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of Ontario

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of Debates
(Hansard)**

**Journal
des débats
(Hansard)**

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Mardi 13 mai 2003

Speaker
Honourable Gary Carr

Président
L'honorable Gary Carr

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO

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ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
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*The House met at 1330.
Prayers.*

VISITOR

Mr Michael Gravelle (Thunder Bay-Superior North): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: If I could beg the indulgence of the House, I want to let them know that our fine, hard-working page from Marathon, Brian Donohue, has a special guest here today, his uncle Chuck Donohue, who is in the members' gallery. We welcome you, Mr Donohue.

CONTEMPT OF PARLIAMENT
OUTRAGE AU PARLEMENT

Mr Tony Martin (Sault Ste Marie): Thank you very much, Speaker, for this opportunity this afternoon. I appreciate the opportunity, although I have to tell you it's not a happy time. It's not something I am pleased to have to do, which is to speak here today on the issue of contempt by the government for this place and for the traditions of this House and of parliamentary democracy. It's a disappointing and troubling day, or should be, for all of us in this place to actually have to consider the actions of the government and their disrespect for the natural order of things, the way we develop the public policy and deliver on the responsibility we're all given when we are elected to this place, no matter what our political persuasion, to participate in debate and discussion about things that affect the everyday lives of each one of us, our families, our community members and the citizens of Ontario.

However, having said that and having expressed my displeasure, I also have to say that it really comes as no surprise, because there has been a buildup of things that have happened over the last years in this province that indicate that this government really has no respect or consideration for government and the role of government and the important job of government in a jurisdiction like Ontario to order the public business of the day so that everybody has equal access and equal opportunity. If we lose our respect and support and understanding of the important role that government plays, we sooner than later turn into a system of anarchy where individuals and organizations and groups of people fight with each other over the resources that are available, and eventually those who are most vulnerable and at risk lose out more often than not.

In speaking to my not being surprised, Speaker, I also want to say that I wasn't surprised at your ruling. I've watched you in this place over the last few years as you've acted as Chair of the House and presided over the very important public debate that sometimes breaks out here, I suggest probably to the surprise of the government, which orchestrates it such that there is very limited opportunity for real debate to happen. But when it does happen, you preside in a way that is fair and dignified and professional. I have to say that I admired your courage in the stand you took almost immediately in response to the announcement that we all heard back in our ridings, back at home in our neighbourhoods, to the news that the government was going to bring down a budget and that they were going to deliver it not in this place but in the boardroom or training centre of one of their biggest supporters and benefactors, Magna International.

The fact that you as a Conservative, somebody who was elected to this place carrying that flag, would have the intestinal fortitude and the courage to stand up at that point, and then later when the House came back, to make the ruling you did, I think speaks well to the opportunity we have here to correct that mistake, to say to the government very clearly, "You cannot do that; you cannot act in this authoritarian, singularly focused, arrogant way in front of this House and the people of Ontario and you must in fact follow the traditions, if not the rules, of this place in the things that you do."

The hue and cry that followed or happened at the same time that you made the decision to speak out I think supports the credibility in your stand and the courage that you showed. I don't think there was a newspaper across this province that didn't, in an editorial or in an article of some sort, indicate displeasure and disappointment and dismay with the decision of the government to deliver this bill in the way it did, in the place it did.

It speaks of a government that believes that the public debate, the public policy development that happens in this place should more and more happen, if not in the backroom of the Premier's office and those in power in this day, then in the backroom of some of the bigger corporate interests in the province. That's a problem because it doesn't allow for others to participate; it doesn't allow for the interests of other people to be brought to the fore and placed before the decision-making authorities. So we should not be surprised if at the end of the day it begins to hurt people. The kinds of things we're beginning to see in communities across this province I think indicate very clearly the damage that is caused by this kind of single-minded commitment to doing it your way, come hell or

high water. This sort of arrogant, I-know-better approach is in fact showing itself.

I have to say to you that I was brought to reflect, the day you stood up and we all found out that the government was going to deliver the budget in this way, on my own experience in that chair, sitting there day after day, presiding over public discussion about things that affect the lives of all the people I represent out of Sault Ste Marie, and never hearing anything of a public debate around decisions that affect those who are most vulnerable and at risk in our communities: every other day a new decision being made behind closed doors, a new regulation being made re the services we will provide or not provide for those who are most in need of them, those who are most vulnerable and at risk; every day another attack, every day another raising of the bar, every day making it more difficult, taking away opportunity from those who need our assistance the most.

Anybody who has followed government or understands it or who has a keen interest or love of public discourse and the way that civil society organizes itself will understand that the true measure of any society in the long haul is in the way it deals with and supports and helps out those who are most at risk and most vulnerable within their jurisdiction. This government has shown, almost since the very day it was elected, a total disregard and misunderstanding and almost a dismissive attitude toward those in our community who are most at risk; as a matter of fact, to the point where they've actually turned over the development of public policy and the tools of delivering support to those who are most at risk and vulnerable to the private sector.

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We're connecting here this government's decision to release its budget in the training centre of one of its largest corporate supporters with the decision they made very early on in their time in government to in fact turn over the further development of public response to the most vulnerable and at risk of our citizens to a private sector corporation, Andersen Consulting, who since then have morphed into Accenture. We see their tentacles in almost every facet of life now where resources from government are distributed to those who need it and then are collected back in some way over a period of time. So it shouldn't surprise us.

It was the realization in my own mind that that is what was happening back when I was in that chair that brought me to a decision that I could not lend whatever credibility I brought to that position, given that I had worked before I came here as a person overseeing a soup kitchen operation that delivered services to those who are most vulnerable and at risk in my own community and the thought that maybe somebody watching this place might say, "Tony's in that chair. He's a guy that has some history in dealing with the poor, so I shouldn't be too worried about what's going on or how the public responds to the needs of poor people is concerned."

I could no longer lend whatever small credibility or legitimacy was there by my being in that chair any more.

I felt I had to make a statement in a public way, not dissimilar, yet different, to the way you stood up a couple of months ago to say to this government, "This is wrong." I was saying as well on that day that to turn over the delivery of services and programs, resources and support to those people in our jurisdiction who are most at risk and vulnerable to the private sector, to a corporation that has a spotted track record to begin within other jurisdictions where they've been brought in to do that, was absolutely wrong, not in keeping with the traditions and the *raison d'être* for government in the first place, which, I believe, first and foremost, is always our primary responsibility: to look after those things and those folks and those issues among us who are most vulnerable and most at risk.

I have to say that I'm also reminded of the very strong reaction of our leader, Howard Hampton, to the issue of the reordering of the way we're going to manage the hydroelectric system, the electricity or the power system in this province; the sense we got early on that this government was going to, as they've done with the delivery of services to the poor, turning it over to Accenture, turn the generation, transmission and distribution of power and electricity to the people of this province—my constituents, my friends and neighbours, people in all of our constituents across this province, in rural and northern Ontario in particular—to the private sector so that they could charge whatever it is they felt they could get, given the nature of the market out there, without being challenged publicly for in fact doing that.

We know the result. We know it very clearly. The purest face actually of the impact of the privatization and the deregulation of hydro is seen no more directly or obviously than in the town of Wawa. Our leader, Howard Hampton, and myself were up there yesterday to speak to the people of Wawa to get a sense of what was happening to them, how turning over complete control of pricing, distribution and transmission of hydro in the way it has unfolded with the deregulation of hydro to Great Lakes Power has affected very dramatically that community, how they've put them on the precipice of complete and total disaster. There are industries shutting down. A big mill in Dubreuilville has laid off over 100 people because this government has decided to turn over the management of our hydroelectric system, completely and totally deregulated, to the whim of the private sector.

Small businesses in Wawa are closing down. A store in that town that I in fact as a young boy used to work at, used to carry out groceries and stock shelves at, that's been there since almost the inception of that town, has now announced that it's closing down. It was the centre and the core and the very heart of that community, right beside a clothing store that has also announced that it's going to close down, and it was there then too.

It's heartbreaking to go into a town like Wawa and see the impact the decisions of your government are making and how they affect them, how they have become the purest face, the purest example that we can find of the impact of turning over the public discourse and control of

these things that are so important to the everyday life of all of us and our communities to the private sector so that they can make as much profit as they can on it. And to suggest for a second that somehow in the long haul that is going to be good for all of us just flies in the face of the reality, particularly where this small town of Wawa is concerned.

They've been trying to get a meeting with the Minister of Energy for almost a year now, the person who holds ultimate and final responsibility for this, who could make decisions, who could make decisions today to change their lot, to make a difference, to save some of the investments that have been made in that community in homes and in small businesses and in industry so that those folks can look forward to a future in Wawa, in northern Ontario, looking after their children and growing the economy and contributing to the economy of this great province in the way that we who call northern Ontario home have been proud to do for literally hundreds of years. That they're not even able to get a meeting with the minister speaks to the thread that runs through the debate we're having here today about contempt of this Legislature, contempt of the people of the province, not even being willing to meet with the folks who are being most directly and immediately affected so that they can make their argument, so that they can put the issue on the table, so that they can challenge you, Minister, in a way that would help you understand that you need to do something to change this so that these folks can be given back the hope and the optimism and the excitement they used to have in the future that they thought was there for them in northern Ontario and in the town of Wawa.

I plead with you. In keeping with the tone of the debate that's going on here, where I think almost everybody will agree that there has to be more respect for this place, there has to be more respect for the processes and the responsibility that each of us has, you in particular as the Minister of Energy has, for the ordering of the public life, for the delivery of those resources and systems that we all depend on for everyday livelihood, Mr Speaker and Mr Minister.

You begin to put it all together and you begin to see a pattern that, unless it's stopped in its tracks, will literally decimate the governance traditions that all of us contributed to putting in place, that all of us committed long hours and thought and energy to respecting and supporting and building up in this province.

Again, the role you played in that I think has to be held out there, front and centre, and we have to thank you and encourage the courage that you have shown so that others in the same position or with the same opportunity will in fact do the right thing, as you have done in this instance, because if we don't, we will find ourselves going down a road in this province where none of us will have any kind of real say any more.

I remember when I was sitting in your chair one afternoon, debate was going on in the House and there was a vote called. The opposition voted against some-

thing that the government was proposing, and of course they lost, because 99.9% of the time we do in this place, particularly where you have a majority government that's bound and determined to get its platform and its agenda through. The government side then, on a second vote, made the suggestion that, well, it would just be the same vote over, and the opposition stood up and said, "No. We want the opportunity to vote again."

It's interesting. I was listening to the now House leader of the government party, who was, I believe, in the last couple of days so critical of the decision that you made, kind of whisper to the member sitting beside him, "Oh, let them have their vote. It's the only thing they have left." It is, and I felt bad about that. I felt bad for myself and I felt bad for my constituents, and I felt bad for every member of the opposition in this place. It's the only thing you have left: the ability to get up every now and again and vote, to say no to some issues—or support some issues—that this government puts forward. They want to take that away from us. They don't want to allow us to do that any more. They want to deliver more and more of the public policy of this government outside of this chamber. They don't even like the fact that we get, from time to time, a chance to stand up—even though we lose, 99.9% of the time—and say, "No."

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The member from St Catharines knows. He has fought in this House, over and over again for years, changes in rules that parties of every ilk have brought forward to diminish the opportunity of members to actually participate in the public debate that must happen here around issues that affect all of us and our constituents.

So, Mr Speaker, I end my few minutes here this afternoon in debate over this issue of contempt of the government for the legislative and governing traditions of this province by again thanking you for the courageous stand that you took. I thank those in the House, in my own caucus and the official opposition caucus, for standing up as well and saying, "No, this is not acceptable. This isn't on. This isn't in keeping with what we need to be doing in this place if we're going to be respectful of the needs and desires of all of the citizens of Ontario out there, to know that their government speaks for them, to know that their government, when considering public business, considers their interests first, and at the end of the day decides in that way on issues that come before us, including things as important as the budget of this House."

Hon Helen Johns (Minister of Agriculture and Food):

I want to tell you that I'm very excited to have this opportunity to be able to speak, not only to the House but of course to the constituents in my riding of Huron-Bruce. It's a great riding. I feel privileged to be here and I feel privileged to be able to speak on behalf of them in this Legislature.

Let me say that sometimes in politics there are dilemmas. I never want to be a Premier of the province of Ontario, but I think our Premier had a very difficult deck of cards dealt to him a number of months ago. He had

promised the government that he would come out and give multi-year funding to a number of our transfer partners. Coming from a financial background, I appreciate just how important that is in communities, in hospitals, in education and in municipal politics. They need to have a longer-term perspective to be able to make good decisions so that they can move forward. The Premier made that promise, and in so doing he got himself caught in an unfortunate situation. What happened was he said to call the House back together by the end of March—

Interjections.

Hon Mrs Johns: So much for the democratic process, Mr Speaker.

He wanted very much to be able to give these people the multi-year funding that they deserved, and that he had promised he would do. But when he said that he was not going to call the House back, of course there was talk immediately that there was going to be a promise broken. There was no way that, if the House didn't come back, he would be able to deliver multi-year funding. So from that perspective, what we see is the Premier trying to do the right thing in the province of Ontario. He gives the budget to the people who need it the most, the people who need multi-year funding. At the same time, he allows me, in my work as Minister of Agriculture and Food, to travel the province, to consult with the people of the province to make sure that I know what it is they want when it comes to the throne speech, when it comes to the budget, when it comes to important issues in the province. I want to say very clearly that that's exactly what I did. I got in the car, I travelled all across the province and asked farm groups and farmers in the agricultural community and the rural community to tell me exactly what it was that they wanted from this government in the throne speech, in the budget and in our future endeavours. And believe me, they told me.

Interjections.

Hon Mrs Johns: So much for the democratic process again. If they speak louder than me, I will go away.

So what happened was that I travelled to the east, I travelled to the north, I travelled to the west. I hit a lot of agricultural groups in my car, I have to say, and ate a lot of McDonald's on the way, and I learned a lot about what the farm groups wanted and what we should do to set a vision for Ontario that would take us into 2004, 2005, 2006. I guess today my thought is that I should spend some time and thank the people who came out to hear me, talk to me and tell me where the government should go in the future. That's what I did in the time I wasn't in the House.

I can't speak for others, but I can speak for the people I saw in Kemptonville and Norfolk, whom I saw in Marcel Beaubien's riding, whom I saw in Powassan. I can speak about those people who came to me and said, "This is what I think the government's vision for the future should be." So from that standpoint the Premier fulfilled two important objectives: he ensured that people got multi-year funding, as he had promised, and he ensured that farm groups in this province and agricultural com-

munities in this province got the opportunity to talk to their minister and tell this government where we should go in the future, and that got incorporated into the documents.

I also want to say that we had a wonderful opportunity—maybe some people take this for granted, but we certainly don't in the riding of Huron-Bruce—to have pre-budget consultations this year in Goderich. At that time we brought together a number of different groups who spoke about the things they would like to see in the budget. I have to tell you that the school boards were there, the hospitals were there, businesses were there, farmers were there, and individuals from the community who just had an idea about where they would like to be; all of them came to Goderich to be able to talk in the pre-budget consultations. Many more wrote to me and talked to me about the throne speech and the pre-budget consultations we did in that particular place.

I want to say there are some people who really went out of their way. From the agricultural perspective, the Ontario Federation of Agriculture, under the leadership of Ron Bonnett, talked to us about nutrient management and about the agricultural policy framework we're working very hard on. I had a number of different organizations, from the Christian farmers through to all the commodity groups, talk to me about how we might proceed to have a strong vision for agriculture. I had people in my constituency of Huron-Bruce talk about the wonderful opportunities that come to our community because we're a rural riding and because we're concerned about the future and the vision.

One of the things I'm particularly proud about, and an individual who I think is someone who should be recognized by the whole House from my riding, is Cathy Ritsema. Cathy is a person who works for Alzheimer's. This is an important society that is very close to my heart; I support it almost any time I can. I have an aunt who has Alzheimer's, and it's very hard on her family. So I have been really pleased and thought it was very visionary when the government decided in 1995 that we needed an Alzheimer's strategy and that it would be a program that would focus on and ensure that we did the best we could for people with dementia in Ontario.

Some of the insightful things we've done, both inside the riding and outside: of course we've invested more in Alzheimer's, we've done more research, we've put more drugs on the formulary tied to Alzheimer's. When we're building new long-term-care facilities, the thing we also do is build facilities that work for people with dementia: no corners; rounded walls, walkways that continue to allow them to pace—important things that will help people with dementia to lead lives that we all want them to live. So from that standpoint, it's important that we have strong social programs like our Alzheimer's program, and to get that, we obviously have to have a strong economic pillar in Ontario.

1400

I want to say that one of the strong economic pillars in the province is tied closely to something in my riding,

and of course that would be Bruce Power. Bruce Power is an organization within my riding that I am particularly proud of, and this government has made a huge difference in their livelihood. This government, through Bill 35, allowed them the opportunity to come in and run this nuclear generating station. This generating station has done things that were not possible under the old Ontario Hydro. While all three parties were in power, what happened was that four of the reactors at Bruce nuclear were taken out of production. Since Bruce Power has come in to Bruce, which was after 1999, they have been working to bring back two of the reactors, which will be coming back this spring. I've watched them with their timelines, and I've watched the management of this organization make this work.

Believe me, I am incredibly proud of Duncan Hawthorne and his management team, as he has moved Bruce Power to produce more megawatt hours in the province, probably about 1,500 by July 1. That will make a huge difference to the economic engine in the province. It will make a huge difference to energy capacity in the province. It will make a huge difference to the some 3,000 people in Huron-Bruce who work there. It's good for Huron-Bruce, it's good for Ontario, it's good for Canada. We in this House should all be proud of the work we did to allow that to happen when we voted for Bill 35.

I also want to say that in the province of Ontario since 1995, the government recognized that there was a need for communities to decide on investments that should happen in their communities. The government, under Mike Harris, decided that we needed to invest funds in the Trillium Foundation. What we do is—

Mr Gilles Bisson (Timmins-James Bay): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: You have asked us to deliberate on the issue you've put before us, which is contempt of the House. I'm looking for the government to explain either why they did what they did or to say that they recant. What we're hearing now is a litany of what they did or didn't do while they were in government. Bring them back to order.

The Speaker (Hon Gary Carr): The minister may continue. I know all members have tended to get off a little bit during this debate.

Hon Mrs Johns: I'm talking about the accomplishments, obviously, of this government and the important things that have happened in Huron-Bruce, and the consultations that happened with respect to the budget and where the budget has allowed us to go in this place.

I was talking about the Trillium Foundation. Maybe people across the floor don't like the fact that this government has done so many things for local communities. But when you're in your local community and you hear about the Ontario Trillium Foundation, lots of times you don't understand that those are taxpayer dollars that were established by this government to ensure that we have local investments. In my community, that's really important—\$100 million across the province, some of it allocated to our local communities, much of it set aside so

we can have the services we need in rural and urban Ontario.

Let me say that I have some people who agreed to be on this committee for me who would do incredible work. I think about Nelson Robertson from Port Elgin. I think about Harry Thede, who is a farmer and was once the warden of Bruce county. I think about Ellen Connelly, past president of Community Living and past president of the Alexandria Marine and General Hospital. I also think about Mary Ellen Jasper from Goderich, a local volunteer who has active on so many committees. They deserve to have a chance to talk about the things they want to do. They deserve to be able to get an opportunity to talk to us about a vision for the future.

One of the people on the Trillium Foundation whom I know my colleague beside me, Minister Tsubouchi, would really like to meet is Gloria Day from Grand Bend. She was involved in community cultural activities. She has been really instrumental in keeping our local playhouse going, and she works tirelessly to make sure we have cultural investments from the Trillium Foundation. We also have Conny Detzier from Mildmay, who is a farmer and a member of the South Bruce agricultural advisory council.

I heard a lot about how we need to invest in agricultural communities. I heard about why we need to move forward to make sure we do the right things to strengthen agriculture in the province. Of course, as a result of my travelling during this time, when we took the opportunity to speak to Ontarians, that's one of the things I heard.

