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of Ontario
Fourth Session, 37th Parliament

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**Official Report
of Debates
(Hansard)**

**Journal
des débats
(Hansard)**

Monday 16 June 2003

Lundi 16 juin 2003

Speaker
Honourable Gary Carr

Président
L'honorable Gary Carr

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO

Monday 16 June 2003

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO

Lundi 16 juin 2003

The House met at 1845.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

THE RIGHT CHOICES FOR
EQUITY IN EDUCATION ACT
(BUDGET MEASURES), 2003

LOI DE 2003
SUR LES BONS CHOIX POUR L'ÉQUITÉ
EN MATIÈRE D'ÉDUCATION
(MESURES BUDGÉTAIRES)

Resuming the debate adjourned on June 12, 2003, on the motion for second reading of Bill 53, An Act respecting the equity in education tax credit / Projet de loi 53, Loi concernant le crédit d'impôt pour l'équité en matière d'éducation.

The Acting Speaker (Mr David Christopherson): It's my understanding that the member for Trinity-Spadina is in the midst of the leadoff debate for the third party. Please continue.

Mr Rosario Marchese (Trinity-Spadina): It is a pleasure again to have the floor to speak on An Act respecting the equity in education tax credit. It is a pleasure to have 30 minutes to beat up on the Conservatives. It's something that is good to do; it makes me feel good to do it.

I am certain there are people watching today who love to watch a member beat up on the Conservatives in the way they would like to beat you up if they had the opportunity to be here. That's what I think.

I'm sure there are loads of those people out there saying, "How do I get in this place to have the opportunity to attack the Tories day in and day out?" They have to live vicariously through some of the members on this side who have the opportunity from time to time to do that and enjoy it at the same time.

I do like it because today, June 16, we are on live in this political forum at 6:45, debating An Act respecting the equity in education tax credit. We do not have today, because it's not his night to be here, the Minister of Enterprise, Opportunity and Innovation, who is the original author of this bill. He was here when I was debating Thursday night. I've got to say to you he is very proud of the initiative he took, which he handed over to the now-Minister of Finance and then-Minister of Education, who

clearly was unhappy at the time, that I could discern, but you wouldn't notice it.

Mr Marcel Beaubien (Lambton-Kent-Middlesex): It's only hearsay.

Mr Marchese: It's only hearsay; you're quite right.

You wouldn't notice it, because the now-Minister of Finance quite comfortably and happily took on the issue of the tax credit and has continued with the work that Monsieur Flaherty introduced. So they seem like a pair of happy people. They sit beside each other, quite happy to support the initiative, one and the other.

1850

But I've got to tell you good folks watching that there's nothing that has anything to do with equity when we're talking about giving your tax money away to private schools that neither need nor want your help. There are a great many private schools such as Upper Canada College, the example I use so very often, where the tuition fees are now \$16,000 a year. I'm not quite sure I understand the meaning of Monsieur Flaherty, when he talks about equity, or Madame Ecker, when she talks about An Act respecting the equity in education tax credit. What equity do they bestow onto the public by giving away your money to parents who send their kids to places like Upper Canada College, where the tuition fee, just to go to school, is 16,000 bucks?

I'm not quite sure what the minister has in mind. It's possible that he, in his omnipotence, has a greater facility and skill in understanding things than the rest of us, but I do not see the connection between giving my money—your money—away to rich folks who send their kids to Upper Canada College at \$16,000 a pop. I don't see it. What equity does it give to that child who is subsidized by their parents, and who now is subsidized by me, when the real help that is needed is not for that young person going to Upper Canada College. The real help that's needed is in our downtown core, where we have inner-city needs in Toronto, as we would in Hamilton, as we would in Windsor, as we would in any city in Ontario.

Where equity is desperately needed is where kids come from poor homes and cannot break the cycle of poverty, and where kids come from troubled homes where there might be sexual abuse, where there might be alcohol abuse, where there might be psychological abuse. Those are the kids who desperately need our help, who desperately need a compensatory educational system to deal with the problems and troubles they face day in and day out. I just don't see, for the life of me, a kid going to Upper Canada College, where the parents can afford to

pay 16,000 bucks, who would need my taxpayer's money and your taxpayer's money to fund them to achieve what? Equity? Because they choose to send their children to private schools, you and I have to pay for that choice?

