated program. You would set a minimum benefit, and the idea is very simple. If I work for an employer that has a benefit package that includes a pension that is higher than what the province mandates in its legislation, you are exempt. You don't have to provide anything else, because you are already providing the minimum. But if you're an employer who doesn't meet the minimum, you would then have to meet it. You would be given some time by way of a transition, but you would have to set up a pension committee and you would have to go out and find a pension that basically buys the benefit that is defined in the legislation as a minimum standard.

The pension itself must be a defined-benefit program. It must provide after 30 or 35 years of employment X amount of dollars per month for all employees. We can't gamble with the retirement income of individuals, and that's the problem I've got with RRSPs. I think RRSPs are not a bad thing, but I know all kinds of examples where people have been given the opportunity in some cases to take money out of their RRSPs, if they're not locked in, and have blown their retirement income. I was just talking to somebody on the weekend, and I don't want to say what type of business it was because some people in my community might understand who I'm talking about, but a person who started up the business, took \$60,000 out of their RRSP account, secured their business, ran it for a number of years, and is now getting out of the business with some debt and has no retirement income whatsoever. So I believe we don't want to go the way of RRSPs by way of deferred income. We need to put in place a defined-benefit program that meets a certain minimum level. All employers would have to meet it.

If you are an employer that's small enough and you can't create your own pension plan, we then have to

amend the legislation and allow for MEPs, what are called multiple employer plans, so that if I'm an employer and there's an employer across the street that has a similar type of pension, you're able to buy into that particular pension plan so that there are multiple employer plans in place.

The other thing I would say is that there has to be automatic vesting. It is crazy in this province that we have workers who are basically by way of their careers working for upwards of 10 employers in a 30-year work cycle and have no pension because they haven't worked anywhere long enough to build one.

2120

I've got good friends who work six months in one place, one month in another, some of them unionized, some of them not unionized, and they have no pension plan because they haven't been with an employer with a pension plan long enough to be vested in it. New Democrats would say it's automatic vesting, that the minute you're employed by that employer you're automatically vested and it becomes a totally portable pension system. You have a totally portable system that says no matter where you work in the province of Ontario, you will carry your pension with you. There will be a minimum defined benefit in the legislation; it will be a defined benefit program and you will be automatically vested.

The other thing I would do in the pension legislation is deal with the issue of what you do with surpluses. There are far too many examples out there from the bad old days, before the NDP amended legislation by way of regulation to prevent this from happening. I would stop the practice of withdrawing surpluses out of pensions. There are a number of pensions across the province of Ontario, across Canada, that have built up huge surpluses. The money is being taken out by the employers and being basically squandered rather than trying to build up the benefit of individual employees.

First of all, we have to understand that there are reasons you've got to take surpluses out of pensions. We've got to say that up front. What you need to do when you make the amendment to the pension legislation is say there's only two ways to take the money out of the pension plan if there's a surplus. Now, what's the reason you'd want to take money out of a surplus?

Mr Peter Kormos (Niagara Centre): On a point of order, Speaker: Is there a quorum in the House?

The Acting Speaker: Is there a quorum?

Clerk at the Table: A quorum is not present, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker ordered the bells rung.

Clerk at the Table: A quorum is now present, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: The member for Timmins-James Bay.

Mr Bisson: That was kind of slow. It took a while to get those people in.

For the benefit of those members who just returned, what I was discussing is what I and our party would put

inside a throne speech, given the opportunity this spring. I was talking about pension plans and I was at the point of talking about pension surpluses.

First of all, let's understand. Pension surpluses happen, and we don't need to explain why, but the issue is that if you don't have a mechanism to take the surplus out of the pension, the taxman in Ottawa is going to come and take the money out. So there needs to be a mechanism to deal with surpluses. The question is, what mechanism do you put in? I would argue, number one, there would be only two ways to take money out of a pension plan.

First of all, surpluses should be spent primarily on building a better pension. The max pension you normally get is what they call a 2% pension plan: 2% for every year of service, based on your best three or your best five. Once you have surpluses in a pension plan, it should be automatic that the surplus be applied to a better benefit. Employers should not be allowed to withdraw the money to do whatever or to get pension holidays. Presently you can get a pension holiday, you can withdraw the money or you can put the money in the plan for the purpose of building a better pension. The first thing you need to do is stop the ability of the employer to have pension holidays.

There are two ways to get the money out. The first way I would get the money out is to build a better pension. Once the employees have the max pension built by way of surpluses, the second way I would allow it to be withdrawn is as it is now, but only with the consent of the employees. In other words, you have to have the consent of the employees to take the money out so they have some say about where the money is redirected. For example, if there's a huge surplus inside the fund and it means \$10,000, \$15,000, \$20,000 per employee, that money would then be split between the employer and employee at a percentage by which they paid in, and then the employee could say, "I want my money directed to an RRSP" or whatever it might be.

The basic points I'm making here about pension reform are that we should develop a portable pension system for all employees in the province, there should be a minimum benefit set out in the legislation, there should be automatic vesting as soon as you start working, and you should give employees the ability to direct where pension surpluses are spent.