I also have Bill McGrath from Wingham, who works heavily in the Trillium Foundation and also works heavily in the community. He's president of the Wingham junior C Hockey Club and a member of the Knights of Columbus. I'll tell you, you can't find somebody who volunteers more than Bill McGrath in the town of Wingham.

I've just appointed someone who has asked to be on, and his name is Joe Steffler from Seaforth. I know that he's going to make a very big difference to the community too. He's very tied to his local community, to Seaforth and the surrounding area. I know that without a doubt he will be another person who provides excellent opportunities for my community.

Along with those people who have provided me with excellent advice over my eight years of being here, there are other people involved in different transfer payment agencies who have helped me out. Let me say that Cathy Cove is one of the people who advises me on education on a regular basis. She talks about education a fair amount of the time. Of course, she wants to ensure that kids in rural Ontario have the same opportunities as kids in urban Ontario. She wants to ensure that we have the quality education we need to have to make sure our children can go on to university and do other things. So, from that perspective, I had a chance to hear from her also.

One of the things that's pretty important to the agricultural community and which I've had a lot of talk

about—and when we get back to talking about the bills in the House, I know we're going to move forward very quickly with this bill—is the rural red tape bill. I have a number of farm dealers—and I think about MacGavins in Walton, John Deere in Exeter and many more, some in Bruce too—who have called me and asked that we move the farm implement dealers portion of the rural red tape bill through as quickly as possible because it's an important part of where they need to go in the future to be competitive and to be able to continue the family businesses they have and which they're very proud of.

Sometimes you get great advice from people you don't necessarily expect to get good advice from. I laugh as I say that one of the people who has provided me with the most help when it comes to agriculture over the last little while is Bob Down from Exeter. He has been an inspiration while we've been dealing with tough issues such as the agricultural policy framework and the nutrient management plan. It shows me that many times, people come together and stand behind their MPP, no matter what their political views are, because they think it's important to make a difference in their community and in their counties. So, from my perspective, I want to thank him for the work he has done.

I also want to thank John Maakant for the work he has done. He is the past president of the Chicken Farmers of Ontario and has been instrumental in the nutrient management plan. He lives near Benmiller in my riding. He has worked hard with me to ensure that we have the right solutions when it comes to agriculture and the future of agriculture and a vision for agriculture.

So I once again want to say that the time we had when I travelled the province was a time I got the opportunity to speak to these people and to reinforce what they want to say, and I think we did the right thing.

Dale Ratcliffe from Zurich is one of my chicken hatchery people. He has met with me a fair number of times to talk about chicken hatcheries and that business in the province, and he has been a proud spokesman for the agricultural community too.

So there are lots of people who have made a difference. Oh, I don't want to forget one more person in agriculture, and that's Tom Fritz from Chepstow, who has done a lot of work in trying to move the province to new issues when we talk about nutrient management: how we can better find new technologies that will be a vision for us in the future to be able to utilize so we can make the very best decisions when it comes to protecting the environment and our wonderful water assets in the province. He gives me continual advice. I'm very grateful to him and very grateful for his vision.

There's not only agriculture in the riding of Huron-Bruce, of course. Tourism is a very big issue. We have a wonderful resource when we think about Lake Huron. Let me tell you that the tourism industry is growing and strengthening in Huron and Bruce. We have a wonderful trail that goes up through the lake where you can weave through bed and breakfasts, and wonderful opportunities to see agriculture interface with tourism and to see rural

communities at their best and brightest. So from that standpoint, I want to thank Cass Bayley from Hensall for the work that she gives us, and Cam Ivey, the mayor or reeve of Grand Bend, for his vision about where rural communities should go in the future. These two people we should be very, very proud of.

1410

I talked earlier about delivering a multi-year budget for hospitals and education and municipalities and why the budget had to be delivered before March 31 so the Premier could keep his commitment on that. I have had extensive talk with Art Ross from Seaforth and Stan Connelly from Goderich, who are on the boards of both of the hospitals. They of course are very grateful that they have the opportunity to know what their budget will be over the course of the next three years. So from that perspective you can see that delivering a budget by March 31 was an important issue in the management of all those organizations who are transfer partners to the government.

I don't want to forget the big businesses in my community, the small businesses in my community, who have come to talk to me. I have aggregate producers, I have Westcast Industries, which is under the capable leadership of Ray Finney. He's the CEO of Westcast, not only from my community, but for Brant, so I think the Liberals should listen carefully, and also for Stratford and many other areas. He's a wonderful person who drives our local community and he makes my community a better place to be, to live and to raise one's family.

I think you can see that admittedly there are some reasons why people may talk about this budget, they may be concerned about this budget, but when the Premier made a decision to give the communities, the transfer payers, the vision about the dollars that they needed for the next three years, that was a very important part of managing the financial resources of this great province that we call Ontario.

I can speak for some of my constituents when they say they are grateful that they had the opportunity to hold consultations, be involved in the throne speech, be involved in the pre-budget consultations. For that, I am very grateful.

Mr Sean G. Conway (Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke): I want to be clear: I rise this afternoon to speak to the amendment to my motion tabled yesterday by my friend the member from Timmins-James Bay.

I appreciate the comments of other members to this debate and I listened with real interest to what the Minister of Agriculture just had to say in her remarks.

I want to, as I deal with the Bisson amendment, reflect again on why I feel so strongly about why we're here having this debate. It is my view about one of the fundamental, if not the fundamental, responsibilities that Parliament has to hold the government to account for what government does, and most especially to hold government to account for the raising of and the spending of public money. We are all here to represent the taxpayers, and the Minister of Agriculture rightly points out that we

have a lot of constituents who will be very pleased to hear the good news about spending on programs that will affect individuals or communities. But I repeat: at the core of our system of responsible parliamentary government is the essential doctrine that Parliament must grant supply. Only this chamber, with duly elected members here, has the ability to grant the cabinet the spending authority that any cabinet requires to do business.

I received in the mail yesterday some information that I think is very material to this debate, and I raise it this afternoon because I think it is information that every member of this Legislature, as a member of the Legislature, must reflect upon as we contemplate the motion before the House and, more important, what it is we are here to do and how we see our responsibilities as trustees for taxpayers, particularly as it relates to the raising of and the spending of public money.

I want to very briefly review the circumstances again of March 2003. It is well-known, I think, by all honourable members that on March 12, five days before we were expected to reconvene for the opening of the spring session, the Lieutenant Governor, on the advice of Premier Eves, prorogued the former session of the Legislature and announced that a new session would begin on April 30, 2003.

On the same day, March 12, the Minister of Finance, Mrs Ecker, announced that she and her colleagues in the Eves government would be presenting the provincial budget outside of the Legislature in a place at that time not yet decided—though we later found out, it would be at the Magna training centre in Brampton on Thursday, March 27—because, the minister said, “The Eves government wanted to take the budget to the people in an innovative and creative way.”

That was done, consistent with Minister Ecker and Premier Eves’s announcement, on Thursday, March 27, 2003, in the afternoon, at Brampton; that was March 27, 2003.

Last night, I received in my parliamentary mail a copy of order in council 769/2003, dated March 26, 2003. This order in council—recommended by Minister Ecker and concurred in by my colleague Bob Runciman, the Chair of cabinet—was signed on March 26, about 24 hours before the so-called “People’s Budget” was presented outside of the Legislature.

What does this order in council, dated March 26, 2003, say? I’ll provide copies to all honourable members. Let me just say, in a very serious way, that getting a copy of this order in council is not easy. I had a seasoned legislative assistant go over to the Cabinet Office this afternoon to see if it was available. Interestingly, order in council 769/2003 is not available on the afternoon of May 13, 2003—what is that, six weeks after it was executed by the provincial cabinet?

Let’s come back—and I say in a very serious way to my friends on both sides of aisle—to the content of the order in council. It says:

“Whereas the Minister of Finance hereby reports that there is no appropriation or provision by the Legislature

for the fiscal year commencing on April 1, 2003 for the general and necessary government expenditures as set out in the” attached “schedule...;

“And whereas the treasury board hereby reports that it estimates that the sums set out in the schedule hereto are the sums required for the general and necessary government expenditures to be incurred by the ministries and authorities for which such sums are shown in the” attached “schedule....

“And whereas the Legislature is not now in session”—and we know why; it had just been prorogued and an announcement for recall had been made for April 30,” but it is observed in the very important and timely order in council dated March 26 that the Legislature is not now in session.

Finally, it observes that: under the Treasury Board Act, 1991, there is a provision for the issuance of a special warrant “where a matter arises when the Legislature is not in session that requires the incurring of expenditures during a fiscal year ... on or after April 1, 2003 for which there is no appropriation by the Legislature;

“Therefore,” we—the cabinet ministers Ecker and Runciman—recommend to His Honour the signing of two special warrants which His Honour did then sign. I want to read what those two warrants provide for.

1420

The first warrant, signed by His Honour the Lieutenant Governor, James Bartleman, sometime on the afternoon of March 26, provides for a warrant in the amount of \$73,236,500 for the general and necessary expenditures of four offices: the office of the Legislative Assembly, the office of the Provincial Auditor, the office of the Chief Election Officer and the office of the Ontario Ombudsman—four offices, to receive by special warrant \$73,236,500.

Then comes the second request for and grant of, by special cabinet order, the following warrant: for the sum of \$36,249,948,600—I repeat, a special warrant in the amount of \$36.2 billion—for what? For a spending plan that is contained on one flimsy piece of paper. What does it tell us? It tells us that with the signing of this secret cabinet order—and, as far as I know, it is virtually still secret—we find appropriations in the amount of over \$36 billion, and what are we told? Well, roughly \$16.5 billion is to go to health. For what purpose? Who knows? We are told, to be fair, that most of it is operating. We’re told that community and social services is to get \$4.5 billion; we’re told that education is to get \$4.9 billion. My friends: a special warrant, authorized by the cabinet in secret to appropriate 36 billion, 250 million bucks. That was March 26.

It is well-known to me what the history of special warrants is. I will say quite honestly, in the spirit of this debate which I began some days ago, that special warrants, over the last number of years, have in fact been used with increasing laxity. Eugene Forsey, one of my favourite authorities, in one of his submissions to the Parliament of Canada not that many years ago, raises a

real concern, as have countless Provincial Auditors, the Auditor General for Canada, and a number of public accounts committees, that special warrants are, by their very nature, intended to be for emergency provisions while Parliament is not in session. They are not intended to be, and we as a self-respecting Legislature surely can never let them become, what apparently they became on March 26, 2003: namely, the setting up of what looks like an election slush fund for this government.

Let me just cite what Professor Forsey observed in his testimony to Parliament some years ago: "It should be made impossible," he says, for any cabinet "to drive a coach-and-four through the most fundamental right and power of the House of Commons, its ultimate control over the expenditure of public money."

Well, we have just seen, with this order in council, a coach-and-four, a Mack truck, being driven right through our fundamental responsibility to ensure that taxpayers' money is spent under a set of conditions that are clearly understood, for purposes that are clearly set out in Parliament by a cabinet and approved by Parliament.

I ask you, as you look—this is the spending plan for 36-plus billion dollars. This is it, more than half the budget; \$36.3 billion is about 54% or 55% of the spending plan that Ms Ecker has laid out in other places for the fiscal year that began a few weeks ago. Over 50% of the spending plan is now underway, not with the sanction of Parliament, not with a budget, not with spending estimates, but rather with a secret cabinet order made seven weeks ago on the advice of Ms Ecker, concurred in by Bob Runciman—I don't know how many of the cabinet knew—with this spending plan.

Let me tell my colleagues on both side of the aisle: this is unprecedented. I have checked, in the last 12 hours, and on the basis of my research, the order in council that was signed by the Eves government on March 26, 2003, represents the largest appropriation made by special cabinet order in the history of Ontario, in the history of Canada, and as far as I can tell, in the history of the Commonwealth: \$36,350,000,000-odd dollars. It is unprecedented, and it ought to give this House and every self-respecting member in it real pause. But it gets worse.

Special warrants—we now call them treasury board orders—are intended to bridge a gap when Parliament is not in session. It is May 13 today. We are almost two weeks into the spring session. Parliament is now in session. Where, I ask my friends in the Eves government, is the motion for interim supply? I can't find it on the order paper; it does not yet exist. I tell you, go and find, if you can, order in council 769/2003. Let me just say this to all my friends on both sides of the aisle: it's bad enough that this has been done; it's bad enough that a special emergency provision has been prostituted in this way, but that honourable members of this Legislature should have to go high and low to find this document is even more disgraceful. I challenge you to go and find it. I sent an assistant to where I would normally expect to find it, namely at the Cabinet Office. The last report I got, just a few minutes before I stood up, was that orders in

council up to 769/2003 were there and a number of orders after 769/2003 were there. Conspicuously, this is missing.

I note, for example, that while this was done the day before the so-called people's budget was presented in Markham, the Minister of Finance, who has spoken in this House and outside on several occasions, has not hinted a word of it—not a word of it. Not only has she not hinted a word of it, she has not done her duty as an honourable member representing the crown to come to this place with an interim supply motion. Understand there can be at the end of the day no valid appropriation that you, we as honourable members, do not approve.

Yesterday, my friend Bradley observed that this week's Maclean's magazine has 30 pages of glossy advertising. The Pembroke Observer, the Toronto Star, radio and television are full of advertising about what government is doing. There has not been a word in this place, outside of this place or in any of this government advertising that an unbelievable, unprecedented special warrant, decided at a secret cabinet meeting on March 26, 2003, has appropriated \$36,350,000,000 of taxpayers' dollars for God knows what purposes. You certainly can't tell a hell of a lot by reading this; and not a word in the advertising, not a word here, not a word in the debate.

My friends, I repeat, you are all hard-working, good people. This is taxpayers' money. We have a public duty to account for taxpayers' money.

1430

Of course the Minister of Agriculture is right about the good works that you want to do. But there are rules to this game, and fundamental to our rules is that cabinets must come to Parliament with their spending plan. That's what the budget is and that's why you're in trouble for what happened that day, on March 27, 2003. It was at best a faux budget, a show budget. It's not a real budget because it's not a budget legally until the minister stands here in her place and moves the necessary motion: that this House approves in general the budgetary policy of this government. From that motion begins a very critical aspect of our parliamentary liturgy, and in that liturgy the voting of supply is absolutely essential. This is no way to run a railroad.

I'm going to tell you that if I were a taxpayer and I looked at this, it would be hard for me not to conclude that this was not a set-up for the election that surely must have been contemplated back in mid-March, when this strategy was developed. I've been there and I understand the pressures that governments are under as they head into the election cycle. But I repeat: by secret cabinet order, behind closed doors on March 26, on the advice of Ms Ecker and Mr Runciman, the Eves government, in an unbelievable and unprecedented way, appropriated by virtue of a special warrant, now called a treasury order, \$36,350,000,000, representing more than 50% of the spending for this year. That is unbelievable. That's something about which Parliament has to be concerned.

I want to say as I resume my seat, my friends, that if we are prepared to tolerate this kind of gamesmanship,

this kind of outrage to Parliament and our accountability and responsibilities, what on earth are any of us doing here? And I repeat again: why would any bright, hard-working, self-respecting member of any political party work so hard for 35 days to come back here? This is our duty at its core and we are not doing our duty. Support my motion so this kind of activity can stop.

The Speaker: In the rotation, the independent member, la députée d'Ottawa-Vanier.

M^{me} Claudette Boyer (Ottawa-Vanier): Merci, monsieur le Président, de me donner l'occasion de m'exprimer sur la recommandation de—

Interjections.

The Speaker: I apologize. We'll start again. If we could just restart the clock; the member didn't have a fair chance.

M^{me} Boyer: Encore une fois merci, monsieur le Président, de me donner l'occasion de m'exprimer sur la recommandation de mon collègue Sean Conway qui stipule que c'est « le droit indéniable de l'Assemblée législative, rassemblée dans ce parlement, d'être les premiers récipiendaires du budget de l'Ontario. »

J'aimerais vous féliciter de la façon de laquelle vous avez pris vos responsabilités face à l'indignation soulevée par mon collègue Sean Conway au sujet de la lecture du budget le 27 mars dernier, lecture faite en dehors de cette Chambre.

Je tiens d'abord à féliciter le Président de cette assemblée d'avoir eu le courage de se prononcer sur ce sujet épineux.

To adjudicate a contentious item, an issue, requires courage and impartiality. It requires knowledge and independent thinking. It requires an ability to consult and seek out information. I believe that you, Mr Speaker, have given this House an example of the role of the Speaker at its best. On behalf of all Ontarians, especially the constituents of Ottawa-Vanier, I thank you.

Je désire aussi féliciter mon collègue Sean Conway, qui a soulevé le point en demandant au Président de se prononcer.

It is thanks to the Liberal member for Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke that the issue was placed before this House and that the Speaker was asked to make a determination as to the appropriateness of the manner in which the budget was presented. I think, and I believe it is clear, from all that has been said and from the ruling of the Speaker, that there indeed has been a contempt of this Parliament. The budget, from the beginning of our parliamentary process, has been presented first to its members assembled in the Legislative Assembly. We are the elected ones. We are the ones responsible to the people. We have the duty and the responsibility to react on behalf of the taxpayers of this province. That right has thus far been denied.

Que ce soit inconstitutionnel ou non, le fait demeure que le premier ministre a rompu avec une tradition qui date depuis le début du Parlement ontarien. Un des principes fondamentaux de notre système parlementaire veut que les propositions des dépenses et de taxation publique

soient présentées d'abord aux membres élus de la province. A titre de membre élu de ce Parlement, j'étais offusquée, même fâchée, de voir supprimer ma responsabilité première envers mes commettants et mes commettantes et mon droit de questionner le budget en leur nom.

My constituency office has been swamped with letters, memos, telephone calls and e-mails objecting to the high-handed manner in which the budget was presented to a chosen, restricted group of corporate associates and Progressive Conservative supporters. I have been asked repeatedly to intervene, to bring pressure to the House and to make sure that future budget presentations be made in the appropriate manner that our democratic process requires and demands. I was so appalled that Premier Eves chose to present his budget outside the Legislature that I even wrote to my local papers to decry the gesture. What an insult to the democratic process. What an abuse of power.

As the Speaker has so ably stated, it is the undisputed right of the Legislature to be first to hear the budget presentation. The Eves government deliberately chose to circumvent the established process and has been found in contempt of Parliament. It would be only fair for Premier Eves to rise before this House and admit the error of his government. But believe me, I'm not sure and I'm not willing to hold my breath waiting for that to happen.

Autant que je voudrais bien entendre M. Eves admettre son erreur afin que nous puissions avancer, clore ce débat et passer à d'autres questions, je ne suis pas certaine d'entendre des excuses de ce parti.

I really believe that we had a healthy debate on this issue. Many of us from all sides of the House have had an opportunity to express our opinions. Some of us have agreed with you; some have not. Some have been more expressive than others. Some of us even had the chance to congratulate others for being number one on the debate. I do believe that this matter has been discussed long enough. It's time to vote on this motion and get back to the business before us.

1440

The important thing for all of us, and for the government in particular, is to acknowledge the mistake and make sure it does not happen again. Let there be steps taken so that all future budgets are presented as they should be, in the proper manner: respectful of tradition, respectful of all elected members and respectful of the parliamentary process established in the province of Ontario.

Que ce soit une leçon et que jamais plus, ni les membres de cette Assemblée, ni les citoyennes et citoyens de cette province ne soient assujettis à un tel outrage de la part de notre gouvernement.

Interjections.

The Speaker: Order, please. The government House leader has the floor.

Hon Chris Stockwell (Minister of the Environment, Government House Leader): With some help, I think I'll try and set the record for the government with respect to special warrants. Again, I was very—

The Speaker: Order. All members were very quiet for the member for Renfrew, so I'd ask for the same co-operation for the government House leader.

Minister?

Hon Mr Stockwell: Government House leader. I promise I won't heckle myself.

Special warrants have been around forever. It's a process that reeks of some kind of dial-up indignation. All governments pass special warrants. They all did. The NDP I think sat for a very brief period of time in the last year of their mandate.

Interjection.