Monsieur Flaherty and Madame Ecker have no problem saying, "Well, if they choose to send them wherever they send them, we have a duty and a responsibility to treat them equitably." I'm sorry, Madame Ecker and Monsieur Flaherty, but the public doesn't agree with you. The public does not believe that rich people should be subsidized to send their children to a very, very private school, where the intent of those who have money is not to mix their kids in our public system but to get them as far as they can from the public system and put them in a private system where they are mixing and mingling with other kids whose parents are rich like them. That's the point of a private school. That's the point of private. It's not choice; it's the point of private. They send them to a private school because they can, because they don't need my money and they don't want my money. But you, Flaherty, and you, Ecker, have chosen to send our money away to individuals who neither need nor want our money.

Taxpayers, you ought to be seriously worried about what this government is doing. It's taking \$120 million away from last year and this year to subsidize, by and large, non-denominational schools and, yes, denominational schools, but the bulk of your money is going to non-denominational schools. Is that really what you wanted this government to do: take \$120 million from last year and this year out of our pockets to give away just like that, with no accountability whatsoever? Taxpayers, there is no accountability here.

I read to you last week, on Thursday, that Madame Ecker says, "I believe that one of the most important tasks of any government is to provide a strong public education system for our children.... We have set higher standards through more rigorous curriculum, and we have implemented standardized testing so we can ensure our children are learning what they need to achieve their potential to succeed. We've created report cards that parents can understand. We've established standards for the professional development and performance appraisal of teachers in the classroom."

They don't have standards for the professional development of teachers in the private system. Why not? If they can take, so far, \$120 million of our money, why would we not make those private school teachers as accountable as we do our public school teachers? Why not? They receive public dollars. Do you expect any less? We should give our money away without any accountability. That's how this government sees it. How do you explain that? Surely, those of you watching who like the Conservative Party must be calling these people and asking, "Why are you doing that?"

Taxpayers and citizens, they also require that we have standardized testing for our students, but the children in the private system don't have to write standardized tests. All they require, because of the push by critics and other

parents, is that private schools tell parents what assessment tools they're using. The only measure of accountability is that parents be told that some assessment is going on. But there's no requirement that the assessments we use in the public system be the same, and ought to be the same, if you get public dollars from the private system. Why not?

How can you, Ecker and Flaherty, give away our money and say, "We've introduced tough standards for the public system, but for the private system we don't have to do that"? Why? Because rich private little boys and girls are better than the rest of us? They don't need to be surveyed, they don't need to be assessed, tested provincially like the others? Why? Is it that rich people are able to transcend the laws or the regular rules that apply to the rest of us? But they're entitled under Madame Ecker's rules to get my money and yours.

Something isn't right. Something is profoundly, politically stupid when governments can take your money out of your pocket and give it away to the rich. Just like they did with the income tax cuts they made to individuals and corporations, just like the Americans have done under Reagan and are now doing under Bush, taking trillions of dollars out of their government pockets in America to be able to deal with issues of social policy as it relates to their 270 million bucks, they're taking billions and billions of dollars away, where 20% of the American public get 70% of the billions, if not close to a trillion, in tax cuts—20%.

1900

We know there are 25 million in America who do not have any health insurance whatsoever. They proudly, here, argue in the same way that giving our tax money to the rich is OK because they pay for themselves. No, they don't. We pay for it. We, the little people, the ordinary folk, pay for that. The rich people take the money the Tories give them and run. The federal Liberals did the same at the national level, where they gave \$100 billion away in income tax cuts. We all know that those who benefit are the wealthy, not the little guys at the bottom. You, taxpayers, are giving away your money. You don't even know where it's going, but it's going out of here in buckets every day.

Next year, Joe Spina is going to be happy to give away another \$120 million. The Minister of Labour, the following year, will be happy to give away another \$120 million.

Hon Brad Clark (Minister of Labour): The Minister of Labour?