The last thing I have to say about pensions is that you need legislation, as we did when we were in government, to maintain the principle that 50% of the people on the board are plan members. That way you don't have non-plan members trying to take advantage of any surpluses in the pension and you prevent any kind of wrongdoing or hanky-panky, as we might say, when it comes to pension plans.

Another thing I would dearly love to see—and my leader, Howard Hampton, and the New Democratic caucus have talked about this to a certain degree, not as much as we would like at this point—is the whole issue of apprenticeship reforms. Nowadays in the province of

Ontario we have a non-existent apprenticeship program. It used to be that a young man or woman employed in a mine, a mill, a car plant or any kind of employer out there in construction could look forward to serving an apprenticeship in one of the qualified skilled trades. We have now done away with that. There are still apprenticeship programs available, but they are entirely supported by employers. The government no longer plays a role, other than providing community college access so people can go in and get their credits by way of their apprenticeship program. But there is absolutely no assistance from the province to make apprenticeship a desirable thing for employers to do.

One of the things I believe in my heart and that my leader, Howard Hampton, has spoken of is the whole issue of developing an apprenticeship-style program that says there be a wage subsidy tied to the employee so there is an incentive for the employer to hire the apprentice. In that way, you provide the incentive, you give the employee the ability to upgrade their skills into a skilled trade of some type and you provide an opportunity for people to move up within the various skilled trades.

As well, I believe you have to expand the apprenticeship programs. We shouldn't look at apprenticeships as strictly apprentices in the skilled trades. I think we need to broaden our horizons. We need to recognize that apprenticeships should be looked at in various other trades and professions. Should we, for example, have apprenticeships in the technology side, in terms of computer programming, repair etc? Should there be apprenticeships in the electronics industry in terms of people in telecommunications? Should there be apprenticeships in the administration side? Should there be apprenticeship programs in place for various people out there who want to get into a particular profession or trade? In my view, that would greatly assist employers to develop the skills they need within their employment, within their factories or plants or businesses, and at the same time provide much-needed opportunity to young people in Ontario.

I'll give you a good example. Again, it's a rural issue more than a Toronto or an Ottawa or a Hamilton issue, but in many communities it's very difficult to attract tradespeople. It's very difficult to attract professionals. One of the ways you can do that is to provide opportunities for the individuals within the community to apprentice within those programs.

Another thing that I and my leader Howard Hampton believe needs to be done is the whole issue of a PST holiday. We are into a recession. Let's not kid ourselves. We're into a recession; the economy has slowed. I notice, for example, in the building I live in, there's a coffee shop—

Interjection.

Mr Bisson: You decide, brother, not me. You're the House leader. There's a—

Mr Prue: Coffee shop.

Mr Bisson: There's a coffee shop. Excuse me; you had me going there. The House leader and whip are having a conference and the whip is having a discussion.

2130

Interjection.

Mr Bisson: That's fine. You just have to tell me when, Peter, That's what I need to know.

We know the economy has slowed. All you need to do is to go into the retail sector and you'll notice there's a lot less activity in the retail sector. For example, there's a coffee shop just downstairs out of my building. I used to go there, up until about a year ago, and you had to stand in a lineup at 8 o'clock, 7:30, in the morning to get coffee. Shelley knows where I'm talking about, because it was the same building where she and Howard lived for a number of years. Now there's nobody there. I go in the morning and I'm the only customer buying coffee. They know me by name now: "Oh, Mr Bisson, here's your medium black coffee, \$1.40, please." They never knew who I was until about six months ago, but they don't have the customers any more. The little sub shop that was downstairs is closed, bankrupt, gone. Why? Because there is not the amount of people travelling in the city of Toronto, and that's primarily what both those businesses catered to. There's not the amount of tourists and others travelling through the city, people travelling on business or people just coming to visit, to sustain those businesses. It's very sad.

That's the reason our leader, Howard Hampton, along with our critic on finance, David Christopherson, have advocated and called for the fact that the government, at the very least in the period running up to the Christmas holiday, should have had a PST reduction. Imagine, if you will, that we had a PST reduction and somebody's looking at buying something. A person, for example, says, "I want to buy a big-screen, 61-inch television. Boy, I'd really love to be able to buy that TV."

Interjection.

Mr Bisson: Now that my friend John is here I'm going the full 25 minutes. Have a good day, John.

The person goes in and says, "I want to buy the 61-inch, wide-screen television, RCA, high-definition."

Ms Martel: Who buys a television that big?

Mr Bisson: Right. Who buys a television that big? That's what I want to know. But anyway, the person goes in and says, "Oh, \$6,000 with the surround sound and all that, with the DVD." Then the salesperson says, "But if you buy it, I'm going to give you a PST reduction."

Ms Martel: It's to watch Shania Twain.

Mr Bisson: Watch Shania Twain? If you come from Timmins, of course you would, on a wide-screen television. She's a very good singer and I love watching her.