Hon Mr Stockwell: Three weeks, was it? They practically operated permanently on special warrants. Again, the word "secret" comes out. First, let's get something clear: an order in council is posted across the street on the sixth floor, a public document—

Interjections.

The Speaker: Again, the member was very co-operative when listening to the member for Renfrew. I think it is only fair that he have co-operation. He's trying to make some points. The member for Renfrew had an opportunity to do it, and in this place we listen to all members.

I know we all would like opportunities to shout out at the other side. But, to be fair, the government members did listen very quietly to the member for Renfrew and I think the government House leader deserves that same co-operation.

It is very difficult, when you're talking about an issue like this, to have people yelling that close. I would ask all members to please give the co-operation to the government House leader that he gave to the member for Renfrew.

Sorry again, Minister.

Hon Mr Stockwell: OICs are public documents. OICs are posted and all members, all of the public will get an OIC. They can see any OIC. OICs—orders in council—are public documents. So let's discount this secrecy thing. It's impossible to have secrecy regarding an order in council. So let's start with that.

The second thing we have to discuss is special warrants. All governments pass special warrants. I was in the process of explaining that during the last year of the mandate of the NDP government they sat for a very brief period of time—three weeks, I think. They operated almost exclusively on special warrants because they needed to have them in order to continue the business of the government.

That's a fundamental understanding of special warrants: to continue to do the business of the government. It is in order to pay the employees.

Interjection.

Hon Mr Stockwell: I appreciate that. I'm trying to help you.

It's in order to run hospitals; it's in order to run schools and pay teachers. We all operated on special warrants at one time or another.

Now the question you ask yourself is, "OK, you get special warrants. How do you then go about qualifying

special warrants? All the members of the House will know that there are processes to qualifying special warrants—interim supply, for example. You all know very well that last June in every sitting there was an interim supply motion filed and debated, thereby giving you the authority to spend that money during those periods of time.

We had an interim supply debate last June. You can only have it when you sit. So you pass an interim supply practically every session that you sit—every session. Generally speaking, to the members opposite, it's done near the end of a sitting rather than the beginning—generally. Lots of times House leaders try to negotiate consent for interim supply. Very rarely do they get it—I don't think we ever got it—but sometimes they do. That's how you qualify your special warrants, through interim supply.

How does interim supply work with respect to special warrants? To my friend across the floor from Renfrew—I know he knows this—if you've sat on this bench for any period of time in your life, you'd know that you have orders in council for special warrants.

Mr Richard Patten (Ottawa Centre): Thirty-six billion.

Hon Mr Stockwell: I say to the member opposite, you have no idea of the numbers and levels of special warrants that have been passed in the past.

Mr Patten: Sixty per cent of the annual budget.

Hon Mr Stockwell: All kinds of them. Is it the largest in a whole number? Probably. As a percentage of the budget? I'm not sure; we're looking into that. I don't know, because a percentage of a budget—there were special warrants passed when I was in this place and we weren't in government that were fairly substantial. The reason we didn't argue with them was because you debate special warrants through processes—interim supply—and then you must have a budget motion that's filed.

It's funny you guys should talk about that. The reason we're not debating the budget motion that was filed is because of the Speaker's ruling. It's on the order paper. It's there to be debated. It's the first order of business. Why are we not doing this and are listening to the dial-up indignation is because we are caught in this situation of debating Mr Conway's motion. That's on the order paper.

So we have three things I've tried to get across at this time. First, everybody passes special warrants; everybody, every government, has passed special warrants, practically operated on special warrants for a whole year. Secondly, you get interim supply to debate those special warrants that are passed as orders in council. Thirdly, orders in council aren't secret; they're posted; anyone can get them. Fourthly, you've got to file the budget motion, which is filed and which will be debated. We are debating the budget motion as soon as humanly possible. Why? Because when you have a throne speech, you have to finish debating the throne speech before you can go to any other government business. The next order of business is the budget debate, as normal.

Ms Marilyn Churley (Toronto-Danforth): No kidding. We didn't know that. Thank you.

Hon Mr Stockwell: You're more than welcome.

That's not all. This is how the process works.

Interjection.

Hon Mr Stockwell: OK, what happens next, I say to the member. What's the next order of business after that?

Interjection.

Hon Mr Stockwell: I thought so. The next order of business—and I'm sure you'll know this after I tell you—is that estimates must be tabled. The estimates are tabled and then you debate the estimates. They can be debated in committee and get reported to the House. Estimates are debated. That is also a process to deal with special warrants, which you all passed and in which you all followed exactly the same process.

It is truly dial-up indignation. It is truly a speech, I will say, that reeks of newness, reeks of a process that was just brought to this member's attention. But the reality is this member knows exactly how special warrants work and knows exactly how governments are held to account for special warrants. There are many ways to be held to account. I say to members opposite, before you convince yourselves this is some kind of secret, nefarious process—

Mr James J. Bradley (St Catharines): It is.

Hon Mr Stockwell: I'm sure the member for St Catharines thinks so; he still finds Communists under rocks.

But before you think this is some kind of nefarious, secret process, check your standing orders, check the Legislative Assembly Act, check all those bills we passed and all the standing orders we work under that hold the government to account on how they can and cannot spend money.

Interjection: This one wasn't available.

Hon Mr Stockwell: I hear the member saying, "This one wasn't available." I say to the member opposite, if you didn't think it was available, it's only because you didn't know how to get it. All you have to do is go get the OIC that's passed.

Interjection.

Mr Dwight Duncan (Windsor-St Clair): It wasn't there.

1450

Hon Mr Stockwell: You said that on the last OIC when I was in this place that you said was secret. I walked across the street, went up to the fourth floor and it was posted, right there—a secret document posted on the bulletin board for everyone to read, including the fire evacuation plan and who was in charge on that floor and all the OICs you could want; and they said it was a secret.

Interjections.

Hon Mr Stockwell: They said it was a secret. Now they're telling me special warrants and orders in council are secrets, even though you have to do interim supply, budget motions, debate of the estimates, go through all those processes to deal with interim supply, of which we have the budget motion filed. We will have interim

supply debated this session, and we had the proper processes, through the OICs, in place. And all of you, in your previous incarnations, if there were incarnations during government times—

Mr Patten: It's not available.

Hon Mr Stockwell: I say to members such as Patten—and Ramsay would have been there, Kwinter would have been there, Curling; I know Ruprecht was there.

Interjection: Cleary.

Hon Mr Stockwell: Cleary, you were there. You all passed special warrants. You all did exactly the same thing.

Interjections.

Hon Mr Stockwell: Oh, yes. You did. You all did OICs. You all posted the OICs. You all had interim supply debates. You all had budget motions filed. You all had estimates tabled. You all went to committee and debated those estimates. You all did this in government. And suddenly, today, you didn't know any of this stuff. Suddenly it's a big secret, special warrants. Suddenly, "I don't know anything about how this place works. I just found out that the government passes special warrants and we have interim supply debates and we have estimates committees. Wow. I found late-breaking news: the government passes special warrants."

Mr Bradley: A brown envelope.

Hon Mr Stockwell: You've got brown envelopes, I say to the member for St Catharines. You could have gone to your library and got them. That's all you had to do.

Mr Bradley: We looked.

Hon Mr Stockwell: You didn't look. Don't tell me you went to the library and looked, member for St Catharines. I don't believe that for a second. You couldn't even tell me where it is, let alone that you went there and looked. So, pardon me.

Mr Duncan: It's just a big joke.

Hon Mr Stockwell: Well, to some degree it is a big joke. I really do find this somewhat offensive. It is a big joke.

Interjection: Why is it a big joke?

Hon Mr Stockwell: Why? Because this is how we've done business for decades. This is how we've done—

Interjection.

Hon Mr Stockwell: The standing committee on the Legislative Assembly, yes; you should know this. Estimates for the budget—Chair. Oh, here are the guys who would even talk about how this would work.

Interjection.

Hon Mr Stockwell: Thank you so much, Newman.

These are the guys who would talk about how this would work. They would actually be on the estimates committee, analyzing, going through—guess what?—special warrants. We've got the Chair. Wasn't this surprising? Do you know what? The Chair is Gerard Kennedy, a Liberal. Alvin Curling is a member. Steve Peters is on there.

So as long as you've been here, you've gone to the estimates committee—for, in some instances, 10 years,

and in Mr Curling's case probably up to 17 or 18 years. You've gone to estimates committee and you've been debating special warrants for 18 years.

Mr David Ramsay (Timiskaming-Cochrane): Because we knew about them. This was secret.

Hon Mr Stockwell: How was it secret? My God. Eighteen years you've been coming to this place, 18 years you've been talking about special warrants at committees, and today you rise up and you're surprised that we passed a special warrant.

Mr John Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands): No, it's the amount.

Hon Mr Stockwell: Oh, hold it. First it's a secret. Now I've got a new angle from the member for Kingston. First it's a secret, then they decide, "OK, that's not working, because it can't be a secret. We sit on committees. We sit in the House. We debate interim supply. We do estimates. We have the budget motions filed. We do all the supply bills. So it's not a secret. Oh, it's a lot." Well, it's a lot.

The argument can be put—I would bet money that when the NDP were in office for that year they operated almost exclusively on special warrants—almost exclusively. I bet you almost all of their spending was special warrants because they didn't sit in the House to get the budget passed or the estimates approved.

Furthermore, I will guarantee you that Mr Nixon, who was the finance minister; Mr Bradley, the Minister of the Environment; Mr Conway, House leader and Minister of Education; guarantee—Ramsay was in there for a short time. He used to be with you guys. Then he got over there, and then he went into cabinet. You know this. You passed orders in council for special warrants. You did.

Mr Gerretsen: That's not the issue.

Hon Mr Stockwell: Apparently, every time we make a point that says—this is dial-up indignation, because you said it was a secret. We all know it couldn't be a secret. Then you say it's the amount. Then I talk about the amount, and you say, "That's not the issue." What's the issue? The issue is, if the entire thrust, if this is—

Interjection.

Hon Mr Stockwell: The point is, that's not true. Don't you get it, member for Kingston and the Islands? You could pass every penny through a special warrant if you like. Every last nickel can be passed through a special warrant. That matters not. You still must file all the appropriate motions and all the appropriate bills. You must pass interim supply. You must debate estimates. You must do all of those things, even if every nickel, every last nickel, the government spent is spent through a special warrant. You get out of nothing. There isn't one process, one responsibility, one thing that you can avoid by passing a special warrant. Nothing. You still have to come to the House to debate it. You still have to go to committee. You still have to get your interim supply. You still have to file a budget motion. You still have to debate it in this House. This is synthetic indignation.

Interjection: Again.

Hon Mr Stockwell: Again. This is synthetic indignation. This is you people discovering North America in

1975. That's what this is. It is. Honestly, it is. You people are saying that you've made some amazing discovery. You've told the world that you've split the atom. Guys, it was split before.

I don't mind discussing this motion with respect to the motion on Conway's thing; I don't mind that. But standing in your place today and talking about special warrants as some kind of amazing new discovery, that this government somehow subverted the process—everybody has passed special warrants. This is the process. This is what you do. We didn't do a darn thing differently. It wasn't a secret; it's posted. Every OIC can be found. Let's get back to talking about the motion that Mr Conway filed. Let's get away from this synthetic, dial-up indignation because you believe you've just discovered North America.

Mr George Smitherman (Toronto Centre-Rosedale): I'm pleased to join the debate on this motion. I just want to give a warm welcome to the students from Rosedale Heights School of the Arts and especially to their teacher, Frank Rioux, who used to spend more time around this place.

If ever anyone needed an example of dial-up indignation, they just got a 17-minute tape of it from the government House leader, frothing at the mouth trying to indicate something that, in point of fact, he was wrong about. He's part of a government that has not yet come to terms with the facts that are before them. The fact is that the \$36-billion warrant, with one page of backup, stands out as just one further piece of evidence about the extent to which that government was involved in a manipulation designed to circumvent the legislative process. That is the essence of why we're involved today in this debate.

I want to start by saying that this place means something to me. When I was a kid, I sat in that gallery when the David Peterson government was here. I thought to myself that this is a place that someday I wanted to be. Later on in the life of that government, I had the honour of sitting in those chairs just behind the Speaker's dais, where I served as a note-passer to David Peterson and cabinet ministers during question period.

1500

When I came to this place after my election in June 1999, I felt a certain sense of delight at the prospect that I would have the opportunity, on behalf of 115,000 or 120,000 constituents in the great riding of Toronto Centre-Rosedale, to be their voice, to be their representative, to bring their issues to the Legislature. But instead what we've been faced with by a government that I think no longer has the requisite amount of respect for their own individual roles as MPPs and for their role collectively as a government has been the really disheartening reality that a budget, one of the most significant, if not the most significant, things that occur in this place, would be taken from here and turned—the government House leader used the word "synthetic." If there was a better word to describe the environment the government chose to move that budget speech to, it was to a synthetic environment, an environment that was contrived and an

environment that had but one purpose, and that was to give the government an opportunity to manipulate the process in a way that this place no longer seemed to serve well enough for them. If we can make decisions that are that expedient, that hundreds of years of parliamentary tradition can be so easily overthrown for the sake of the need to get a good media hit, then I think that's a sad statement about the extent to which members in this place value their own role and their own commitment and their own responsibilities to their constituents.

I have a bit of a motto. In Toronto Centre-Rosedale, we like to say that we practise politics with passion. We do that in part because sometimes it excuses the wild excesses of our rhetoric, but mostly because we like to demonstrate to our constituents—and in my riding I'm talking about people who have come from every corner of the earth, who reflect every face that is on the face of the world, and in many of those cases we take seriously the responsibility to teach them about democracy. In my election training process, we're training people in six languages. But we're not just training them to go and knock on doors; we're giving them some education, some information about our democracy.

Interjection.

Mr Smitherman: What do we have to show them from this spring in the Ontario Legislature? We have a government loaded with members just like that one, who are quite content to see their own power, their own role and their own voice usurped and diminished by the powers that be. Regrettably, in that government the powers that be no longer reside in those benches, save but one or two. They reside in the polling and communications firms that dot the landscape of downtown Toronto. This is no longer a government. It's a polling operation with a communications arm, and these are some of their agents. They stand in their places and read the scripts that have been produced for them in all kinds of faraway places.

But today, and in the course of this debate, we have an opportunity, and I'd encourage members to seize upon it. It is from the wise words of Sean Conway. We can learn a lesson that can help us all—not just them and not just us but all of us—to recapture before it's too late some sense about the important role this place can play and the important role that we as MPPs within it can play.

I'm offering myself for re-election in my riding. I'm 39 years old. These are the best years of my life in terms of my energy and my experience, and I have very little interest in spending that kind of time, with the commitment we all make to public life, working in an operation where my voice can be so easily ripped from me, where my responsibility to speak on behalf of the 115,000 or 120,000 constituents in Toronto Centre-Rosedale can be so easily taken from me, that the government can choose to move a time-honoured and essential element of our role and put that in a TV studio somewhere.

Sean Conway's legacy, despite the fact that some people don't like to hear the words, will be to show us a different way, a different route, a different opportunity

and to remind us before it is too late that this place is losing its relevance. And there can be no doubt but that that is the case.

This is not a warning that he offers only as he makes maybe his last stand as a parliamentarian. This is something that through the course of his time in office and through the course of the time that I've had the honour of sharing a table with him in a caucus room he has reminded us of: what this place was like in 1975, when he first arrived here; and of the challenges that have occurred over time, where one after the other down a slippery slope this place has been changed by successive governments, and following too often on the heels of governments operating in other parliamentary jurisdictions. But if we do not stand and fight that fight, then we are really bringing into serious question why we want to be here.

I want to be here because I can play a role in connecting the constituents in my riding to what happens in their government. The member from Scarborough East has that delightful smirk on his face. I don't know what his role is. But I know that I work to animate communities, I work to educate communities and to be involved with them and to fight for them. That member, we don't know why he's here.

I want to talk about a commitment of the political party that is led by my leader, Dalton McGuinty, to re-establish our commitment to democracy. If 50% voter turnout is anything, it's the share price of politics, and it is the public's reflection on the value of the work we do and the relevance of the work we have. Our party stands and says that 50% is not good enough for those of us who aspire to political office, for those of us who have passion for government and for assisting people, for those of us who believe in democracy. Why would we stand still in face of a number like 50%, which says that only every second person thinks it's important to vote in a provincial election when issues like health care, education, the environment, how our kids live and grow and how disabled people live in our society—if only 50% of people are voting—are the issues that are at stake? What is that a sign of, and what are we doing about it? From the government we got the answer: "We're doing all that we can to deliver a fatal death blow to the quality of our democracy in this province."

As I stand on this motion, I want to say that the clarion call goes out from Sean Conway and that we, as parliamentarians, have a responsibility to listen to that message and to ensure that it does not fall by the wayside.

I want to spend just a little bit of time talking about some of the commitments the political party that I'm part of makes toward policies for good government.

Interjection.

Mr Smitherman: I hear the moans and groans from the member from Timmins.

Interjection.

Mr Smitherman: Perhaps it was the member from Beaches-East York, then.

I've had a lot of respect for the work that other people have done in this place, talking about proportional representation and doing what we can to make sure all of the voices that are out there are heard. My riding is one of those ridings that provide an awfully good glimpse of the fact that unanimity does not often come, a riding so diverse by any measure—by sexual orientation, by ethnicity, by income level, by the nature of where one lives. My riding is a diverse place. We want to talk about re-establishing a government that works for you.

One of the things I've had an awful lot of opportunity, thanks to this government, to talk about is fixed-date elections. When you look at the issue around that warrant—\$36 billion, with one page of backup—that is part of a manipulation which is all around, trying to make sure the government gets the most advantage out of its current right to set election dates.

1510

I want to say that the government has helped us immeasurably in making our case to the people of Ontario about taking the date of election calls out of the hands of government. I think that in this coming election, watching how this government has operated around election calls will make that policy a very, very successful one for our party and, more importantly, a successful one for the quality of our democracy.

We want to introduce technologies that will enable more people to vote. We want to look at increasing voter turnout by 10%.

The government opposite is a money-raising machine; at least they used to be.

Mr Gregory S. Sorbara (Vaughan-King-Aurora): Not any more.

Mr Smitherman: They used to be. We saw the wheelbarrows being wheeled up to the various leadership contestants hardly more than a year ago. The money in Ontario politics is something which has to be brought back under control. Loopholes so big that you could drive through the very same Brink's trucks that were rolling up the dough to Ernie Eves's campaign have no place in Ontario politics, and we need to bring some order to that.

With respect to partisan government advertising, today in Maclean's magazine we have a government that buys 30 pages of advertising. The backs of letter carriers are being broken as this orgy of government spending—

Hon Dianne Cunningham (Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities, minister responsible for women's issues): Oh, don't overdo it.

Mr Smitherman: You carry 1,200 glossy pieces from corner to corner. You haven't been out on the streets long enough to know that you're breaking the backs of letter carriers with the sheer weight and volume of the partisan government advertising you're making the taxpayers pay for, and it's unconscionable.

Interjection.

Mr Smitherman: There's no picture of the Prime Minister in there.

It's unconscionable, Madam Minister, that you sit there in your place and heckle, because you see the cash-

deprived colleges and universities which could benefit from the more than a quarter of a billion dollars you've spent on this stuff.

We want to have voting reform that re-encourages full public debate. We want to take a very hard look at whether it's time for the overhaul of our voting process in this province, to encourage more people to vote and to participate in this election. We think that encouraging a debate among people is a good thing and that, on the quality of our voting system, it's our responsibility to give people an opportunity through referendum to make some comment about that.

We think that in a healthy parliamentary environment, members of provincial parties and government parties should have the opportunity to offer more criticism of their own government's policies. Last Thursday, here in this House, we got yet another example of the extent to which the mentality exists around here that disagreement on any point is a sign not of strength but of weakness. Some members of our party divided on an item in private members' hour last week. There were two different points of view about a bill, and this was met with some—

Interjection.

Mr Smitherman: You're so rarely talkative. It's so nice to have you today.