Mr Marchese: Are you not the Minister of Labour? The Minister of Labour, last year, gave away \$60 million; this year he's giving away \$60 million; next year he's going to give away another \$60 million if he gets elected—God bless, I hope not—and the year after another \$60 million going out of our pockets. Our pockets. They're just willing year after year to give away yet another \$60 million at a time. The Minister of Labour will entertain us with his comments soon, so we can hear from him and his ability to, with great discernment,

explain to you, taxpayers, why he's giving away your money. I look forward to his two minutes, if not more.

What can I say? We have a public system that's starving for money. Dr Rozanski said we need to restore two billion bucks.

Mr Beaubien: He's leaving, by the way. He's gone.

Mr Marchese: He's leaving, yes. God bless him too.

He said, when he did his report, we are \$2 billion short. Mr Eves still claims that he rolled more money into our public system than any other government. Most members nod. Ministers and others nod like penguins. They will nod at anything the Premier will tell them. Dr Rozanski told them they were \$2 billion short. If he said that we're \$2 billion short, you cannot say, Norm, that you gave more money, when Dr Rozanski said we have to put it back.

Interjections.

Mr Marchese: Where did it go?

Hon Norman W. Sterling (Attorney General, minister responsible for native affairs): It's going to increased services for our students, services that weren't there before.

Mr Marchese: Yes. Minister Sterling, the Attorney General, says it's going to services somewhere, but we're not seeing it. Here's what you did, Norm. Let me explain. You will have an opportunity to—

Hon Mr Sterling: Don't patronize me now.

Mr Marchese: No, no, no. I wouldn't want to do that. You put \$325 million or so—

Interjection.

Mr Marchese: Brad, hold on.

—some \$320 million or so for the line item that goes into negotiations with teachers and boards. You may or may not know—I suspect you don't; not to patronize you or anything—the Ontario Public School Trustees' Association says that line item that you responded to that Rozanski told you was underfunded—you guys gave \$320 million; the public school trustees' association, says on that line item you're \$900 million short. You put \$300 million; you're still short. That's fine.

But you put some money back, so you feel good and you're able to tell the public, "Oh God, we did that. Then we put \$225 million in special ed," because Rozanski told you—not because it's underfunded or anything. No, no, no, no. Not because you guys cut back all these years. No, no, no. It's just that Rozanski said you should put some money back and so you did. You also put in some money for transportation, all of which amounts to, more or less, \$600 and some-odd million.

Then you made some other announcement to deal with at-risk students, \$50 million or so just about a month ago, when you knew students were failing, when you collapsed grade 13 and now we have four years of high school and not five, and you introduced a new curriculum to make it tougher, as you say, so many students collapsed now into two streams and not three and would suffer because of those curriculum changes. You knew four years ago you would have those problems. Under pressure—and from Rozanski—you said, "We'd better

put in some money to deal with students at risk," when we knew for so long that students were at risk, and you did nothing. So what you have not put in—according to Hugh Mackenzie, an economist that you all deride—is that we are short by \$1.4 billion this year of the money that should be refunded to the school system that you robbed for so many years.

You do not deal with the issue of inflation at all. You do not deal with the issue of benchmarks that have been deliberately set low since 1997. So you are deliberately starving a system desperate for money, including keeping supervisors in Toronto, Hamilton and Ottawa when we do not need to keep those supervisors in place. They are political placements. They are designed to keep school boards silent because they've criticized you for too long because of the underfunding. You've decided to keep them there, even though Rozanski told you that the boards could deal with many of their problems by doing but one of those recommendations: giving each board across Ontario 5% of the foundation grant so they would have the flexibility to respond to their own needs. Implementing just one of those recommendations would free up the Toronto, Ottawa and Hamilton boards of politically appointed supervisors, who are Tories all, designed to stay there to keep boards silent.

Hon Mr Clark: Hogwash.

Mr Marchese: Just the one recommendation, Brad, that you are not aware of. I can tell you're not aware of it, and you ought to be, because I've just given it to you. Just that one recommendation—should you decide to be listening, and you probably have because you said "Hogwash" to what I'm saying—would give the Toronto board alone—

Interjection.

Mr Marchese: No, listen to me, Brad. Forget the book. You can't read while I'm speaking.