Interjection.

Mr Bisson: We're having a discussion around my speech that is really distracting. Anyway, the point I make is this: imagine if Polkaroo appeared on a 61-inch television. Imagine, if you will, that the person walks into the retail store, let's say Crazy Crazy or Artic or Music Box or whoever it might be, Amstar, and says, "I want to

buy a 61-inch television.” The person walks in and the salesperson says, “I’ve got a deal. The provincial government, Howard Hampton, is going to give me a 3% or 4% reduction on PST. I’m prepared, as a salesperson, to give you the other 3% or 4%.” So all of a sudden the person’s looking at a 7% reduction on a \$6,000 item. It’s quite an incentive to buy and you would have a much, much better opportunity to sell those goods. In fact, I know from talking to the retail sector in our community—most employers and most small businesses in my community, I want to say, are not card-carrying New Democrats. Some are.

Hon Mr Baird: Too bad they don’t build TVs in Canada any more.

Mr Bisson: We used to build televisions in Canada, but the policies of the Tories over the years—

Ms Martel: Mulroney.

Mr Bisson: —of Mulroney, pushed it all out to the United States and pushed it all the way to Japan. But the retailers in our community are basically saying—

Hon Mr Baird: Eighteen-cent health-care Mulroney, the good old days.

The Acting Speaker (Mr Bert Johnson): The member for Sault Ste Marie, come to order.

Mr Michael Prue (Beaches-East York): He can’t heckle from our side.

Mr Bisson: Have the TV scan over here. I want people to know, this is not the member for Sault Ste Marie. I know the member for Sault Ste Marie, and you are no Tony Martin.

Most of the business community in our community are not card-carrying New Democrats. They’re not in Sudbury; they’re not in most communities. They’re a mixed bag of Tories and Liberals and New Democrats. But even the Liberals and even the Tories are telling me, as I go in, “That’s a great idea. Howard Hampton has proposed an idea that’s concrete, that’s money in my pocket, that will work. Could you try to talk the Mike Harris government into doing this?” Our leader, Howard Hampton, has spoken to that very directly. We have encouraged the government to move on a PST reduction over the short term. If we were the government and writing the throne speech in the spring budget, or the spring—Now I’m calling a throne speech a budget. How many times are you going to give me a signal? Anyway, that is one of the things we’d put in it.

I just want to say one other thing before I wrap up the speech, because it is topical to this, and this is a very serious issue, the whole issue of ODSP benefits, Ontarians with disabilities.

Interjection.

Mr Bisson: Excuse me, House leader, I’ve got the floor. I’m the whip. Just wait a second, all right?

On the ODSP issue, I had a really good meeting with the TCN group, the Timmins Consumer Survivors Network in Timmins. We had a great discussion on the whole issue of people with disabilities and people on the Ontarians with disabilities program specifically. The huge complaint they have is the amount of money they’re getting monthly. There has not been an increase on the ODSP for a number of years. Our critic for poverty, Mr Tony Martin, has a bill before the House that basically would index the ODSP to the cost of living, something we would do in the throne speech and we have called on the government to do. As well, our critic, Tony Martin, has another bill to stop the clawback from the federal government, that whatever increase you get on your CPP would not be taken off the ODSP.

The next thing we talked about, and I think it’s very important and we need to do some work on it, is a type of STEP program. A lot of people who are on Ontarians with disabilities are disabled but not totally unable to work. But the system penalizes them and doesn’t allow them to find part-time jobs, because once you’ve reached your maximum—it’s not a lot; I think it’s \$150 a month—you lose your pension. So there’s no incentive for those people to go out and try to develop skills that would allow them to work part-time. We need to have a type of STEP program to give those people the ability to have dignity of work, holding on to their pension, maybe a reduced pension, but at least they’re able to hold on to their benefits and their drug card and be able to work on a part-time time basis.

With that, I know my good friend from Nickel Belt, Shelley Martel, would love to speak for another 20 minutes.

The Acting Speaker: Further debate? Mr Coburn has moved government notice of motion number 104. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour, say “aye.”

All those opposed, say “nay.”

In my opinion, the ayes have it. I declare the motion carried.

Hon Mr Stewart: I move adjournment of the House.

The Acting Speaker: Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour, say “aye.”

All those opposed, say “nay.”

In my opinion, the ayes have it. I declare the motion carried.

This House stands adjourned until 10 am tomorrow.

The House adjourned at 2138.

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CONTENTS

Wednesday 5 December 2001

ROYAL ASSENT

The Lieutenant Governor 4263

GOVERNMENT MOTIONS

Status of business, government
notice of motion number 104,

Mrs Ecker

Mr Coburn 4263

Mr O'Toole 4263

Mr Galt 4267

Mrs Elliott 4270

Mr Gerretsen 4272

Mr Crozier 4275

Mr Curling 4277

Mr Bisson 4279

Agreed to 4286

TABLE DES MATIÈRES

Mercredi 5 décembre 2001

SANCTION ROYALE

La lieutenant-gouverneure 4263