On those sorts of issues, we should be encouraging MPPs to bring forward their views and the views of their constituents and to divide. We think that division or differences of opinion are a sign of strength, not of weakness.

We want to bring in legislation which says that cabinet ministers have a responsibility to be here during question period. In the standing orders, it's not appropriate to raise the attendance of any member, but Mike Harris is no longer here. When I first sat in that seat and came to this place—I remember when I worked for David Peterson. When I worked for David Peterson, on those very rare days that he missed question period—because his attendance rate was over 80%, and I've got the stats for you—he'd phone in and see what happened.

Then I came and took a look at the stats and saw that we had a Premier in this province who came to work about every third day. That was a very ample demonstration of his commitment to accountable government in Ontario. He would not be here and be held accountable, but we held him accountable in the end and he ran. And when we brought forward legislation that would have made it incumbent upon government members and ministers to hit a certain target or have their pay docked, they voted against it because accountability is good for everybody else but it's not so good for them. They've got their own judges and juries, and apparently those are just pollsters.

We think that public hearings on significant government legislation should not be something to be wrangled out by the opposition, wrangled out of government by some big concession. Public hearings are opportunities for MPPs to get out there and hear directly from people about legislation that is before the House. We think that government needs to be more transparent.

Earlier, we listened to a 20-minute speech by the government House Leader that looked a little bit to me like a dog chasing its tail. He worked very, very hard to say that of course these orders in council are not secret. They're pinned up on the wall over across the way on the fourth floor in the Whitney Block. The point of fact is, on the issue of the \$36-billion warrant raised by my friend the member from Pembroke, that order in council was not publicly available. We need a government that, when it's spending \$36 billion of taxpayers' money, is not afraid to be clear about that.

So as my opportunity to participate in this debate winds down, let me say that as someone who first ran for office in 1999 and who will be present again when the government has the courage to go to polls, I want to be part of a government, and I believe that I will be, that makes a commitment to restoring the quality of our democracy here in the province of Ontario. We send a signal to the people of Ontario that we take ourselves seriously: that we will not stand idly by as some pollster-contrived idea goes out of control. Instead, we will find our voice and we will rise up and say that this place is relevant and that for it to be relevant always, we must be dedicated to the task of making it so. Sean Conway, the retiring member from Pembroke, has shown us the way. I encourage government members who believe in their own roles and responsibility to vote in favour of the motion, as I will.

Ms Shelley Martel (Nickel Belt): As I begin my remarks this afternoon, I want to go first to the comments that were made by the government House Leader. I guess in the beginning, I would say that maybe some others appreciated the civics lesson about how the place operates. I've been here 15 years and I don't think I really needed much of a lesson in civics today. But I guess, Speaker, if I were in the position of the government House Leader, I would want to be avoiding the contempt that you have said the government has dealt with too. I would be doing everything I can to talk about everything but the fact that you found this government in contempt with respect to its off-site presentation of the budget in the infomercial, the dog-and-pony show that went on at Magna Corp.

Secondly, if I was in his shoes I would probably want to avoid what is the more important issue that arises from the warrants themselves. The most important issue for me that arises from the warrants is one that the government members have tried to hide behind in dismissing the contempt. That is to say, "The Premier said that the House was coming back and the budget was going to be tabled."

The excessive amounts in the warrants make it really clear that the Premier had no intention of bringing this House back. The Premier had no intention of having a throne speech; the Premier had no intention of bringing us back to table a budget; the Premier had every intention, after the dog-and-pony show up at Magna, to call the election.

1520

The Premier has tried to play the media and the public and his backbenchers and you, Speaker, and the rest of us

as fools by trying to tell us otherwise. March 26: Mr Runciman and Madam Ecker signed a warrant in the amount of \$73 million to fund the operations of the Provincial Auditor and the Legislative Assembly and the office of the Chief Electoral Officer. That amount is \$73 million. Now, I know, because I sit on the Provincial Auditor's committee, that a big chunk of that was not going to the operating budget for the Provincial Auditor, and I suspect a big chunk of that was not going to the Ombudsman or to the Legislative Assembly. The majority of that \$73 million was going to the Chief Electoral Officer because that's where we were going after the dog-and-pony show up at Magna.

It's clear: \$36 billion, one page, not very clearly outlined what that expenditure was going to be for in terms of very precise programs. It's clear. The government was setting up a slush fund. The government was going after the dog-and-pony show. The government had absolutely no intention of recalling this assembly or of presenting a budget in this place. Frankly, that's what I think the importance of the special warrants really demonstrates to us: that the Premier was trying to play everybody for a fool, that the Premier said one thing to the media, to his backbenchers, to you, Speaker, and to the public, but behind the scenes, to a couple of his cabinet colleagues, he was doing and setting up something very different. His members signed warrants for huge amounts of money that were directly attributable to an election that was going to be called. He told us one thing publicly and was doing something different with his cabinet colleagues. That's not terribly honest, in my opinion. That demonstrates to me the clear contempt that the Premier has—not just with respect to having the budget off-site, up at Magna—but the contempt that he displayed for Ontarians when he told them, on the one hand, "Don't worry, the Legislature will be recalled," and on the other was giving clear direction to the Treasurer of this province and a second cabinet minister to sign warrants that clearly were leading us to an election—not a month or two down the road, but right after the dog-and-pony show up at Magna.

I think that's what people should be so incensed about with respect to the warrants. That's what they should really be concerned about: that the Premier of the province could so glibly and flippantly say one thing to the public and to his backbenchers and to members of this assembly and to the media, and so clearly be doing something so completely different behind the scenes. He had no intention of bringing this House back in order to table the budget here, none at all. That's clear with respect to the timing of those warrants and the amounts of those warrants as well. I think the Premier should be apologizing to the public today for being not so very honest about what his intentions really were.

So for all of those government members who've been trying to use the argument in this place and outside that it wasn't really contempt because the Premier said very publicly, and he did, that the budget was going to be tabled: well, don't use that argument any more, friends,

because it's clear from the existence of the special warrants and the amounts that the Premier wasn't telling his backbenchers the truth either when he was dealing with this very matter. I think that's regrettable.

Speaker, I'm sorry. I should not have said that. I apologize. I withdraw.

Let me go back to reading on page 10 of your response to the motions themselves. This is what you said:

"When the government or any member claims that a budget presentation is needed outside the House well before it happens inside the House in order to communicate directly with the people or because of a perceived flaw in the parliamentary institution, there is a danger that the representative role of each and every member of this House is undermined, that respect for the institution is diminished, and that Parliament is rendered irrelevant. Parliamentary democracy is not vindicated by the government conducting a generally one-sided public relations event on the budget, well in advance of members having an opportunity to hold the government to account for the budget in this chamber."

That is exactly what the government was up to. The worst part of it is that it was something that was so premeditated. It was something the government was so interested in doing. It was something the government was clearly intent on having happen, despite the very public criticism from the get-go, from the first day the Premier announced his intention not to recall the House and to have the budget outside this place. There have been a number of references to editorials that were very negative from newspapers that are generally very supportive of this Conservative government. Even they thought something was wrong.

I know that I got calls and e-mails, and I know that Conservative members got calls too, despite what Mr Wettlaufer said in this House yesterday. I remember an article that was published in the newspaper and Mr Miller, who is here today, talking about how many people were coming and complaining in his office about the government's intention to hold the budget off-site and not have it when the Legislature was in session. But the government clearly, even after hearing that criticism from some of the very papers that are generally very supportive of this government, just continued down the same path.

The Minister of Finance, in a press release on March 12, stated: "The Eves government will change the way budgets are presented in Ontario."

Well, they surely did that.

"Janet Ecker, the Minister of Finance, underscored the point when she acknowledged that, while past finance ministers have gone outside the chamber to present budgets due to a parliamentary filibuster or leak," and I quote Mrs Ecker, "What is ... important is that this, the actual initial communication of this to the public will occur outside the Legislature. That has occurred in some circumstances before," but "not in this kind of circumstance...."

The government was way down the road in thinking this was okay and not understanding the problem, and

frankly not caring about years and years of parliamentary tradition just being swept right under carpet—thrown out the door—because they were more interested in a public relations exercise than they were in bringing the budget here.

The government had time. When the government initially talked about its intentions, when the Premier talked about the infomercial and what was going to be done, the government still had enough time to change its mind in the face of very adverse public reaction. Did the government do that? Oh no. This government got its back against the wall even more, decided it knew everything and anything there was to know about this matter, couldn't care about parliamentary tradition. It was just onward and upward and forward from there. This was the way it was going to be, and this was how it was going to be done—who cared about parliamentary tradition, and who cared about the criticisms?

From the get-go on this issue, the government, the cabinet, the Premier showed nothing but contempt for the rest of us, who are duly elected and have a role to play in a parliamentary democracy—a role, I would argue, that most of us take very seriously. The government showed nothing but contempt and disdain for the public, who have a right to know their elected members will be here on the day the budget is presented and will be in their places and able to listen to it and make comments about it. The government showed contempt and disdain for people who would normally come to this place on the day of the budget and be part of the process—for the government or against the government, but at least would be part of the process—by having an invite-only dog-and-pony show up at Magna. From the very beginning, when this plan was hatched—God knows who hatched it, and God knows who was involved in it—from the very moment that the powers that be in the Premier's office decided to go down this road, they showed nothing but contempt and disdain for the public, for MPPs, for the media and for decades of parliamentary tradition with their decision to go off-site.

Speaker, we have had two motions put before us to deal with your ruling that the government is in contempt. The first was put forward by Mr Conway and says: "That this House declares that it is the undisputed right of the Legislative Assembly, in Parliament assembled, to be the first recipient of the budget of Ontario."

My colleague from Timmins-James Bay, Mr Bisson, has moved an amendment to Mr Conway's original motion. That amendment reads: "and not to present the budget in this way constitutes a clear contempt of the House."

1530

I listened with interest to some of the government members' reactions to this as they joined in the debate yesterday. I listened quite carefully to Mr Clark, who made the argument that this amendment should be seen as an expression of non-confidence in the government and that was the way the opposition was going to portray it. So it was going to be difficult, if not impossible, for

government members to support the motion, because the opposition would stand up and say, "This is a vote of non-confidence and you've just voted as not being confident in your own government." He was worried about what he was going to do because that's the way he saw it.

First of all I don't believe that this motion has anything to do with a non-confidence motion. But even if I did, my response to the honourable member is: that's your problem, isn't it? It was you and your government that took yourselves down the road to expressing such disdain for parliamentary tradition in deciding to hold the budget outside of the Legislature. That's not my decision; that's not my problem. You were told by any number of people, your own supporters, "Don't go down this road." You had every opportunity, ample opportunity, and lots of time to change your minds, but the more the criticism of the government grew, the more the government got its back up against the wall, determined to hold the dog-and-pony show off-site. Then they went to Magna, to boot, to make it even worse.

I say to Mr Clark, even if I thought it was a motion of non-confidence, you'll get no sympathy from me for your dilemma. You're not getting any pity from me about the situation you're in. You guys made a conscious decision to go down this road and it has been contemptuous of the rest of us, the media and the public and you've got to bear the responsibility for that.

I don't even believe the argument that Mr Clark made. I don't believe for one moment that the motion we're debating should or can be seen as a motion of non-confidence in the government. Was what the government did stupid? Yes, it certainly was. Did it show contempt? Yes, it certainly did, and the Speaker has proven that. But is it a non-confidence motion in the government? No, it is not. Issues of non-confidence generally involve the budget itself, the fiscal policy and the monetary details and we are not dealing with that here. We're dealing with where it was held, not the contents of it.

Second, you would have a non-confidence motion with respect to the throne speech. We're not dealing with that issue here at all. That's not the context within which we're having this debate.

Third, if we were dealing with a money bill, and the government lost a vote on a money bill, that would be a vote of non-confidence. But we're not dealing with that at this time either. We're not dealing with any details of the budget. We haven't yet dealt with the bills that have come from the budget. So that's not an argument either.

The fourth scenario in which you would have what might be a bill or motion of non-confidence would be where the government itself deemed a bill or motion to be one of non-confidence, as the Liberals did in Ottawa several weeks ago with respect to trying to get more money from the gun registry. But we're not dealing with that here either.

I completely dismiss the argument that was used yesterday by Mr Clark that he is somehow in an awkward position of how he has to vote because this motion should clearly be seen as one of non-confidence. It is not.

It certainly makes it very clear that the government was wrong and that the government should not be so contemptuous as to try to hold a budget off-site. But it is not a motion of non-confidence; it is a motion that this government should be voting for.

I also heard a member yesterday try to use as part of her argument—this was the Minister of Community, Family and Children's Services—that, "In my judgment, I had to think about whether we did the right or wrong thing. Did we do the right or the correct thing in having the budget off-site?" Speaker, you already ruled on that issue. That argument is over. All she was trying to do yesterday, and so was one of her colleagues, was essentially to challenge your ruling about that. You have made the decision that contempt was shown. It's not for the government members now to question publicly or question in this House whether or not they made the right decision. You have said very clearly in your ruling that they made the wrong decision. They should be dealing with the fact that they made the wrong decision instead of standing in their place yesterday coming very, very close to challenging your ruling, which is what happened in here yesterday.

I say to the government members, you folks should do yourselves a favour. You should get up and admit that you were wrong, that you made a mistake, that it was a dumb idea to thumb your nose at decades of parliamentary tradition and to make a conscious decision to hold the budget somewhere else. It was a dumb decision. I don't know whose idea it was and I don't really care, but the fact of the matter is that public reaction to it has clearly shown how dumb it was.

Speaker, more importantly, your ruling in this chamber has shown that the government held us in contempt by what they did. I think the government could have gotten out of this mess so quickly last Thursday, if they had wanted to, if someone from that side had merely stood up and said, "Yes, we made a mistake. Yes, we are interested in bringing forward and supporting a motion that would say, 'From now on the budget will be presented in this assembly.'" Do you know how quickly the government could have gotten out of the mess it's now in if someone over there had been smart enough just to come to this place and do that? But the fact that we are still here three days later—we have a government House leader who is more interested in giving us a civics lesson on how this place operates than dealing with the fact that the government had no intention of coming back here, and that's clear by the warrants that were signed just days before the dog-and-pony show at Magna.

You know the government—

Interjection.

Ms Martel: Here we go again—is not interested. I don't think the government really is sorry. I don't think the government believes that they have shown contempt. I think the Minister of Community, Family and Children's Services was right yesterday when she said, "Well, you know, in my judgment, did we do the right or wrong thing?" Never mind what the Speaker has ruled.

“What did we do, the right or wrong thing?” You did the wrong thing, folks. Do yourselves a favour and get out of it. Decide today that you’re going to support a motion that very clearly says that from now on in the province of Ontario no government is going to show disdain or contempt by having the budget outside of the Ontario Legislature; from now on the Ontario Legislature is going to be the first recipient of the budget of the province of Ontario, and it’s going to happen here in this chamber, where all MPPs can be present and where the public can participate; that’s what’s going to happen from now on. That’s what your government should be in here supporting. Show clearly that you don’t hold the Speaker in contempt or the rest of us in ongoing contempt because you refuse to do that.

This is not a motion of non-confidence. Don’t try to portray it like this. Admit you made a mistake and get on with it. Support the motion today, support the amendment by my colleague Mr Bisson and say from now on you won’t show such contempt and disdain for the public and the province.

Hon David Turnbull (Associate Minister of Enterprise, Opportunity and Innovation): I am very pleased to rise today to speak on this motion by Mr Conway. By way of background, let me first of all review your ruling. In your ruling, you found no case established of privilege being offended in this Legislature. Additionally, you found that no House rules were broken and no practices were offended, because in fact the budget had been presented outside of this House on more than one occasion. I’ll speak a little bit more to that later. It was done both by the Liberals and the NDP. In your ruling, you said that any discussion of constitutional law was best left to the courts, and that of course is appropriate. I note you offered no opinion that would suggest that this government did anything wrong with regard to privilege. You did not find that the government was in contempt.

Based upon the arguments that were presented, you said last week that a prima facie case was established. I looked up in Webster’s dictionary the definition to make sure that I understood it correctly, and indeed that was my understanding. It says that “prima facie” means “as it seems at first sight.” Of course, you ruled that it would be up to this House to decide, and then you moved to allow Mr Conway to present a motion to the House for discussion, debate and ultimately a vote. It is clear that that is what we’re doing now.

1540

Let me speak to the fact that budgets have been presented outside of this House before. We know that in 1988 Liberal Treasurer Robert Nixon read one outside of this assembly and it was not ruled a contemptuous act. Then our friends in the NDP—and of course both you and I, Mr Speaker, were sitting in this House when this happened. Remember the social contract? That, of course, was a budget statement, and that was read outside of this House. I note, as I look back over history, there have been several budgets that the NDP brought down and indeed some that the Liberals brought down where

there was ultimately no vote on the budget. I would suggest if there was anything which was out of order, surely not having a vote on that would seem to be more serious.

Turning to what we did in presenting the budget in a facility outside of this House, let me say that in no way were we trying to truncate the process but rather to expand it, and in fact in this respect we had a very broad-ranging pre-budget consultation which involved several thousands of people across this great province. Indeed, during those consultations I consulted with my constituents in the great riding of Don Valley West, and those thoughts were submitted to the finance minister for her consideration in preparing the budget.

On the day of the budget, the budget papers were presented and tabled with the Clerk of the assembly. There was a budget lock-up for the media and for parliamentarians of all parties in the normal way. Of course, opposition members were all invited to the reading of the speech by the finance minister. As is tradition, on the day that the budget is read, only the finance minister presents a speech and then there is an adjournment. You do not in those ways have the opposition speaking to it, other than to the press. Of course, the opposition spoke to it to the press in the normal way on the day that the budget was presented.

This government has undertaken to table budgets in a timely fashion before the end of the fiscal year, and indeed this is what we did. This is the first time, if I remember correctly, that this has been done since the 1970s, which allows our transfer partners to have some level of certainty in preparing their own fiscal arrangements for that year.

There will of course be budget bills presented in this House, and they will be debated. They will be debated as soon as we get out of this debate. The first order of business obviously was the throne speech, and then we will move on to budget debate. There will be a full debate, and ultimately our government will bring it to a vote, something which the NDP on several occasions didn’t bother to do.

Let us turn to some of the things that were in the budget and speak about that in a little bit more detail. But first I just want to parenthetically mention that I find that the H word that we are not allowed to use in this House comes to mind when I hear the protestations of the Liberals and the NDP, given the fact that budgets have been presented by both the Liberals and the NDP outside of this House. One has to wonder about the level of self-indignation that is being brought on.

Let’s look at the details of this budget, which was a very good budget for Ontario. It’s a budget which will strengthen this province’s economy. We know that in the years since we formed the government, we have had over one million net new jobs in this province, and indeed growth in this province today is the best of all of the G7 nations; it is better than Canada itself. Canada is leading the G7 nations, but Ontario’s economy is in fact better than all the rest of Canada. Indeed, the economists suggest that next year we will once again lead the G7

nations. This is not by accident; it's because we have worked away at making this province more successful by having lower taxes and less red tape, which encourages businesses to invest in this province. Only through that investment do we get the jobs which were sadly lacking as a result of the actions of the two previous governments. You will recall, of course, that we had over a million people on welfare in this province when we formed the government. Today we have an economy which is doing well. We have done this by making hard decisions, but they are principled decisions which we have taken to the people, and they have endorsed us.

We have the fifth consecutive balanced budget in this province. It's amazing that the last time there were five balanced budgets in a row was 1908. Think about that—1908. That means all of those governments in between have once in a while balanced a budget.

Let me turn to the Liberals. It's very interesting that in 1990 they claimed they were going to have a balanced budget. It was the first time. They brought down a budget which said it was balanced, but in point of fact the auditor has pointed out that whilst you claimed a balanced budget, it was some \$3.029 billion in deficit when the NDP took over.