The Toronto board alone would have \$125 million. With that money, Brad, we wouldn't need Christie, who was the former campaign manager of Chris Stockwell, to be there, sucking taxpayers' money out of our pockets and bleeding the system and letting go people that we desperately need—just that one recommendation. That one recommendation will prevent Christie, the Conservative appointment and former Conservative city councillor, from taking away people we desperately need to stay in our schools. And who are threatened by the Christie-Tory cuts at the Toronto board? That highly paid now-servant of the Conservative government is going to let go educational assistants and fire more vice-principals, lunchroom supervisors and caretakers. These are the eyes and ears of school safety, and for the last seven years you've been taking them out. Christie plans to cut some more.

These are the eyes and ears of school safety. In my questions to the minister, she refuses to acknowledge that these people are very important, given the current rash of incidents that we've been experiencing in some of our schools where so many kids are threatened by intruders, and threatened in a way that only a parent could under-

stand. But even non-parents would feel it, when kids are approached by intruders, predators who could, just like that, take some kid away.

Mr Bill Murdoch (Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound): We don't have it that bad up in our riding.

Mr Marchese: We have them everywhere, Bill. These people are everywhere. But if we had those caretakers back, and lunchroom supervisors, ed assistants and vice-principals and principals, in some cases, there would be yet more eyes to keep an eye on who's coming in and who's going out. One parent wrote to me—

1910

Mr Murdoch: How much money would you put back in?

Mr Marchese: I will tell you how much we would put in, Bill from Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound. What matters is what you took out and what you're unwilling to put in. Bill, that's what matters. Rozanski has told us what you should be putting in, and you are unwilling to put money back.

One parent wrote to me, saying—

Interjection.

Mr Marchese: Hold on, Bill. Quiet down. Listen to this.

Sarah D. wrote to thank me for the remarks I make in this House from time to time. "The recent spate of attempted child abductions have made me increasingly aware of these cuts in staffing at my children's school. With a reduced number of assistants, custodial staff and lunchroom and schoolyard supervisors, I am no longer confident that there are enough adults at the school to keep the children safe from this very real threat," Bill.

"But I do not want a police presence at our schools. I want to see staff who are part of our school and greater community and who therefore know who belongs in our school and who may pose a threat. We had such a community but it has been relentlessly eroded in the past several years." It's not just me saying that, Bill. It's regular people out there: parents in the schools.

"Please continue to urge the government to return funding to our schools," and in parentheses she says, "(and, no, Mr Eves, you haven't done so, not in Toronto at any rate). Our children deserve a safe environment in which to learn and to thrive, and we parents deserve the peace of mind of knowing that our schools are providing our children with what they need."

You've taken millions out of our educational system. We now have community use of schools that has dropped to levels never seen before. Girls Scouts, Boy Scouts, and activities such as basketball and other games that people play in our schools, no longer can afford the rates schools are charging because of the downloading. Because of the stealing of money from school boards, which you now control, our schools are unable to rent out space at rates that are affordable to just ordinary people out there who desperately need to use our gyms.

We have less money for English-as-a-second programs. We have had cuts in educational assistants unlike we've ever seen before, cuts in caretakers unlike we've

ever seen before, cuts in social workers, cuts to the youth counsellors we have in Toronto who keep kids in, so they don't drop out of school and cause harm to themselves and to society. The social and economic costs to us are not measurable, Bill. They're not.

Christie, your instrument fired all of the youth counsellors who deal with students at risk. These are the people we need to hold in our system and not let them go. Christie said, "Well, it's not classroom-related so we can let them go." This is your buddy, Chris's buddy, a Tory like you taking essential people and programs out of our educational system. You understand, Bill. You did this, not me. You did it.

It's not a question of how much you would put back; it's what you've taken out and the social and economic costs that has.

Mr Murdoch: Were you here in 1990?

Mr Marchese: I was here, Bill.

Mr Murdoch:—all that money you wasted.

Mr Marchese: Oh, the money you waste. Bill Murdoch, my good buddy since 1990, the member from Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound, yapping away like a little puppy at the other end, is saying, "What did you do in 1990?" I'm telling you, taxpayers, that if you'd had Bill, the member from Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound, and others of his ilk in government in 1990, you would not recognize this province. Some of you don't recognize this province today, with a good economy. Do you think you would have recognized Ontario if the Tories had been in government in 1991-93?

Bill laughs. The member from Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound laughs. He laughs heartily. They cut our health care system unrecognizably. This is the government that gave you Walkerton, courtesy of the Conservative government. That's the kind of environment and the legacy they left you. This is the government that's giving you a hydro legacy where when the Tories were here they would say, "Look at the legacy we're leaving our kids with, a debt," and today, \$1.5 billion, but because some of it is already subsidized by another company, about \$600 million is just put aside as a debt to your children. They don't speak of the debt and the legacy they leave our children—your children and mine. But in our time, did they talk about, "Oh, the legacy the NDP is leaving."

This is the legacy they leave you in good economic times: we have a social service climate that has been eaten to the bone; we have a home care system where people can't get the services they need; we have kids who are autistic, now more than ever, and the minister brags about all she has done. What has she done? Day in and day out we hear cases of autistic students who cannot access services, and the minister just stands up saying, "We're giving more than ever before." I can't believe it. It's painful, really painful.

Mr Murdoch: Fifty billion dollars of debt.

Mr Marchese: Billy, Billy, I'm telling you, it's painful. And it isn't just painful to me, who can see these things, but the public sees it, Billy, the public sees right through you. I don't know how you're going to get elect-

ed this time. I've got to tell you, you've got to continue being a maverick out there, because you're not here. You've got to be a maverick out there and tell the public how much you stand for yourself and not the government. Billy from Bruce-Grey has no problem defending the government in here, but when you read quotes from Billy out there, he's a real maverick, attacking Harris formerly and now Eves. Oh, yeah, Bill, I'm looking forward to the results in Bruce-Grey.

I'm telling you, good citizens, if you think this government is going to get elected and is going to give you a balanced budget, you're dreaming. It's not there. If this government gets re-elected, God forbid, you're going to see that services that weren't devastated before will be non-existent. There is no money. They are bankrupt, you understand. They are bankrupt, and they're giving \$120 million to achieve what they call An Act respecting the equity in education tax credit, taking your money to give it away to the wealthy, money they do not have, money I do not willingly give away, money I know you don't want to give away to rich boys and girls and rich parents who don't want my help—\$120 million. Imagine what we could do with that money.

Interjections.

Mr Marchese: They laugh. But it doesn't bother me that they laugh, because my view is that you, discerning public, see it all and see through each and every one of these Tories. My view is that you are tired of this government, you are exhausted with these members. I do not think you'll tolerate them for another term. I do not believe it.

New Democrats oppose this so-called equity bill. It's not equity; it's a disaster for Ontario.

The Acting Speaker: Members now have up to two minutes for questions and comments.

Hon Mr Clark: The member has unmitigated gall. I will give him that.

This bill is all about providing equity. In 1999, when I was elected, one of the first issues in my riding that came into my constituency office was a group of parents who were concerned that there was funding for Catholic schools but no funding for Dutch Reformed schools; there was funding for Catholic schools but not for Muslim schools. They saw that as an inequity. I soon found out that they had actually gone so far as to challenge that inequity all the way to the United Nations. The United Nations stated that this definitely was an inequity.

The government was faced with a problem: to rectify that inequity, you could fund all the schools, or you could come up with a more innovative approach. We chose the more innovative approach, one that's more cost-effective, one that's more efficient but is fair, compassionate and equitable.

1920

What it does is provide tax credits to parents who are putting their children in a Muslim school or a Jewish private school or a Dutch Reformed private school, whatever the case. It's about equity. These are the same parents who are paying upwards of \$7,500 in taxes out of

their pockets annually for the public system to which their children don't go. So an equitable proposal was put together: the tax credit for education.

It's not about funding private schools. The member opposite would loudly and bombastically try to convince the public that we're giving money to private schools; we're not. It's about tax credits for parents whose children are going to these schools.

The interesting thing is that there are members on the opposite side of the House who have clearly supported this, but they've been silenced by the leader of the loyal opposition.

Interjection: Muzzled.

Hon Mr Clark: They've been muzzled; they've been told, "Don't speak out." It's all about equity and fairness.