Back the year before that, in 1989, in the budget documents that were presented it was suggested by the government of the day, the Liberals, that they would have a \$550-million deficit. In fact, it was only because of an unusually large amount of money, which was unanticipated, which the government of the day received from the federal government that they were able to suggest there was a balance. They got \$888 million, which wasn't anticipated, and yet notwithstanding that, they claimed only to have a \$90-million surplus. We know they created that by something known as pre-flow, where you flow your revenue which should have been recognized in the following year into that year and you put off till future years expenditures that should have been recognized then. It was complete sleight of hand. So for the Liberals to talk about budgeting is quite ridiculous, because they wouldn't understand the budgeting process if they fell over it.

Over the years, we have reduced taxes substantially in this province. In our first mandate, we committed to reducing the personal portion of provincial income taxes by an average of 30%; we delivered on that. Now we will complete our 20% personal income tax reduction by January 1, providing \$900 million a year in additional tax relief.

I particularly address the NDP in this. It's interesting that they always say, "But what about the poor people? You're helping your friends." In point of fact, this budget will eliminate another 45,000 people from the Ontario provincial tax rolls. This will bring the total up to 700,000 people who will no longer pay provincial income taxes, but still many of those people are considered rich enough for your friends the federal Liberal Party to tax. I say shame on them. They should follow our model and take those people off the tax rolls, because I believe

the people know how to spend their money a lot better than Liberals.

In this budget we have—

Interjection.

1550

Hon Mr Turnbull: I think that the Liberals take it as a joke that we are removing people from the tax rolls and yet the federal Liberals continue to tax those people. It's unfortunate that that's their attitude. But, indeed, it does confirm the attitude that the Liberals do believe that they know how to spend people's money better than the people themselves.

Turning to health care: this budget projects a \$28.1-billion expenditure on health care. That's an increase of \$1.9 billion over last year. In fact, going back to when we formed the government seven and a half years ago, the previous government was spending \$17.6 billion. In other words we have added, in those seven and a half short years, \$10 billion, or more than 55%, to the budget for health care in this province. Put another way, we have taken the expenditures on health care from 32% of the operating budget all the way up to 46% of the operating budget today.

Over the years, seniors have told me that they didn't mind paying their fair share of taxes, but have said that a lot of the burden of education should fall off when they become seniors. Indeed, that is what we are moving on with this budget. We are removing seniors through the property tax credit, for both those people who rent their accommodation and those people who own their accommodation. Across this province, this will mean an average saving of some \$475 per household.

We have not forgotten family caregivers and the disabled in this budget. They will receive an increase in the annual tax credit of approximately \$300.

One thing which is tremendously important to all of us is our children and the education they receive. This budget is investing over \$2 billion over the next three years to implement the recommendations of Dr Rozanski in his report. It allows for an additional 20,000 spaces to be added to our colleges and universities to address the so-called double cohort. This will bring a total of 135,000 new spaces that have been added to the capacity of colleges and universities across this great province.

In conclusion, our priorities as a government remain: making sure that we're prosperous by ensuring that the infrastructure of the province is addressed, something that the last two governments neglected; and by increasing the capacities of our colleges and universities. All across this province, we have cranes around the hospitals increasing the capacity and the abilities of hospitals. We believe sincerely that people know how to spend their own money better than governments. That's why we are leaving more of their money in their own pockets, because we believe that the most important things are our citizens and our way of life. We are protecting it.

The motion that has been brought by Mr Conway is something which I think is specious, given the fact that

they, in fact, brought forward a budget outside of this House. The NDP also brought forward a budget outside of this House. Yet, this is pure, unbridled politics that they're playing. I'm proud to say that I will be voting against the motion.

Ms Sandra Pupatello (Windsor West): I am happy to join the debate and support my colleague from Renfrew, Sean Conway, and his motion.

I believe that the House was in contempt when the budget was delivered outside of this House. I believe that on the eve of this budget production at Magna—I think it might have been after 5 o'clock the night before—a fax came through to my office here at Queen's Park. All of a sudden my invitation arrived to participate the next day. Of course, I was in the city of Windsor, and many of the members were in their home ridings, waiting to see whether they'd even have a seat at the table. The evening before, someone clearly thought, "Well, maybe we can just send them along an invitation." It's the kind of invitation you send when you really don't want people to be there. You send it to them at the 11th hour, and obviously you know that their plans won't allow them to get there.

I marvel about the audacity that the government has to pull this kind of a stunt. Everybody knows we're in the midst of an election here; we're just waiting for the call of it. We knew that this document would be more an election document than a budget document, but at a minimum, had it been delivered in this House it would carry the full weight of being an official document of the House as a budget.

As it is right now, in our second week back into session, the government has yet to table the budget bill. I marvelled, when we did sit here last week and listen through the throne speech, at the number of things I heard delivered through the media at the fake budget announcement from Magna, a number of items that did not appear the next week or the week after in the throne speech.

I'm glad to see that our friend Bob Runciman is in the House today to listen to this debate. I marvelled at what Sean Conway was able to deliver to the House today, not because anyone else could access this order in council, and I look at the amount in an interim agreement that he signed giving public safety and security less than \$1 billion for the several months that this will account for. I wonder if this amount includes the helicopter that was announced at the fake budget at the Magna plant. Is the helicopter included in this amount that he signed? I didn't hear about the helicopter for the Toronto police force in the throne speech, but I did hear about it through the media at the Magna fake budget presentation.

Elements like that get thrown out like trial balloons: "Let's see how people are going to react." Well, in the time between the fake budget presentation at Magna and the throne speech, somebody called Bob—I like to call him Rambo Bob—said, "Hey, the Toronto police force doesn't have the operating budget to continue to operate the helicopter even if they handed it to them on a silver

platter." Lo and behold, the helicopter did not appear as an announcement in the throne speech, and I marvel at that. What else did we hear through the media and the fake budget speech at Magna that is not in a budget document that has yet to be tabled in this House?

When Sean Conway stood in the House today and spoke about the special warrant that was issued, I saw that the House leader on the opposite side scrambled to get information in time for his little show that followed about how governments do this all the time. That's nonsense. Governments don't do this all the time. Governments have a responsibility to provide a budget bill in this House so that each one of us, duly elected by our voters, can look at it at the same time. We should have equal access to these kinds of documents. We should have the ability to know the kind of detail that is in a budget bill that drives the process of every ministry in this government and affects my riding and my residents every day of every week of the year. I should be able to access that. Whether we won our own seats in this House by a huge, whopping majority or a slim majority, we've earned the right to be here, and that means we've earned the right to access information at the same time as all of you on that side of the House.

Do you know what's worse? When you hear the stories from the Conservative backbenchers, some of them knew as little as we did on this side of the House. They didn't even know where they were going or whether they'd get into the Magna plant themselves, or whether they'd be barred from the information, or what the content would be of that fake budget that was being presented.

I see one of the members shaking his head. He's a newly arrived recruit to the House. Now, haven't been that much longer in this House than that gentleman—I've been here since 1995—but I remember the first day I stepped in this House. It was a training day for the Club 95ers. Do you know that in that year in 1995, of the 130 seats which we had at that time, 80 of those seats were brand new people, more than half—80 of those 130 had never set foot in the Legislature before. I'll tell you, AL: none of the 80 knew the rules of this House; none of the 80 knew the procedures or the parliamentary traditions of the House; none knew that there was a book under there that would tell you when to stand, when to sit, how to address the Speaker, how to address ministers through the Speaker; what it all meant; why there was a sceptre sitting on the table in front of us; what the Sergeant at Arms' role is in the House. None of us knew those things; 80 of the 130 didn't know.

Do you know what we had to do? We had to rely on the traditions of the House. We had to get up to speed with the traditions of the House and the customs, and we knew that at that time one of those things was the budget. We knew that it's the budget document that drives everything else. It's what sends the ministers scrambling in in their last-minute lobby effort to get their projects represented in that budget. It's what makes all of us as MPPs, whether on the government side or not, scramble to get

our information through by whatever means we can to that finance committee that is developing the budget document. In this case, apparently, it's just a few whiz kids in the back of the Premier's office; the Finance Minister just gets to sit and read. We're surprised she didn't have a teleprompter installed at her desk here in the chamber so it could be more like TV.

1600

In 1995, that's what 80 people had to learn, because they knew nothing of this. But this place has been here a long time—long before I got here in 1995. The people in Windsor West who sent me back here twice know the job I have to do. We also know there are rules in this House that allow me to do my job. Whether I'm a Liberal or a member of any other political party, I have that right.

In 1995, meeting pretty much all the 130 members, I knew instinctively which MPPs had sat in opposition before. You could tell by their demeanour. You could tell by the way they behaved. You could tell by the way they would even grant you a minute to say your piece. They were the first ones to tell you, "Sit down. I don't want to hear from you. We don't want to hear what you have to say."

The lion's share of the new people who came into the House in 1995 had no regard for the opposition. I have to give some of the Tory MPPs credit. They were the ones who had been here before, when they sat in opposition. They knew what the rules were and what their rights were.

I commend Sean Conway. They call him the dean of the House for a reason. He's been on this side of the House, and he's been on that side of the House. He knows what the rules are and what our rights are. Every one of us owes it to each of the rest of us sitting here that we get equal access. That's the whole point.

This past Friday, I spent a couple of hours at Catholic Central High School in the heart of my riding. I was talking to a civics class about government. The speech to all the grade 10 students always starts with, "If there's one thing you have to remember about government in this nation, one thing you need to understand that makes us different from other countries that do not have a democracy, that one thing I beg you to remember is Her Loyal Opposition. If you understand the concept of Her Loyal Opposition, you will understand why our system is based on the British Parliament. Why is it 'her'? Why isn't it 'his'? Because it represents the Queen."

We go through this entire discussion with the class to talk about how the difference with our Parliament is allowance for the watchdog role of Her Loyal Opposition. We access information that proves it's the truth. You don't get to do whatever you want without having to report to this House so every one of us can look, see documents and access information to know that what you're doing is true. That is a fundamental principle that you threw out that biggest window when you took that budget to Magna.

There are a couple of members on that side of the House who understand that concept and will likely be

supporting the motion. But I am urging the balance of the members here in this House, some of you who have never sat in opposition before, to talk to your colleagues who have, so that you as Conservative members can understand that when you are in opposition again you still will have the right to access information.

When I go back to another grade 10 class to talk about civics, that one fundamental principle all of us have adopted for centuries, that role of Her Loyal Opposition and the access we have—I'll tell you who understands that concept better than most: the Speaker of this House, Gary Carr, who took extraordinary heat, I'm sure, from his own caucus colleagues, members of his party, because he dared to stand up for this fundamental belief in a system that is a non-partisan position.

I go back to my riding of Windsor West and I marvel at the number of Tories, really dyed-in-the-wool blue Tories, stopping me in the street to tell me how crazy that was. What was Ernie Eves doing? Granted, they're probably Flaherty supporters or supporters of another leadership candidate, but they couldn't believe he had done it.

Last session when we were in this House, I remember bringing forward an order in council we had found. It was a document that had been signed, again in secret, which nobody knew about. Most of the cabinet did not know the government had signed off, by order in council, a \$10-million secret deal for professional sports teams. We found that out and brought it up in this House.

I remember distinctly looking at the Premier and saying, "How could you do this? How could you benefit only those few corporations when the rest of them are going begging?"

Do you know what he said when I asked him that question in this House? He said, "That was before I was here. That is not how I operate."

I said, "You were here," and he said, "I wasn't here." It was in those very few months when he was at a fancy bank on Bay Street, and he would not operate that way. That was his answer.

Today our colleague Sean Conway stood up with an order in council that clearly was done during the Premier's tenure, if he did have an argument back then that he wasn't here or it never would have happened, and sure enough he's gone beyond the pale this time. Can you imagine the House leader on that side of the House standing up and saying every party does it? Every party does not take over half the expenditures of the entire government and put them in a special warrant. That is unprecedented. The members opposite know this.

I deserve the right to ask the question on the one page that accompanies this special warrant of expenses: in the health and long-term care amount that's been allotted, are the health centres properly funded? Is there money in this amount to move forward quickly for family physicians to arrive in most of Ontario that is underserved? I deserve the right to ask those questions, and I deserve to have the background data that accompanies this. I get the right to say: "In Sarnia-Lambton they're struggling for physicians. Is there money in here?"

I would say to the member opposite from Lambton, you don't know that the money is in here, because that budget has never been tabled officially in this House.

There we are, on fake budget day, called upon by the media for our responses to a process that was never legitimized by being brought into this House.

Many years ago I was the president of an organization, an Italian club in Windsor called the Fogolar Furlan Club, one of the most successful Italian clubs in the nation. It's one of 18 across Canada. Sure, their budget isn't the billions of dollars of the Ontario government. Ten years ago we had \$2 million revenue a year. We had a membership of 900, and our executive council, of which I was president for two terms, would meet on a regular basis to determine the expenses of the organization. It was our due to report those expenses to the general assembly on a regular basis. Let me tell you that our members would be on the ceiling if they found out there were expenses that had been allocated for a purpose they didn't approve of and that they didn't give their stamp of approval to.

Mr Garry J. Guzzo (Ottawa West-Nepean): Northern Italy.

Ms Pupatello: Of course they were from northern Italy. That only made them great organizers of their cultural centre.

The point is that we owe it to our own constituencies. This is how we expect non-profit organizations to work across the nation. Here we are, the largest non-profit in Ontario, and we can't get our systems right to table a legitimate budget, so that I, as critic for the health area, can say, "I want to know what summarizes those totals. What does it mean to the people?"

It was only last week that the health minister stood up and said, "Gee, I didn't know that half the nurses are working part-time." Can you imagine? What planet has he been on this entire time? Is this a minister who never sat in that chair and really, truly listened to the opposition when we raised these issues repeatedly and said that half the problem is that multi-year stable funding to hospitals has not happened, despite your protestations over the last eight years that you would do it. You've never done it. Subsequently those hospitals are never in a position to hire full-time because they don't know if the money will be there to continue to pay them the next year. So they don't hire them full-time.

1610

Do we need to sit and lecture the Minister of Health, in this week of all weeks, Nurses' Week, about why he has such casualization in the nursing workforce? Why are we doing this? Because we don't know the answers. Is the plan in the budget that's going to take care of this problem that was so clearly identified during the SARS crisis in Toronto? Will we have time in the last two weeks that we've finally been in session to table a legitimate bill? Can I know, as the representative for Windsor West, that the money is in the budget for the Daimler-Chrysler plant in Windsor? We know that the fate of 2,500 extremely well-paid jobs are hanging in the bal-

ance for that announcement, a joint federal-provincial announcement of \$350 million. Would this government make the people wait for an election, use that as an election issue and come to my riding to make that kind of grand announcement? Will the people at Navistar sit and wait through a campaign to see if any monies have been allocated for the auto sector when you have been pushed and prodded by all sectors to look clearly at what the future holds for Ontario in the area of the auto industry?

I ask you that. People out there are thinking we're crazy, quite frankly, because we're looking a gift horse in the mouth. We're watching the jobs go south. Never has that been more clear than in Windsor, where we have to see it every day, and we sit and wait for a border announcement. Is the \$300 million, half of which is represented by the provincial government, in the budget document? Everybody knows we've got a crisis in infrastructure to cross our borders, where the lion's share of how well the Ontario economy did was based on trade. Our largest trading partner is the United States and the largest trading point in the nation is in Windsor. Is that \$150 million represented there?

These are legitimate questions that I as the local representative duly elected by the people of Windsor West get to ask. So I don't think it's unrealistic that all of us realize how bad it was, that you had done something terribly wrong by going to Magna, and even in the time since that fake budget you've not done the right thing. You've had more than two weeks to table a budget and we haven't seen a bona fide document. We don't know if what we heard in the throne speech will be represented in the budget. We'll fear for that if many of those things are in there. We don't know how much of those issues or new items or wedge issues were just trial balloons while you poll madly every night to see the public reaction, because those items then will not be in the budget when it's presented. Will we have a budget before the election?

We're telling you the process was wrong and you got caught being very wrong, not just by people who are here in this House every day but by people out there, the people who matter, the people, as you say, whom you were trying to get to with the budget. What it showed me is that people do have quite a high level of respect for this place and you owe it to them to put the budget in this House. Those were people who don't canvass for political parties, they don't belong to political parties; they're regular, everyday people who know the import of the provincial government on their everyday lives, whether it be how their kids go to school and what kind of education they receive or the level of health care their parents, children and spouses are receiving from us. Those are the people who care whether we're doing right by them, and it showed me that they have respect for the House. If my constituents have respect for this House, I as their representative have a duly elected duty to be in this House on their behalf and have access, like all members of this House, to all of the information on a timely basis. But in particular I should have access to a budget that is duly presented in this House.

Mr AL McDonald (Nipissing): It is a pleasure for me to stand in my place and join the debate. I must say it is truly a great honour to represent my riding of Nipissing and to represent individuals in Ontario. We're here to debate this issue today and tonight regarding the budget. I just want to say that we talk about tradition, and I thought I'd bring a dictionary and just read the definition of "tradition" to everyone at home who might be watching so they fully understand. It's "a custom, opinion, or belief handed down to posterity ... by practice ... this process of handing down ... an established practice or custom."

Interjections.

Mr McDonald: So I just want to say to all the parents and grandparents out there who are listening that the tradition of this place is to have the other side scream and yell when you're trying to get your point across. Now, isn't that something that we should be very proud of, to teach our children, our grandchildren, that it's OK for them to scream when we have the floor? I look at my colleague here. I can tell you when the member from Windsor West was speaking, I didn't yell across and try to get my point. I didn't agree with some of the things she was saying. She believes that what she's saying is correct. I didn't interrupt her. Nor did I try to get her off track or the whole bit. I believe in respect. Respect is what we're all about.

When you see the polls, and politicians or elected officials are at the bottom of the totem pole, I ask you, why wouldn't we be? Somebody just has to turn on this channel and watch us. We behave terribly. I see that every single day that I'm in here. If we want to talk about tradition—that's tradition. Tradition is to yell back and forth. I've sat in this House now for almost a year, and I've seen the obscene gestures from both sides of the House. I've heard the cursing and swearing from both sides of the House. Should we hold our children and our grandchildren to that tradition? No. I believe there should be a new practice. There's a new practice of respect. I can tell you that when I talk to a lot of constituents in my riding, they say, "I watch, and sometimes I turn it off because they're just yelling back and forth and nothing is being accomplished."

When I sat on the municipal council and there were ideas put forth that I didn't agree with, or they didn't agree with my ideas, nobody was yelling back and forth. I guess it's OK, once you arrive here at this traditional place that has so much history, to yell back and forth. But I disagree. I believe there should be respect. We should be able to get our ideas across. Do you know what? In the end, when we vote, we vote to determine what the decision will be, and the majority always wins. There's nothing wrong with that. That's democracy. That's what we're here for. That's what we're here to debate.

So when I listen to tradition—and I heard a few of the members speak about tradition and about the budget. I read the definition of "tradition." Tradition in practice shows that it has been done twice before. It just seems that everyone has forgotten to mention those two other

times: once was Mr Nixon and once was Floyd Laughren. They presented the budget outside the House. To be honest with you, the circumstances were a little bit different, but the fact remains that it has been done. That's a practice. What happens is it has been done twice; now it's a third time. What is tradition? That's what we have to get across. You can't just say, "They did it," without standing up and saying, "Do you know what? Our party did it as well." I never heard anyone on that side of the House stand up and say, "Well, do you know what? I don't like what they did, but we did it as well." Not once did I hear that.

I just want to say that as we stand here and debate this issue—and we could debate it for the next couple of days, from what I understand; that's what we're going to do—there are more important things to debate. There's the province of Ontario to run. We need to get out there. There are good things happening in our province. I think we should be getting on with the governance of the province of Ontario.

When I think of northern Ontario and what I heard in the throne speech and in the budget speech, I heard a commitment for tax incentive zones. I must say that when Premier Eves visited Mattawa, Ontario, last week, he announced that northern Ontario was going to be a tax incentive zone—the whole northern part of the province, which makes up about 85% of the geography of the province of Ontario.