Ms Caroline Di Cocco (Sarnia-Lambton): I have a draft submission that the Ontario government made in 1998 to the United Nations. In that submission, they made a compelling argument for not extending full and direct educational funding. It said, "reasonable and objective grounds"—

Interjection.

Ms Di Cocco: It doesn't matter.

Hon Mr Clark: It does matter.

Ms Di Cocco: February 18, 1998. It says this:

"The state party"—which is Ontario—"emphasized that to extend this partial or indirect funding to become full and direct funding" for "private religious schools would undermine the ability of public schools to build social cohesion, tolerance and understanding. When diverse populations separate themselves from the general mix, the public system is the poorer because the opportunities for understanding and accommodating differences are diminished."

It also goes on to say, and this is the government's own paper on this, that this "would result in the disruption and fragmentation of education in Ontario ... The benefits that Ontario receives from a public education system which promotes the values of pluralism, multiculturalism and understanding, would be diminished."

It also says it "would compound the problems of religious coercion and ostracism sometimes faced by minority religious groups."

I go on to (d): "would undermine the goal of universal access to education as many religious schools restrict admission, and staff hiring."

Again it goes on. It says, "would have negative fiscal impacts as there would be a marked increase in the duplication of services and capital costs."

The Acting Speaker: Thank you. The member for Beaches-East—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker: Take a seat, please. There are a couple of members on the government side who persist, even after I asked nicely for them to please come to order. I'm getting down to the final strokes. I have not yet in two years had to ask anybody to leave the chamber to keep the House in order. I'd love to finish my term without having to do that. Please don't ruin my record. If

I ask you to come to order, please do so. Sorry for the delay, the member for Beaches-East York.

Mr Michael Prue (Beaches-East York): It's always a pleasure to speak of the speeches of the member for Trinity-Spadina. He's so eloquent and so animated when he speaks.

I tell you, in all of that there was a simple grain of truth, a simple grain that cannot be lost, and that was that a private school is a private school. That's not really all that enormous. Anyone should understand that. A private school is not for the public. A private school is to separate your children from other children. A private school is to send the rich to one school, the Muslims to another school, the Jewish community to a third school, and the Hindus or the Buddhists or whoever—the Dutch Reformed—to yet another and another and another school. It is not to allow our children to be together. It is not to allow our children to know each other. It is not to allow our children what is the glory of this city, of this province and of this country.

At the same time, another truth was said, and that is about the public school system, how it is being hammered. In this city, we do not have trustees—

Interjection.

Mr Prue: I'm always shocked at you, Marilyn.

We do not have trustees who have any authority left. We have a supervisor who has been imposed. That supervisor is doing irreparable harm to the school system of this city, of Hamilton and of Ottawa. They are taking the monies that were meant for our children. They are taking the positions of the people who care for children in the public system, and they are literally throwing it away.

All I can say is that this bill is a disgrace to the memory of Egerton Ryerson and every single public education minister down to this day.

Mr Murdoch: I find it really bizarre in here tonight that we're being lectured about finances from the NDP. That is really bizarre. We had them for five years here. You put us \$50 billion in debt. He mentioned about how you wouldn't know Ontario if we hadn't been in. Yes, we wouldn't have had to go through all the pains that we had to go through after inheriting a government that put us \$50 billion more in debt. That was just total disgrace, and they can come in here tonight and lecture us on this, and then twist the facts around. It's not taking \$120 million out of public education; it's a tax credit. They can't seem to understand that on the other side, I guess. They just don't understand that.

I'm really in support of this bill because I happen to have a private member's bill that said the same thing. I'm pleased that the government has adopted this bill to do this. You talk about your private schools. Yes, but this is about the choice. Parents have a choice. These people do pay taxes, and now they have a choice. It's a tax credit. We're not taking money out. I don't know. I guess trying to get that point across to a party that put us \$50 billion in debt—how would you ever be able to do that? How would you get that across to them?

It is a bizarre time to be lectured by the NDP in this House about finances. They don't understand finances. They put this country almost under. You talk about where we'd be. Well, it's just lucky that we did get elected in 1995 and again in 1999. You said people saw through that; well, I think they agreed with us. We were elected both those years after the disastrous years we had with you and the Liberals.

The Acting Speaker: The member for Trinity-Spadina has up to two minutes to respond.

Mr Marchese: If the member from Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound was in power in 1990, the services that you now see devastated you would not have recognized in 1990-91. There would have been no services for the aged. There would have been very few services for the poor and disadvantaged. There would have been nothing. If they could devastate our economy, and if they could hurt us in good economic times, imagine what they would do, what they would've done, what they would do in bad times.

Poor kids do not have a choice to go to private schools. Rich kids do. Rich parents send kids to private schools.

Interjection.

Mr Marchese: I don't know why Bill has a hell of a time understanding that. Rich parents send their kids to private schools.

Yes, Brad, this is about funding private schools. I don't know what you're thinking, but this is what it's about. When you give money to parents to send their kids to private schools, you're supporting private schools. Brad, I'm sorry. I don't know what logic you're using, but one and two are three.

Hon Mr Clark: You're wrong.

Mr Marchese: Count it, Brad.

I'll conclude with this by parent, Cathy Hunt, who says:

"The anticipated elimination of the role of lunchroom supervisors, outdoor education residential visits, the loss of 12 more principals and vice-principals, the suspension of our world-renowned parent centres and programs, further reductions to kindergarten education assistants and near elimination of curriculum instructional leaders are only among the list that leaves my mind reeling in disbelief"—in Toronto.

"The money for these programs is in your pocket, Mr Premier. You simply need to reorganize your priorities. For example: you must not give a tax credit to those who freely choose to attend private schools as they are in an economic position to do so.

"A properly funded public education system provides a safe, vibrant, diverse and educated population which secures a promising future for us all. That is the kind of province/country I choose to live in and want for seven generations into the future."

The Acting Speaker: Just before I go to the next speaker, may I just remind members that the rules do require that other members are referred to by their ridings. I understand, from time to time, the odd first

name adds a human touch to the debate, but consistently is really not the way we do business here. I just bring that to the attention of all members and, with that, call for further debate and recognize the member for Perth-Middlesex.

1930

Mr Bert Johnson (Perth-Middlesex): I'm pleased to rise in support of The Right Choices for Equity in Education Act, and I just happen to have a copy of it here. It's short. I won't read it, but it's one page. I would have thought the official opposition, members of the Liberal caucus, would have commented on that, because I have heard them on numerous occasions complain, whine, whatever, on bills when there are several different subjects put into one bill. You would think it was a terrible sin and an awful strategy to do that. What I'm suggesting is, they have no hesitation in complaining and whining, but when it comes time and something is done right—and this is done right and is laid out in a very short, concise form—I don't hear a thing about it. I guess they will say it is not their business to compliment when something—but I think it deserves to be said.

In actual fact, the reason it can be short is, it's an amendment to the Income Tax Act that authorizes the scheduling of the implementation of the credit over five years, going from 10% to 50%. I think that is fiscally responsible and implements the kind of credit for people who send their kids to these schools that allows them—we all know they pay their full share of public school taxes and don't send their kids there, so this gives them a little bit of credit for that apparent inequity.

The 2001 throne speech promised parents in Ontario flexibility and choice in the education of their children. I'm pleased to speak out for such choice on behalf of parents who send their children to the six independent schools in my great riding of Perth-Middlesex. I would hasten to add that those are in addition to the Amish and Mennonite schools that are quite prevalent in some parts, particularly in Perth county.

The Right Choices for Equity in Education Act would assist parents who want more choice for their children's education, including the choice to send their children to schools that offer their religion, culture and values.

Bill 53 speaks to many crucial aspects of life in Ontario, but it speaks first and foremost to education as a key priority for the government. We want every child in Ontario to gain the skills and knowledge he or she needs to reach their full potential and achieve personal success. We want every child in Ontario to have equal access to learning and opportunities, no matter where they live in the province. We want to set every child on the path to becoming a self-confident and contributing adult who will help enhance Ontario's prosperity and competitiveness in the years to come.

The Right Choices for Equity in Education Act adds to this commitment. It not only provides accessibility to the kind of education parents believe responds to their and their children's needs, it also provides choice. The equity

in education tax credit supports parental choice in education.