We know that Ontarians are concerned about their health care. We know they're concerned about education. I can tell you in northern Ontario we're concerned about jobs and keeping our youth in the north. That's important us, to build our northern communities. We want to be able to provide our young people the opportunity to remain in northern Ontario and create the opportunities for them so that they may be able to remain and raise families of their own and build our communities. The flip side of that is that we can protect our senior citizens.

1620

When a tax credit for senior citizens was announced in the throne speech and the budget—when I went out and met with seniors' groups and talked to senior citizens, a lot of them were very concerned that they couldn't stay in their houses because property taxes are going up and the costs of running cities are getting more expensive and services are getting more expensive and labour costs are getting more expensive. A lot of these senior citizens have come and spoken to me and said, "You know, I'm really worried that I can't stay in my house." These senior citizens built our country, they built our cities, they built our communities, and I support that. I support the fact that we're here to help our senior citizens. I think that's crucial.

Quite honestly, I was very surprised that you voted against it; I really was. I thought you would support the senior citizens, but you've taken a stance. I've heard your stance. You don't want to help senior citizens on the property tax credit because you don't think they deserve it. That's fair. You have stated that. You're on the record. That's OK.

Interjections.

Mr McDonald: Mr Speaker, we're going back to tradition. I'm just trying to get my point across, and the members opposite are yelling across. They don't want the public to know that they voted against this property tax credit for senior citizens.

There are good things happening in my riding. We're building a new health care facility. I think it's \$212 million. It's a regional health care centre that will enable us to attract and retain physicians and specialists, who are very important to us.

I might just add that it was your government back in 1985 that cancelled our hospital the first time around. It was announced by this government in 1984, and in 1985 you cancelled it. You said to the people of North Bay and area—and that's Callander, Mattawa, Powassan—"You know what? We don't believe you deserve a new hospital." Even though they were old buildings, you cancelled our hospital.

Mr McGuinty came to my riding. He flew into North Bay. He didn't even get in a car and come downtown. He did his little media conference at the airport and flew off. I believe he went to Sudbury. You know what he had to say? He said, "I won't cancel any project that's going on on Highway 11." What he basically said was, "I don't really care about Highway 11, because when I go to Sudbury, I'm four-laning Highway 69." He did not commit to Highway 11. If you had listened to what he said, he said, "If there's a contract now for five kilometres of Highway 11"—which there is—"I won't cancel that one. But guess what? My priorities are Sudbury and Highway 69." He was very clear on that.

What I also found very interesting was the announcement about studded tires for northern Ontario. The plan was studded tires. This is his plan for northern Ontario. He's going to allow us to have studded tires. Well, we all know that studded tires wreck highways. The investment we're putting into highways now is just an incredible amount of money. When I see the tenders, I go, "Oh my God. That's a lot of money." And here we are, we have a leader of a party saying, "We're going to put studded tires on for northern Ontarians."

The first thing I asked was, "So when I come down to Toronto, do I change my tires at Barrie, or am I going to be allowed to keep my studded tires on all the way to Toronto?" I haven't figured that part out. What I found very interesting is that when he went to Sault Ste Marie he said, "We're not doing studded tires."

Mr Bartolucci, what do you have to say? I understand that that's your issue, that you've really been pushing for studded tires for northern Ontario. I don't agree with it, but that's OK that you agree with it. But your leader goes to the Soo and says no. I don't know if you've brought that up behind closed doors, because I'm sure you can't speak to that today, but he said no.

So in Sudbury he said studded tires and in North Bay he said studded tires, but in Sault Ste Marie he said no. I guess Sault Ste Marie isn't in northern Ontario. So either he has forgotten what northern Ontario is—I've been

here for a year, about 365 days, and he hasn't said "northern Ontario" once in this Legislature. Not once did he stand up and say "northern Ontario." Not once did he ask a question about northern Ontario. He never asked the Minister of Northern Development and Mines a question. He never asked the Minister of Natural Resources—something that's very important. What Mr McGuinty is telling us is: "I don't care about northern Ontario, because there are only five or 10 seats up there. All I care about is southern Ontario."

Mr Rick Bartolucci (Sudbury): We have a whole program; it's called Ontario North.

Mr McDonald: Mr Bartolucci, you're the one who's going to have to answer as to why you're not doing studded tires in Sault Ste Marie while you're doing it in Sudbury and North Bay. So I'll leave that with the member from Sudbury.

I go back to the fact that they've cancelled their hospital. They're not going to four-lane Highway 11. I watched our Premier go up and say that he's committed to doing Highway 69, and then I see these ads in the newspaper. It's the member from Sudbury taking credit for the four-laning of Highway 69. I sat here, and I watched Mr Bartolucci deliver petition after petition about Highway 69. He was very adamant about Highway 69. The Premier used to sit in Parry Sound; that was part of his riding. He thought it was the right thing to do. He got up and announced that he was going to four-lane Highway 69. He didn't make a great big deal of it. He didn't do media conferences and send out letters to the editor. He went up and he did the right thing.

But he committed to Highway 11. He committed to the fact that Highway 11 was going to be done; something that Mr McGuinty did not do. I want to say to the constituents of Nipissing, he did not commit to Highway 11.

Hopefully—and I don't believe that they would—they wouldn't cancel our new hospital. But they've done it once before. So there is some concern in our community about that.

We look at health care in the north, and we're very fortunate that we have a specialist in the area. His name is Dr McKinley, and his wife is Dr Hegge. They performed the first robotic surgery in the province of Ontario between North Bay and Hamilton. It's a project that I firmly believe we should be financing, because it talks about Telehealth, telemedicine, telementoring. It's a situation where he can train other doctors throughout northern Ontario without their having to travel. In other words, they can be part of this program and learn from this doctor who has a lot of expertise. There would be a lot of efficiencies there. So a doctor in Timmins would not have to travel to Toronto to learn this new surgery. He can watch it on the television and be interactive. It's a great project.

I also want to state that in the throne speech and in the budget there was something that I'm sure a lot of the members opposite haven't picked up, but it's especially important to the members from northern Ontario. It's the

Electronic Child Health Network. That's good news for us in northern Ontario because a lot of the specialists are down here in Toronto and Ottawa. Now we're able to connect with them so that—let's say you're a parent and you had a sick child; you could bring the sick child into our hospital, the X-ray could be taken and at the same time the X-ray is being taken it could be reviewed by a specialist in Toronto Sick Kids. Then they could discuss what treatment they're going to take without the family having to jump in their car or fly down to Toronto. We all know how expensive it is to stay in Toronto, and you can imagine how traumatic it is to have to come down here, find a hotel, get transportation back and forth and take time off work.

The Electronic Child Health Network will be good news for the people of Ontario, and I have to congratulate the Premier and the Minister of Health for taking that step, for believing in northern Ontario. Like I said, in my whole year here the leader of the official opposition has never stood up and said "northern Ontario" any day that I was in the House.

This is a very honourable profession, and I believe that we should uphold the traditions of the House, but the proper traditions, not the tradition of no respect but the tradition of respect and difference of opinion.

Interjections.

Mr McDonald: As I'm trying to get my message across and they're yelling across, for whatever reason—I guess they're arguing that "That's OK, that is tradition and we support that." But you have to be sensitive to the fact that we should all be able to speak to the issues. We should all be part of the process. In the end, when we vote, that's what determines what the decision will be.

1630

When I was downtown the other day in the city of North Bay, I had an individual whose name was Carmine Ricciuti. He's a very proud Italian-Canadian. He actually gave me this tie with "Canada" on it. What he told me was, he is proud to be a Canadian. Ontarians think of themselves as Canadians first and Ontarians second. They think of themselves as Canadians. They believe that what happens in Ontario should be good for the rest of the country. I'm a firm believer in that too because, you know what? We live in a great country. We live in a country that has a lot of different beliefs, a lot of different cultures, a lot of different individuals who want to be part of this. We need to be inclusive in our decision-making. As elected officials, we share in the responsibility of consulting with our constituents, with the people of Ontario in what they believe is the vision of our province, the vision of our communities, our cities.

I was very proud. I took part in the consultation on the throne speech. I invited my communities out to be part of it and asked them their opinion, their vision and their ideas on where we should go. I've only been here for a year now and I have never heard of that being done before. When I hear "tradition"—to me, tradition is, do we ask people or not? It has never been done before, but I think that's a great tradition that we're asking the people

of Ontario for direction, for input in the consultation of the throne speech. If we were to say, "That's not tradition. We can't do it," does that make it right? No; I believe we're inclusive.

Ten years ago nobody knew what the Internet was. Now we have the Internet, and I heard one of the members speak about on-line voting. I heard one of the members—I think it was from the Toronto-Rosedale area—say, "When we form the government, we're going to fix the election date." You know what, Mr Speaker? That's the American way of doing things. Here he's standing up saying, "We're going to follow tradition, tradition, tradition," and then he stands up and says, "We're going to fix the election date."

Mr Marcel Beaubien (Lambton-Kent-Middlesex): Where's their consistency?

Mr McDonald: Yes. Where is the consistency? Where's that all coming from? I must say that I was really surprised he said it. Standing up and speaking for tradition—you can't argue against that, but when you say, "OK, we're going to change tradition because this is what we think tradition should be," then we're getting into differences of opinion. I don't agree with that opinion. That's their argument; that's their strategy. Who am I to say that's wrong or right? I believe we should follow some of the tradition of the place, and we should be doing that, but there are changes. We have to accept that society's changing. Things are evolving faster than we even want to admit. We've seen what change has been in the last 100 years. We're going to see that amount of change done in the next 10 years, and I believe we should be ready for it.

Having said that—and I know my time is running out; it always seems to go very quickly when we're down here in the Legislature—I must say to all MPPs that we need to be respectful. We have to understand there are differences in our beliefs, and we should be representing our constituents to the best of our abilities respectfully.

Mr David Caplan (Don Valley East): Listening to much of the debate, it would be hard to understand, I think for any member of this Legislature, certainly for anybody from the public who would be listening, what in fact we're talking about. What is currently before this House is Mr Conway's motion—and I'll review how we got to this point—which is simply that this Legislative Assembly affirms that budgets should be read here first, or the amendment to that motion, moved by Mr Bisson, that if that does not happen, it is a clear case of contempt. That is what is currently before this House.

How did we get here? On or about March 12, 2003, the Premier decided to consult with the Lieutenant Governor and said, "We don't want to come back to the Parliament as we're scheduled to do on March 17. We want to prorogue the House. We want to end this session of Parliament." On that same day the finance minister said, "We're going to present our budget outside of the House." So the government on the one hand says, "We don't want any legislative accountability or scrutiny of our plans and we're going to end the session," and on the

other hand, the finance minister says, "We're going to present this budget somewhere other than in here at the Legislature of the province of Ontario, in the people's place."

That event happened on March 27. Where? The Minister of Finance went to Brampton, to the training centre of Magna International, and to a hand-picked, invitation-only audience presented the 2003 Ontario budget. Of course, upon returning to this House on Thursday, May 1, my colleague Sean Conway, the member for Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke, said, "Hey, wait a second. Just hold on. This offends this House. This is contempt. This shows disrespect, disdain. This is the height of arrogance by Ernie Eves and Janet Ecker, by the cabinet, by the Tory government, of this Legislature, whom they are supposed to serve, and the people of the province of Ontario."

Mr Conway put forward a very compelling argument that in fact Mr Eves has shown contempt for the people of Ontario and for this institution. Speaker, you did rule, and you were very clear in your ruling. I'll read some excerpts because I know some of the government members have been taking great pains to talk about how there were no rules broken, how nothing was done wrong. If that's the case, why are we even having this debate today? Why is it even necessary to affirm the right of the Ontario Legislative Assembly to be the first recipient of the Ontario government's budget? Speaker, you said that the government, by implying "that parliamentary institutions and processes in Ontario tend to interfere with the government's message to the public, such statements tend to reflect adversely on those institutions and processes." So it undermines the people of Ontario's confidence in the Ontario Legislature and its ability to do the people's business.

Of course, governments do three main things. The first is, they pass the laws, the rules that we all agree as citizens and residents of this province are going to regulate our behaviours and promote our province and make sure that we have a civil society. Governments pass laws—all governments do—and we have debate and discussion on what those laws are, how they should apply, if they're severe or not severe, what the consequences will be to breaking those laws. The second thing that governments do is they spend the people's money on whatever services and programs and building and infrastructure the people of Ontario deem necessary to our society. The third thing, and it also has to do with money, is the raising of those funds. Those last two items, the spending and appropriation or the taxing of the public purse, are the Ontario budget. So besides the laws which are passed and the debates we have about bills—private member and government—the budget is perhaps the single most important thing that any government will do.

Speaker, this is what you had to say: "Given the public's reaction to the government's decision to stage a budget presentation outside the House, I think Ontarians are rather fond of their traditional parliamentary institutions and parliamentary processes, and they want greater

deference to be shown towards the traditional parliamentary forum in which public policies are proposed, debated and voted on."

1640

In fact, Speaker, you admonished the government. You said, "Parliamentary democracy is not vindicated by the government conducting a generally one-sided public relations event on the budget well in advance of members having an opportunity to hold the government to account for the budget in this chamber." That's really important, because the government rules for the majority of residents. They propose, and with a government majority of course they get their way. But it is the role of the opposition to scrutinize, to hold the government accountable, to ask hard questions and demand answers. When the government seeks to undo this type of dynamic, when it seeks to frustrate the ability of our process to work, both the ability to propose and to oppose, they in fact undermine our democratic institutions and show contempt, disregard and disdain. It's rooted in a certain fundamental arrogance.

Speaker, you said, finally, in a strong defence of our parliamentary democracy, "A mature parliamentary democracy is not a docile ... or one-way communications vehicle; it is a dynamic, interactive and representative institution that allows the government of the day to propose and defend its policies—financial and otherwise. It also allows the opposition to scrutinize and hold the government to account for those policies. It is an open, working and relevant system of scrutiny and accountability. If any members of this House have a problem with the concept of parliamentary democracy, then they have some serious explaining to do."

Over the course of these events that I've described to you, I received a number of communications from people in Don Valley East. I want to read one such, but I have others and I did bring them with me. This is from Susan, who e-mailed me, and what's really startling about this is that Susan is not a supporter of the Liberal Party. In fact, Susan subscribes to the campaign bulletins of the Ontario Progressive Conservative Party. She forwarded me a campaign bulletin, and the authors were Jeff Bangs, Jaime Watt and Leslie Noble, the campaign co-chairs for Ernie Eves's Progressive Conservative Party. The campaign bulletin reads as follows:

"As you know, the opposition was caught completely off guard last week when the government announced plans for a new and innovative way to present its budget policy.

"As House leader Chris Stockwell, pointed out to the caucus yesterday"—so you know this is a legit document—"changes such as these always bring controversy. Once upon a time, legislative committees were only held in sterile committee rooms at Queen's Park." We've heard this line from government members in their speaking points. She continues: "Now they are held all around the province. At first this innovation was controversial. Now, "it is accepted practice.

“Not surprisingly, our critics and the opposition oppose this plan to present the government’s budget policy directly to the people of Ontario.”

The bulletin goes on to say, “There is no rule that prohibits the announcement of government policy outside of the House. Quite the contrary, it is a regular occurrence and this particular initiative is simply the next step forward in” the so-called “democratization of government business.

“Below you will find an outline of the House rules pertaining to budgets, how the government’s plan conforms to those rules and just how off base the opposition charges really are.” It is signed “Jeff Bangs, Jaime Watt and Leslie Noble.”

You would know that it is the Speaker who is the final authority on what is or is not in order in this House, certainly not some backroom operatives who give government members, cabinet and otherwise, their marching orders.

This is what Susan wrote back. Remember, Susan is not a Liberal. She is a member of the Conservative Party in Don Valley East. She says, “So, like Jeff, Leslie, and Jaime, the rest of the Conservative Party thinks that those outside Queen’s Park (the ignorant and easily duped public) don’t care what goes on...?”

“I am appalled at the change in the way the budget will be presented and am determined with all my heart to vote out the Conservative Party in the next election.

“Your e-mail message was both defensive and arrogant in its wording (‘once upon a time,’ ‘sterile committee rooms,’ and other such sneering phrases), like so many Conservative actions over the past few years. The people of Ontario have learned a hard lesson about allowing any government to hold an overwhelming majority position. It only encourages dictatorial behaviour and rule by backroom cabal.”

This is from a Conservative member in Don Valley East.

This is what your own party supporters have to say about your actions, your passage of the budget and your flouting of the rules. It gets even more interesting. I know all members did receive a letter from Mr Bob Marleau, the former Clerk of the House of Commons. He is as non-partisan as possible.

It’s very interesting what he has to say here, and I’m only going to use certain excerpts. He said, “Budgets are about levying taxes and spending the proceeds. Over the centuries, we the people have acquired rights from the crown to scrutinize government policies, especially spending policies, through well-established and time-honoured parliamentary processes. We elect the representatives of the Legislative Assembly to hold the government accountable for its decisions and how it spends our money. At our great expense, we televise the debates of the assembly so that we can see and judge for ourselves the performance of our government and of our opposition parties.”

Mr Marleau goes on to say, “The government of Mr Eves has just decided that when it comes to budgetary

policy the Legislature does not matter; that it is just an unimportant process obstacle before the government has its way; that the opposition parties are annoying distractions,” that they twist and distort “the grand message of benevolence” from the government.

Mr Marleau accurately predicts, and he says in his letter, “When the Legislature returns in April, this matter will no doubt be raised at the first opportunity. The Speaker will have no choice but to allow the matter to be debated as grave contempt of the Legislature.” This grand arrogance, this disdain, this disrespect is grave contempt. Bob Marleau is not a partisan member here.

I want to, first of all, thank the people of Don Valley East who wrote to me, who e-mailed, who called, who faxed, because, quite frankly, I thought it was very uplifting that so many people do value the traditions, do value our democratic institutions.

I wanted to comment a little bit on some of the arguments that I’ve heard coming from government members. Some have held up the standing orders of the Legislature of Ontario. They said that none of the rules of our Parliament have been broken and that the Speaker has said so. That’s simply untrue. Not every rule is written down in this book. In fact, we have many conventions and processes which are just those. They are unwritten rules of this Parliament and others across the Commonwealth of Great Britain. For any member to suggest that the rules were followed is simply false.

I heard some of the government members say that this debate has gotten in the way; we have very important matter to discuss. In fact, I heard the government House leader today argue that we have the matter of interim supply to debate.

This is the Orders and Notices paper for the Ontario Legislative Assembly. There is no motion to consider interim supply contained in here. The government hasn’t even filed that motion, yet we’ve been here for two whole weeks. In fact, the government’s budget bills have not even been introduced in the House—though they have introduced three bills, but not the government budget. So it would be impossible, quite frankly, for this House to even discuss the budget that the finance minister introduced at the Magna auto parts plant back on March 27 because interim supply has not been introduced; the budget bills have not been introduced. All we really have is a continuation of the same infomercial by members of the government saying, “We’re doing all of these wonderful things.” I am going to get to a little bit about what’s contained in that budget because it is not quite as it has been presented by certain of the cabinet and backbench members.

I did want to comment on one area. Nowhere in our rules, if we were to accept the government House leader and the government members, that this is the final authority on everything that happens in this Legislature—nothing in here says that Premier Eves has any legitimate right to govern this province. After all, Mr Eves was not elected by the people of this province to lead the government in the province of Ontario. He rules only because of

political convention, because he heads the party which holds the majority of seats. It is disingenuous, in my opinion, for the government ministers and members to argue that they have the legitimacy of government because of political convention but the presentation of a budget is not legitimate under the same conventions. It is a contradiction. Either they don't believe in those conventions, either they don't believe in those unwritten rules—and if that is true, then Mr Eves should resign today, the government should call an election and seek a true mandate from the people of Ontario. Or if they do believe that those conventions protect them and allow them to enjoy the right to rule this province, as they do, the government members should stand up and say, “We made a mistake. We made a mistake to violate the rules, the conventions, that are contained within the Ontario Legislative Assembly and assemblies across the Commonwealth in the British Parliaments.”

1650

Lastly, I say to the government members, the reason this has not been done, the reason government members and the Minister of Finance went to Brampton, was in fact to avoid scrutiny of their budget, of the budget papers, of the government direction. If one takes a very close look at what the finance minister presented in her so-called budget, you will see that there is a \$2-billion budget deficit. Contrary to the claims of five years of balanced budgets, it is simply untrue. This year, the 2003-04 budget contains a \$2-billion deficit, as noted by the Dominion Bond Rating Service, as noted by the chief economist of the Toronto-Dominion Bank. In fact, last year's budget wasn't balanced either. There was a half a billion dollars unbalanced; it was in deficit by half a billion dollars. The only reason they could get that far was they applied almost \$1 billion of federal health care money to last year's budget.

Now I can understand why the finance minister and Mr Eves would want to avoid that kind of scrutiny of the shoddy practice here in this Legislature. I can understand why this government is so interested in a one-sided infomercial. I understand why the government, why Mr Runciman and Madam Ecker, signed a secret cabinet order expropriating, stealing, \$36 billion from the people of Ontario without a spending plan being provided to the representatives of the people of Ontario. It is because when you look closely at what the government has proposed for its spending plan and how they're going to raise the money, it does not hold up to any kind of scrutiny.

So I can understand that Mr Eves would not want to be held accountable for his plan. I can certainly appreciate that. But there is a political party—Dalton McGuinty and the Ontario Liberals—that does believe in balanced budgets. If and when my colleagues opposite have the guts and the wherewithal to call an election, we are very happy to put our plans in front of the people and they can compare them with our competitors as well. I know that Mr Eves and his plan and his \$2-billion, deficit-ridden budget is going to be found wanting.

There were so many editorials and writings that have gone on. I picked a few, just recently. I couldn't pick them all because I'd be here literally for hours. The Kitchener-Waterloo Record:

“In contempt.

“...opposition parties warned the Ontario government” but they went ahead anyway.”

The media “urged Premier Ernie Eves to think again” and the media “were treated with contempt. Eves said the media always raise a fuss.

“And when people across Ontario spoke out against a plan that violated parliamentary traditions ... they were treated with contempt....

“But last week, the criticism came from a source the government can't treat with contempt,” and that was from you, Speaker. Lastly, and most importantly, if the people of the province of Ontario want to treat somebody with contempt, they know who to take aim at.

I have the Ottawa Citizen urging members of the government to support Sean Conway's motion. From the Ottawa Sun: “The Tories should simply admit as much”—that they are in contempt—“and move on.”

It is clear. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker (Mr Michael A. Brown): The member for Hamilton West.

Applause.

Mr David Christopherson (Hamilton West): Thank you very much, Speaker. I appreciate that. I thank the minister for the applause. We'll see if you feel the same way in about 19 minutes, 54 seconds.

Hon Mr Stockwell: Don't yell.

Mr Christopherson: Well, I won't yell if you don't upset me. How's that? If you give me a chance to get my bit out, we won't have that problem, OK? It's interesting that you'd be the first one to comment, because I decided I was going to open my remarks referring to you. And by “you,” Speaker, I mean the government House Leader.

Interjection.

Mr Christopherson: It's a little early to run out, because I'm going to start with some nice stuff. You might want to hear that. It would begin—and I shouldn't say it's a guaranteed good thing, because the first thing I want to say may do damage to either or both of our reputations. I say through the current Speaker to the previous Speaker and current cabinet minister that I consider him a friend of mine.

Chris Stockwell and I came here on exactly the same day. Our backgrounds—actually there are more similarities than dissimilarities. I remember being the point person acting as his campaign chair within our caucus to elect him Speaker because I really thought he'd do a tremendous job. The fact of the matter is that I think the history books will reflect that Speaker Stockwell was indeed one of the finest Speakers this place has ever seen. I say that as someone who has at least no provincial axe to grind. I'm not running in the next election, so there's nothing for me to gain here, other than to put on the record the fact that I think my friend Chris Stockwell, a Tory, did an excellent job as Speaker.

I open that way because I remember distinctively the day that Speaker Stockwell stood in his place and made the ruling that's been referred to here previously on the issue of a prima facie case of contempt. I can remember the tenseness that was in the room, the pressure that was on the Speaker, the concern on this side of the House that this was one of those defining moments. Would he decide, given that clearly he was an independent thinker—you may disagree with him from time to time and he may rile people, but nobody can ever say that Chris Stockwell is in anybody's pocket. We were interested in whether or not, at the end of the day, his ultimate loyalty would be as a Tory, which would be understandable, or to the duties of being Speaker, which to us on this side of the House was obviously the side we hoped he would fall on, and indeed he did. I can remember the reaction on the government benches, not dissimilar to what's happening now. There were a lot of Tories at that time—and I've been here 13 years—who all but considered Speaker Stockwell a traitor.

Hon John R. Baird (Minister of Energy, Minister responsible for francophone affairs): Oh, I did.

Mr Christopherson: I hear one of the current cabinet ministers saying, "Oh, I did." And of course that shows you the kind of dilemma our system places on any Speaker.

Not to the same degree by any stretch, but I have been in the chair as Deputy Speaker and had a very important ruling that actually came down one way or the other on my own caucus. I not only experienced that as a member of this place, but having sat in that chair I know how tough that can be. I also remember how I felt it was wrong of people like John Baird to feel that way. I also understand, having sat over there and at the cabinet table, that although the distance in the aisle is not that far, the viewpoint is light years apart.

Hon Mr Stockwell: Agreed.

Mr Christopherson: I hear my friend Minister Stockwell saying, "Agreed."

I think that's what we really have here, because I have no doubt in my mind—and this is the part, Chris, where you can start to get upset if you wish; I haven't even spoken and he's leaving already. But I have a funny feeling—and I think, Chris, you actually sat somewhere right about where I am, as I recall, about bang on, flinging the earpiece. Remember? I was sitting right there. You got really good at that too.

I can remember what he was like as an opposition member, and I can just imagine, Speaker, how Minister Stockwell would have reacted as MPP Stockwell of the third party had we, the Bob Rae government, done exactly the same thing, and that is move the budget from this place to anywhere else.

Speaker Brown, let me say to you that had the shoe been on the other foot, we'd still be peeling Chris Stockwell off the ceiling, he would be so outraged.

Hon Mr Stockwell: Indignant.

Mr Christopherson: Indignant. Outraged too, but "indignant" is a far more accurate word. And all of his colleagues too.

1700

I really think the government makes a huge error in shifting its focus to the motives of the Speaker. That's a loser unless we've got a Speaker—and we had a circumstance not that long ago. I won't go into details. It's not the prettiest chapter in the history of this place. We had a Speaker who did not have the support or respect of this House, and there were questions around motive in terms of decisions being made and things being said. That's not happening now. The only people defending this are the government, and I guarantee every one of you there that if you were over here, you'd be saying and doing exactly the same thing because it is outrageous. People are offended, and I think that's what you've failed to grasp, and I think that's why John O'Toole, for a short period of time anyway, is a household name in Ontario, and across Canada if you watch Newsworld. He's there often enough. It was because of both the actions he did, but it was the sneer on the face that really cinched it. I think that starts to show the separation of attitude and how this is viewed on the opposition side and out in the public versus that short little walk across the aisle from opposition to power. You have made a horrendous mistake.

I think Ian Urquhart is correct in saying that had you stood up at any point short of the ruling, or even right after, and said, "Do you know what? We screwed up big time. We apologize. We've learned from it. Nothing like that will happen again"—Ian is absolutely right: that would have gone an awfully long way. Instead, we have the spectre of John O'Toole on the front page of the Toronto Star giving off what is probably the most opposite message this government could possibly want on an issue of questioning contempt.

That's part of the difficulty we've had with this government. This is not new. I would be one who would acknowledge that for Speaker Carr—this is only my opinion; I don't know this for sure, but I suspect that although this decision alone stands on its own and his ruling stands on its own, I have no doubt in my mind. The Speaker got here at exactly the same day I did, as did former Speaker Stockwell, so I have a pretty good idea of what his experience is and what his memories are of this place and what it means, its history and its tradition, and the fact that, yes, sometimes things change, but that, yes also, some things ought not to change. I have no doubt in my mind that his ruling in part reflected his experience, ranging from disappointment all the way to outrage at some of the actions this government has taken against this institution, this people's House and the rules therein.

I'll give examples. Not long after this government was elected and took power, they brought in the infamous Bill 26. I see my friend John Baird rolling his eyes and groaning.

Hon Mr Baird: I thought it was Bill 7 you were talking about.

Mr Christopherson: No, I won't go to that one, one of the draconian bills. We'll come back to that another time.

This is about the procedures of the House, Minister. Bill 26: the government brought in a massive omnibus

bill, massive, and they brought it in a couple of weeks before Christmas—no public hearings outside of this place, as I recall. I'm going from memory now but I don't think they were offering or doing any hearings outside of this place, and they were very truncated. The whole thing happened closer to Christmas than the first of the month, and obviously the intent was—you don't have to be a political scientist to figure out that what they were hoping to do, with everybody preoccupied with the coming Christmas season and the opposition upset anyway about a whole lot of things the new government had done, they would be able to get it in under the radar. That act alone was indicative of your attitude.

But it's important when we look at this to remember the number of things in that bill that removed debate from this House and put it into the cabinet room. By that, I mean the number of areas in Bill 26 where it no longer took the House to change a law; it could be changed in cabinet, by way of regulations, done in secret. Now I say again, I've been in the cabinet room. I've been part of those secret discussions. I'm not questioning whether or not they're done behind closed doors. That is the way that our parliamentary system works. That's not the issue.

But the fact of the matter is that there's a world of difference between a cabinet minister standing up in this place and saying, "I am moving the following bill and changing the following laws," versus a recommendation that goes to cabinet from that same cabinet minister and they debate it in cabinet, and the only thing we find out about, as the public, is what their decision was after the fact, with no recourse.

Ultimately, it took Alvin Curling, the member for Scarborough-Rouge River, to refuse to vote, who in so doing held up the whole place. We already had this planned ahead of time. I'll tell you how bad it was, how serious the crisis was: Liberals and New Democrats were working together. That really doesn't happen very often. But we did have that in place, because we felt we had to do something. We expected the Sergeant at Arms to march over and ask Mr Curling to leave. So what we did was we threw a human wall around him, New Democrats and Liberals, and said, "No. With respect, Sergeant, unless you're planning to use force, you're not going to get to our colleague." I have to say too, for the history books, he was terrific. He was honourable. He did everything he should have done, but he certainly didn't cross that line. Because there was no call at that point or anywhere near there for any kind of violence whatsoever—none whatsoever. What we were doing was within the rules of this place, to the extent that there were rules to deal with it, and we were using those rules to try to make our point.

Speaker, why have I gone into such great detail? The reason is that one of the questions the public asks is, "How could the Tories think they could get away with it? Why would they do this and think they could get away with it?" With the greatest respect to the electors of this province, to the media who watch this place—and I guess

to some degree we're the opposition; we're supposed to lead and ensure that these things don't happen. So I blame us, too. But we let it happen. When Bill 26 happened, the people of the province should have been outraged. When this government stopped doing public hearings with bills and committees—and we can almost point out the time; the current House leader of the official opposition and I, when I was the House leader for our caucus, could identify the moment when the committee system in this province and in this Legislature died.

Where's the public? If you want to know why the government thought they could get away with this, then ask yourself, why wouldn't they? Look what else they've done, and they got away with it. Why wouldn't they think they could get away with this? A lot of people would call some of the things the opposition have complained about, in terms of what I just talked about—legislation versus regulation, the ability to take bills out into committee, the willingness to have an honest, open debate in this place and allow some time for that, allow each of us enough time to reflect the views of our constituency and our home communities—most of the time it was just written off as inside baseball, and often that can be an accurate accusation. But in this case we failed, as opposition members, to make the case to the public and the media about why what was going on was the slippery slope away from democracy as we know it in this place.

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There are reasons why Ontario is the greatest place in the world to live, and a large part of that is our democracy, the stability of our political system, the fact that, by and large, most people do accept that there is a legitimate structure of governance, even if they don't always like the people within that structure. This government has eaten that away, step by step, rule change by rule change and, at the end of the day, it feels like we've lost a big part of what this place is. And it has to stop. Speaker Carr feels that—I believe that—in his bones, that damage has been done, that somebody has to do something. He did that, and we are now holding you accountable. You did this because you thought you could get away with it; that's why you did it. You don't have enough people in that caucus and in your staff—I say very directly to people in the Premier's office and ministers' offices that I don't even know—associated with this government who feel and understand this place and understand democracy. You cannot rip democracy away because it suits your political needs.

And you finally got stopped. I don't know what the ultimate vote is going to be on Sean Conway's motion, or on my friend Gilles Bisson's amendment. I'm not sure that it matters all that much. Quite frankly, there's an election coming. I've got to tell you that I sure hope there's a minority government. I think this province desperately needs a recalibration. I know from my experience in this place that the only way those rules—

Interjections.

Mr Christopherson: Well, don't get too cocky over here in the Liberal caucus because I have no more faith

that you're going to change the rules with a majority government than they will. Oh, you'll change some that you proclaim, but I'd feel a lot more comfortable with a minority government because that's where the opposition will have the ability to take back some of the power and authority and influence that rightfully belong within this place, and the rights that members have.

I heard a cabinet minister talk earlier. She got up and said that it was a privilege to speak here. Then she went on and spent a whole lot of time thanking a lot of people. I thought maybe she'd got an award here today before I arrived. But anyway, she said what a privilege it was. Well, I'm going to tell something to all the government members: there are privileges and rights and respect that the opposition deserves to have returned to them, and when those rights are returned back to opposition members, they are de facto returned to the people of Ontario. That's the anger, and that, John O'Toole, is why the sneer seals the deal, because it shows the contempt, the lack of respect for this place and what it means.

In closing, I would just ask members to look around the world at how many people are still struggling, ordinary working people, professionals, academics, people from all walks of life still, in this day and age, putting their very lives on the line, the existence of their families on the line around the world, to have one crumb of the democracy that we have in this place. It would be wrong for this Speaker, Speaker Carr, and this opposition to allow this government to continue to take away those democratic rights. You are in contempt. It is contemptuous to do what you have done and take the attitude you have. Change must happen.

Mr Beaubien: It's a pleasure to rise in the House today to speak on the motion from my friend from Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke. As the member for Nipissing talked about tradition and read the definition of tradition from a dictionary, I'm not going to go back over that, but I would like to concentrate on tradition in this House, and also respect.

Directly dealing with the motion or the directive from the Speaker, according to the Speaker, the budget speech papers were properly filed with the Clerk. In his ruling on May 8, 2003, on page 231 of Hansard, the Speaker mentions that tradition in this House had already been broken in 1988 and 1993. He also talks about the meaning of contempt, and I will quote the Speaker directly from page 232:

“Generally speaking, any act or omission which obstructs or impedes either House of Parliament in the performance of its functions, or which obstructs or impedes any member or officer of such House in the discharge of his duty, or which has a tendency, directly or indirectly, to produce such results may be treated as a contempt even though there is no precedent of the offence. It is therefore impossible to list every act which might be considered to amount to a contempt, the power to punish for such an offence being of its nature discretionary....”

According to the Speaker, on page 233, “As I've already indicated, there have been occasions in the past

when a Minister of Finance or a Treasurer has neither personally presented the budget in the House nor read the budget speech in the House.”

But in his ruling, Speaker Carr does not mention contempt with regard to those occasions.

Let me share with you some of the comments that I received from the riding of Lambton-Kent-Middlesex. There is no doubt that we received calls in the office from people who were adamant with regard to the location of the speech, from Conservatives, Liberals and New Democrats, but I have to balance the calls we received, because we received more calls, again from Conservatives and Liberals—I'm not sure about New Democrats—as to the content. People were more concerned as to the content of the budget speech as opposed to the location of the speech. So for the constituents in my riding who were opposed to the location of the budget speech, I apologize for that, if they were offended. However, they also have to respect the position on the other side of the story, because that is democracy.

We have been debating this issue for the third day. I'm sure there will probably be 102 members who will speak to this issue and we'll probably get 150 different opinions, because that's the reality of the democratic process.

For those of you who may not know, Speaker Carr is a very good hockey player. He's played a lot of hockey. I've had the opportunity to play with him and he's an excellent hockey player. I know that over the years the Speaker has always respected the referee and has always considered the referee impartial. I would like to quote from a speech entitled “The Role of the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly” by Gary Carr, MPP for Oakville. In the closing line of his speech he says, “The role of the Speaker is one that transcends partisanship and lies at the very foundation of our democratic parliamentary heritage.”

The motion from the member for Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke seems to be disconnected from the ruling of the Speaker. However, I want to go back, like I said in the initial stages of my speech, and talk about tradition. I want to go back to the November 15, 1984, Hansard. It says:

“Television in Legislature

“Mr Bradley moved, seconded by Mr Wrye, resolution 40:

“That in the opinion of this House, electronic video Hansard should be installed in the chamber to provide coverage of all proceedings in the House in addition to that provided at present by the written and electronic media.”

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He goes on further to say: “The arguments in favour of the implementation of electronic video Hansard in the Legislative Assembly of Ontario are many and compelling. The arguments against such an initiative are clearly self-serving on the part of the government and without merit with respect to providing the maximum information to viewers in order that they might have as much access to the legislative process as possible.”

Further on he says: "It is often said that Canadians do not have as much knowledge of the legislative process and the workings of government as they should have in order to make political judgments and to influence their representatives in a positive and measurable way. The televising of the proceedings of the Ontario Legislature by TVOntario and by other networks that might be interested could result in an increased awareness of the legislative process and a better understanding of the issues with which legislators must deal."

He also says a little bit later on, on page 4152 of Hansard, "While the reluctance of the government to approve this initiative is understandable, what is disconcerting is the opposition of some members of the press gallery and the representations made to the Board of Internal Economy on behalf of this group."

One piece I found quite interesting, and I'll quote Mr Bradley, was: "Perhaps a piece written by freelance columnist Eric Dowd captures the issue as well as any column I have seen on this issue. Let me quote from this article of June 29, 1983. According to Mr Dowd: 'Cameras do lie, frequently. Most days in the Ontario Legislature there are cameras from eight or nine television networks or stations taping parts of the proceedings, but it would be difficult to claim they provide a comprehensive, and therefore accurate, picture of what goes on.'"

So it's interesting to find that there are different opinions. Again in the transcripts: "As Speaker Jerome stated so well in summation: 'Democratic government means government in view of the public. In present-day society, this means television, for television is the medium through which the public sees major events.'"

Let's look at what's happened since 1984. We have fibre optics and wireless technology today, which we did not have then. We have the Internet, which was not available in those days. And whether it was right or wrong, there's no doubt that we were trying as a government to use different means of communicating the message to the taxpayers of the province of Ontario.

While we're talking about tradition in this House, a number of years ago most members wore jackets and ties. Today, we see people without ties, and I think that's their personal decision. But again, it's going against tradition, its not the custom that we used to have in this House.

As I pointed out, there was quite a heated debate, and I'll go back to some of the clips in the newspapers with regard to cameras that were installed in the Legislative Assembly back in 1986. Again, that went against custom, that went against tradition, and as the last speaker from across the way mentioned, there is no doubt that during a filibuster a few years ago something happened in this Legislative Assembly that was against custom.

Let me go back to an editorial or column in the *Globe and Mail* of November 15, 1997. It is written by—it doesn't say. It says, "Back in the dear, dead days when TV cameras were not allowed in the Ontario Legislature there was an institution known fondly as the scrum."

It goes on further and says, "Basically, despite the fact that television cameras have been allowed in the House since March, 1976, the Legislature of Ontario is not being televised...."

"There is no continuous coverage that would have enabled the cable channel, for example, to give live coverage to last week's important debate on raising the drinking age. There are no late-night reruns of the entire question period, no weekend roundups of House high-lights, no videotape available for use by the parties or local stations interested in their own member...."

"Perhaps it's time to do things properly. If the Ontario Legislature is serious about televising its proceedings, then it is going to have to abandon the present half-hearted system and bring in its own electronic Hansard."

Here's an article again by Orland French in the *Globe and Mail* of November 30, 1982. He says, "You'd think it would be easy enough for TVOntario to stick a few lights and a couple of cameras in the Legislature. Not so. Seven years after the Camp commission recommended televising of the Ontario Legislature, committees have piled up study after study after study. And we're no closer now to TV in the Legislature than we were in 1975...."

"NDP leader Bob Rae says, 'I think it's crucial to guarantee public access. It would allow all members to get their messages across and would contribute greatly to public knowledge....'"

"Former Speaker Jack Stokes, a New Democrat, says, 'There's a need for us to communicate much more effectively with the eight and a half million people in Ontario. It would improve the conduct and raise the level of debate in the Legislature.'"

So article after article. There was a tremendous debate back in 1986, and started back in 1976, with regard to breaking tradition, with regard to televising the proceedings of this House. As I said, probably 102 members will speak today or in the next few days—hopefully not all today, but some have spoken already in the past three days—and yet we're going to have different opinions, different angles on how people look at it. But that's democracy, that we are entitled to have a different spin, a different outlook on an issue. I have to respect my constituents' opinion when they say they did not like to see the budget speech given in an auto parts manufacturing plant. I respect that, but I also respect the opinion of the people who called and told me they were more concerned about the contents of the speech.

Here's another one I would like to share with you, another article by Orland French in the *Globe and Mail* of November 20, 1984. It says, "The Conservative government of Ontario was nine years old when television first hit the Canadian airwaves, in 1952. Three generations of television children later, the Conservative dinosaurs of Ontario herded together in the murky marsh of poor information and defeated a motion to install television permanently in the Legislature." It goes to show that sometimes we were against breaking tradition as a party also.

"The best of television technology is available to bring your MPPs live but asleep directly to your living room. The Tories won't have any part of it...."

"Ironically, the Ontario Legislature press gallery is on record as opposing electronic Hansard. Why the press would oppose another form of disseminating information may be difficult to grasp. The reason is rooted in paranoia. Television reporters fear that if electronic Hansard is brought in, they'll get the boot."

I must give credit to the press because they certainly were opposed to where the budget speech was given for the year 2003.

In an article by John Cruickshank of November 30, 1984, Jim Bradley says, "I see it as a matter of freedom of information to give the people of Ontario an unfettered and unedited version of the events in the Legislature." Again, we had pros and cons with regard to this particular issue.

1730

My colleague from Nipissing just gave me an article that appeared in the North Bay Nugget. I can't give you the date because I don't have it, but it's entitled "An Age of Shameless Politics." Speaker, I'd like to share this with you and the rest of the House and the constituents back home who may be listening to this debate today: "It's time for Ontario politicians to get over the made-for-TV budget kerfuffle and get on with the business of government."

"Outside of a few stuffy political science professors, opposition politicians and Speaker Gary Carr, nobody really cares where the budget was delivered."

"Holding the budget outside the Legislature wasn't the smartest move by the Tories—we don't agree with the format—but the debate has been dragging on for too long."

It goes on in this article: "Voters want the truth and government direction, not necessarily at Magna International...."

Speaker, I would like to address a few issues with regard to some of the issues you dealt with in the budget speech. I think there are a lot of people in the province of Ontario who would like this House to get on with the ordinary business of the House and debate the budget so that some of the initiatives that were introduced in the budget can be implemented, such as the tax credit for seniors whereby the education portion of their property taxes will be rebated. Now, I know the Liberals have an awful lot of difficulty in embracing this. But I've had an awful lot of seniors come to my constituency office and mention the fact that it's difficult for them to make ends meet with the small pension they live on.

Mr Gerretsen: You've made it difficult for them.

Mr Beaubien: The member from Kingston, who's very good at heckling all the time, doesn't listen very well. He probably never listens to his constituents. I hear the echo all the time from the member from Kingston.

For the people who would receive \$450 to \$475, and if that person is on a pension—I should point out Mrs Bell, who lives on Sixth Street in Petrolia, on a pension of

probably between \$11,000 and \$12,000. Let me tell you, the member from Kingston, Mrs Bell would certainly appreciate receiving the \$475 that this government is willing to give back to her. Do you know why? Because she's raised a family. She's worked hard all her life. She's paid her taxes. She's 82 years old. She lives in her own house. She's not costing the taxpayer a penny.

What is wrong with a government that does have a heart, some warm blood running in their veins, rebating that person that \$450? What is wrong with that? What have you got against that, member from Kingston? What have you got against that?

Talking about my constituency—I know the Navistar plant is not located directly in my constituency, it's in Chatham-Kent, but many of the people from my constituency work at the Navistar plant. This is a plant that's under the threat—the workers are voting today—of closing.

This government had the intestinal fortitude and the vision to look at putting \$625 million into the auto industry to retrain people, to make sure that the high-paying jobs in Ontario remain in Ontario. Why do we do this? Because without high-paying jobs, without viable economic activity in the province of Ontario, we would not have the level of health care that we have today. We would not have the education system that we have in place today. We would not be able to provide all the other programs that we're providing in Ontario. I realize that when you're spending \$70 billion to look after the needs of Ontarians, it's a lot of money, but as a government we are committed to that, and if we can get on with the debate of this budget, we will make sure that the people of Ontario benefit from it.

Mrs Lyn McLeod (Thunder Bay-Atikokan): I'm pleased to have an opportunity to participate in this debate on Mr Bisson's amendment to the motion presented by my colleague Mr Conway. I appreciate the fact that Mr Bisson's amendment is somewhat more provocative for the government than my colleague's very reasoned motion, which I had thought the government would endorse as a way of perhaps assuring the public that they were not going to repeat what was so obviously a political mistake, even if they don't appreciate the mistake in terms of their contempt of the Legislature. But Mr Bisson's amendment, from my perspective, calls the government for what it has done; that is, showing a very deliberate contempt for the Legislature.

In my view, this is a government that has no respect for the legislative process and no respect for the members of this Legislature, whether of the opposition or of its own party. Furthermore, this is a government that has absolutely no respect for the public we serve. This is a government that wants all the power that it can possibly take unto itself, and it is prepared to do anything it can get away with. This is truly contempt of a kind we have never experienced in this place before.

I'm perhaps not sounding terribly detached in approaching this debate, and I'll confess that's true. Even though I am retiring, I'm not detached from this debate.

I've committed some 16 years to public service in the Legislature of Ontario. I've done that because I believe it matters. I believe this is public service. I believe that what we do here can actually make a difference in the lives of people. I believe there is a responsibility on our part to reflect the diverse views, needs and perspectives of the people who have elected us. So I'm not detached. In fact, I'm angry.

I'm not just angry about what's happened in the province of Ontario in the last two months, because I see what has happened in regard to the faux budget and now in regard to this government voting itself, through cabinet, some \$37 billion to do with as it pleases, on the signature of two people. I see these actions as just the culmination of what has been a progressive, deliberate diminution of the role of this Legislature. It has been a consistent and, I say again, deliberate continuous exercise on the part of this government.

I know that my colleagues participating in this debate have talked about the fact that we went 128 days with no sitting. It does beg the question from members opposite who are getting up on behalf of their government trying to defend what is truly indefensible and saying, "We have other things we need to debate." We agree. We've waited since Christmas to come back to this Legislature so we could debate the issues that matter to people. So don't tell us that the need to debate other issues in any way justifies the arrogant, contemptuous actions of this government.

My colleagues have said, "You know, the record for this government—it's not just 128 days that we didn't sit since December; it's the fact that we've only sat an average of 78 days per year since this government took office." I know my colleagues have talked about the fact that this government uses closure on motions to cut off debate, that they've used closure on 60% of the bills they have presented. To compare that to old records, in 1985, closure was used on 1% of bills—60% of bills.

But those aren't even the issues that made me angriest and have probably kept me angry for the last eight years. What made me angriest was one of the very first actions of this government back in 1995. It was the introduction of something called the bully bill. I just want to refresh people's memories about the context of the bully bill, Bill 26. That was an omnibus bill, not just an omnibus bill with some little housekeeping details but an omnibus bill that significantly changed some 23 pieces of legislation. It was presented in this House while most members of the Legislature, particularly most members of the opposition, were in a budget lock-up. It was not a budget—this government uses the term "budget" too lightly, obviously—but a financial statement, and we were being given the privilege of seeing it in a lock-up, which, surprisingly, we were relieved from somewhat late.

By the time we got to the Legislature to hear the presentation in the Legislature—they were still reading statements in the Legislature back then—we found that this massive document had been tabled. That was the

document, with all its significance, that this government presented shortly before Christmas in 1995 and wanted passed before the Christmas break. This was the omnibus bill that my colleague Mr Curling had to sit overnight in the House in order to try to filibuster the government's ability to pass that bill before Christmas so we could at least get two weeks of hearings. That was one of the first actions of this government. Should we be surprised that, as they approach the end of their second term—and, we trust, the end of their mandate—this government has exercised this ultimate contempt of the Ontario Legislature?

1740

I'm not going to spend time getting into this so obviously—I can only say—pathetic defence, because I truly am getting lost for words to describe what's gone on here, that they had to present this budget speech outside of the Legislature because the Legislature wasn't sitting. Anybody who's following any of this knows the House was supposed to be sitting on March 17 and didn't come back. That was a pathetic first offer at a defence. It surprises me that members opposite are still trying to use it.

The second line of defence was even more shocking, though. The second line of defence used by the Premier himself was, "After all, nobody cares about this. Just opposition members and media types and a few policies wonks would ever care." Well, much to their surprise, people cared. They cared, quite frankly, beyond what I thought they might care, because too often we think that people have become truly cynical about what we do here and truly turned off, and wonder whether or not what we do does matter. Clearly people do value what we do here, they do respect the institution and they were angry with this government.

This government was in contempt of this Legislature because of what the Premier said. It was contempt to the people of Ontario because he said they don't care. He was in contempt of this place and of members because he said that we are just a barrier to communication, that they had to take the budget speech outside the Legislature because they wanted to communicate with the people. This is not a government that communicates; this is a government that advertises. That's what this presentation outside the Legislature was all about. How long do you have to be here to stop being a least a little bit naive? I was convinced when I heard that this budget speech was going to be presented in an auto parts plant owned by a strong Tory supporter, I thought, "That's not a budget. There's no way that's a budget; that's a campaign launch." Because I'm retiring, I cleared my office out and I turned the key in the lock and thought, "I'm heading home because the campaign's being launched tomorrow." It wasn't a campaign launch. It certainly wasn't a budget. It was a massive public relations exercise from a government that doesn't communicate, it advertises.

The government then talked about the fact that they couldn't call us back until the end of April because they

needed to consult. The agriculture minister today talked about all the consulting she was doing and that they couldn't possibly bring the House back on March 17. That's why they had to take the budget outside because they had to bring the budget in by the end of March, but we weren't sitting because the government was consulting. The government had three months to consult. Besides which, this is not a government that consults. I saw the throne speech consultation document. It was an advertising document. It was as much an advertising document as all of the \$600,000 worth of advertisements that the government has just recently launched as its pre-writ advertising blitz. The throne speech so-called consultation document was part and parcel of the pre-writ advertising blitz.

Is it any wonder that the public is growing more cynical? I believe we have to be genuinely concerned about a public that believes their vote doesn't matter because the voice of an individual member doesn't count for much. I genuinely believe that all of us who care about the democratic process and parliamentary democracy should, in fact, be looking to strengthen the role of individual members, to deal with that public cynicism, to make people believe that their vote does count.

The Speaker was clearly concerned about the direction this government has been going, and he said that when he brought in his judgment on a *prima facie* case of contempt. He said, and I'm not sure I'm quoting him exactly, "What's to stop other governments from taking more and more outside the Legislature?" He expressed his concern about the direction we were going, and I share his concern because I don't know how the continuously greater limitation on what legislators do in this place encourages the public to believe that what we do matters.

This government, this Harris-Eves government—and Mr Eves was a part of the Harris government for almost its entire term under Mr Harris's leadership—has taken executive power to heights never before contemplated. I have to say, and others have said it before, people inside the government backrooms, that this isn't even really the power of an executive of elected members; this is really the exercise of the power of backroom, non-elected people. That makes it even more frightening. But this is a government which has given itself, through its executive, incredible power to make laws without any public scrutiny at all. This government has been censured—perhaps as good a term as I can use—by more than one judge in court for its use of what is called in legal terms, perhaps parliamentary terms, the Henry VIII clause.

You'll know, Mr Speaker, that this whole debate is around the fact that one of the roles of Parliament, one of the reasons we exist is to serve as a check and balance on the power of kings. In today's day and age, with the Queen somewhat removed from direct involvement in the government of the country, it is to keep a check and a balance on the exercise of executive power. This government in bill after bill has given itself the power to make laws through regulation without recourse to the Legis-

lature. In fact, in two bills at least, this government sought to give itself the power to make changes in the laws themselves without recourse back to the Legislature. This government has given itself the power in virtually every piece of legislation it has passed to be held not liable in the courts for the action that it has taken, repeatedly giving itself executive power.

Today, quite beyond the Henry VIII clause, which gives the government almost unlimited regulatory power, and again regulations with the force of law that are not made public, the government has given itself spending power, spending power to the executive, of a magnitude—again—never before seen and surely not contemplated.

This government, the day before it presented its so-called budget at the Magna auto parts plant, just a few days after it decided not to bring the House back for a legislative sitting, decided that it would vote itself the power to spend almost \$37 billion of taxpayers' money. They did this with a special warrant which is normally used only for emergency situations and in times when the House is not sitting or is in an election, which this government clearly expected it to be in.

Hon Doug Galt (Minister without Portfolio): You know better.

Mrs McLeod: The member for Northumberland says I know better. I know better than to think that any government can give itself the executive power to spend \$37 billion of taxpayers' money without scrutiny by the Legislature of this province, let alone without approval of the Legislature of this province. That is completely unprecedented.

It was also deliberate, because in 2002, one year ago, the finance minister—who granted herself, with one other signature, the power to spend almost \$37 billion—introduced, and her government passed, an amendment to the Treasury Board Act that would allow the use of a special warrant to authorize spending in the fiscal year after the year in which the warrant had been issued. This government foresaw the intent to do exactly what they have done. From the time they took office they have deliberately, consistently, persistently set out to erode the power of the elected members of the Legislative Assembly, and what happened in the last two months is just the culmination of that.

There is so much I would like to say in a retrospective of eight years of government erosion of the role of the Legislature. I'd like to talk about committees and the fact that once upon a time within my lifetime in this place a committee was a place where we actually took a bill and examined it, considered it, really heard from people and took it back and amended it. I don't think that has happened in eight years to any significant degree. What's more typical is something like Bill 26, dating back to 1995, when it was so massive and there were such limited committee hearings that most of the clauses, significant changes to legislation, never even got addressed. Do you know how they work in committee now? They say, "We'll use closure. We'll get to a certain time, and if

we haven't considered the clauses by that time, you just put up your hand and vote for them or against them with no debate at all." That's the way they've run this place for the last eight years.

1750

I feel so strongly about this because I don't think we should take democracy lightly. Other people have talked about the fact that we didn't have to create a democratic process; we didn't have to create a parliamentary democracy; we didn't have to fight to put checks and balances on the power of the king. Others did that for us. We inherited the privilege of serving as members in a parliamentary democracy. We inherited 700 years of effort to define a parliamentary democracy.

In the few moments I have left, let me talk a little bit about it: in the 14th century it was decided to have no taxation without parliamentary consent; in the 15th century the Commons gained equal law-making powers with the lords; in the 17th century we saw a bill of rights establishing the authority of Parliament over the king that was enshrined in law, the principle of freedom of speech in parliamentary debates. In the 14th century, the 15th century, the 17th century: a slow evolution that was hard-won. It was won through revolution; it was won through people being prepared to go to war; it was won through people losing their heads. The parliamentary acts of the 20th century finally gave primacy to the House of Commons where we sit. Finally, over the course of 18th-, 19th- and 20th-century evolution, we achieved universal suffrage, where all men and women have an opportunity to vote so that we have government that is truly of the people, for the people and by the people.

I am angry at what I see to have been a consistent erosion of the ability of individual members elected by their constituents to play an effective role in governance. I am angry that this government uses as a defence that they need to communicate with the public. I would argue that no government can say that they have to bypass the elected representatives in order to communicate with the public. We are elected not only to communicate with our own publics, which we must do, remembering that communication is two-way—it means listening first and bringing views to this place—it's not just advertising at them, it's not just talking at them, it's not just telling them what you want them to hear; it's listening to our constituents and bringing their views back to this place. This is where the voice of constituents is heard.

You cannot communicate with the public by bypassing the voices of the elected representative. It's only through elected representatives that every citizen gets the right to have their views heard. That's why this has to be a place for debate. It has to be a place where dissent is allowed.

I'm not going to argue that there don't have to be changes to the democratic process and the way we run the Legislature. Obviously I feel that, after the changes of the last eight years. I have believed from the time I came into this place that we need to have more opportunity for true dissent in the Legislature. I sat as part of a caucus of

93 people, and we put our hands up to vote for government legislation on almost every issue. There's no way 93 of us felt the same way on every issue. I've argued for a long time that there should be a place where the diversity of views of the Ontario public is recognized. I don't think there's any loss of power for the governing party or for any leader if you allow dissent to be recognized. That's true communication. We are representatives of a large province with very diverse views, so we do need more true, free votes, as a Dalton McGuinty government would provide for.

What I feel saddest about tonight, approaching almost the end of not only my speaking time but the time of my service in the Ontario Legislature, is that instead of seeing more freedom for the expression of dissent, more opportunity for real debate, more opportunity for every member to effectively voice the views of their constituents and effect change through true deliberations on the legislation that's presented here, instead of that, we have seen such a limitation on hearing the voices of individual elected members. It would be very sad after 700 years to lose the parliamentary democracy.

Mrs Margaret Marland (Mississauga South): I would just like to say at the outset that I do commend the service of the member for Thunder Bay-Atikokan. She has given totally dedicated, committed service, I believe, to her constituents. I've been privileged to be here during her entire service to her community and indeed to her party, both in government and opposition. I believe this member has served this chamber and her constituents well.

Although I appreciate there are only about four minutes left this afternoon, I would just like to say a few words on this subject. I really wish, first of all, that it was possible in some ways for all of us to look at ourselves individually on absolutely every subject that comes before this chamber. All of us don't always have that opportunity and sometimes—I know, believe me, because I served in opposition for 10 years, and for eight years I've been privileged to serve on the government side of the House. I think in the combination of both of those roles, I've learned to recognize what is deliberate and what intentions are. It certainly was never the intention in any way at all, nor was it deliberate, that this government would do anything but the best for the people of Ontario.

The best is presented in the budget itself. The best is all of the things—and I wish there was time for me to highlight some of the things in this budget that we could be debating at this point. We could, in fact, talk about the important things in this budget that affect people's everyday lives in this province. Instead, we are discussing a process. Ironically, in that process over the last three days, I have seen a deterioration of respect for each other in this chamber.

Mr Sorbara (Vaughan-King-Aurora): No, no.

Mrs Marland: If something really upsets me, it's when we lose respect for each other, I say to the president of the Ontario Liberal Party, who is now heckling,

The most important thing is that we recognize we all have a role to play in this Parliament. We are elected to represent the interests of our people. The people who elect us expect us to come here and serve with dignity and pride in the opportunity of service. When we lose that respect for each other within this chamber, wherever we sit, we lose respect for the institution of Parliament, and we certainly lose respect for ourselves.

To try to say there was an intent for anything other than informing the public about the intentions of our government as it pertained to the budget, I personally feel very strongly that was wrong. To try to say that we had anything but the best intentions—you've heard the

arguments that the budget was tabled in the Legislature. You've heard that there was the usual lock-up, there was all the usual access to the content of the budget that there has been, I may say, in every year except one, since I've been here, and that one year was not when the Conservatives were the government.

When I think about what we could be talking about in this chamber in terms of the announcements of funding for children—

The Acting Speaker: Thank you. Please sit down. It being past 6 of the clock, this House stands adjourned until 1:30 of the clock tomorrow afternoon.

The House adjourned at 1801.

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