In my riding, parents can choose the great public schools of the Avon Maitland or Thames Valley District School Boards or the Catholic schools run by the Huron-Perth Catholic District School Board or the London District Catholic School Board, or they can choose schools like Brookside Christian School in Listowel, the Stratford Montessori School or the Sebringville Christian School.

For 2002, the tax credit reimbursed 10% of the first \$7,000 of tuition fees for a maximum tax credit of \$700 per child, and 10% of the first \$3,500 of tuition fees for a child of kindergarten age for a maximum tax credit of \$350. If the Legislature approves this bill, the tax credit rate will rise to a maximum of \$1,400 or 20% per child for 2003, 30% for 2004, 40% for 2005 and 50% for the year 2006 and beyond.

The equity in education tax credit does not remove funding from public education. It doesn't remove one red cent from public education. In 1995, when we took office, education funding stood at \$12.9 billion. The government has increased funding for the education system every year. I recall standing in the Legislature, in late 1995, or possibly 1996 or even 1997, and telling the people in my riding that, yes, we would cut funding to schools but it would not include classrooms. So yes, there were savings that had to be made. We said we would not cut one cent from health care, and we didn't, and that we would make savings in non-classroom spending in education. With the enhancements announced in the 2003 budget, education funding for the upcoming 2003-04 school year, including direct provincial transfers and education property taxes stands at a record \$15.3 billion, the highest level of education funding in Ontario's history.

All four boards that serve students in my riding are receiving increased funding next year, despite declining enrolment. The Avon Maitland District School Board will receive funding of \$135 million, an increase of 5.5% over the current year, while enrolment is projected to drop 3.8%. The Thames Valley District School Board will receive \$580 million, an increase of 6.2% more than the current year, while enrolment is expected to fall 1.8%. The Huron-Perth Catholic District School Board will receive \$39.5 million, an increase of 9%, despite a projected decrease in enrolment of 1.9%. The London Catholic District School Board will receive \$158 million, an increase of 6.8%, despite a projected drop in enrolment of 1.3%.

The projected base target for school boards for the 2005-06 school year will be almost \$2 billion, or 14% higher than the 2002-03 education funding level announced in last year's budget. This will enable the education system to focus on what every parent wants: improved learning and higher achievement for students.

The honourable members will recall that our government appointed Dr Mordechai Rozanski to chair the Education Equality Task Force to review the student-

focused funding formula implemented in 1998. The purpose of the student-focused funding is to ensure quality education and equality of opportunity for all students, no matter where they live in the province of Ontario.

As part of his review, Dr Rozanski examined past studies and reports on education funding and researched best practices. He met with education stakeholder groups, conducted public meetings, and the task force accepted submissions by mail and through his Web site. We received his final report last December and the report confirmed that our education funding reforms are sound. It also provided the government with immediate and long-term recommendations on how we could build on the strengths of the student-focused funding formula. Our government considers the Rozanski report an excellent blueprint for the future and we are implementing the report over three years, as Dr Rozanski recommended.

In fact, within three days of receiving the report, our government committed \$610 million in new funding to special education, teachers' salaries and student transportation. We announced \$250 million for teachers, education assistants and other specialists for students with special needs. We announced \$340 million to give school boards the flexibility to reach fair and responsible collective agreements with their teachers and staff for the 2002-03 school year. We announced the board-by-board allocation of \$20 million to enhance the safety and efficiency of the student transportation system.

1940

Our government responded to other Rozanski recommendations in subsequent weeks. We announced that \$66 million more over three years would be invested in computers for the classroom, up-to-date textbooks and other learning materials. We believe that students need resources like textbooks, computers and other classroom supplies, which will help them reach their full potential in school. We announced the \$50 million GOALS strategy to benefit students who need extra funding in reading, writing and math for the transition to the workplace or to college or university. We also announced that \$75 million more would go toward renovating and replacing existing schools. At the same time, we announced \$74 million to help small rural and northern schools and to address the issue of declining enrolment. Some \$50 million of that total is going to a new rural education strategy. Dr James Downey, former president of the University of Waterloo, has since been appointed to provide the government with recommendations on the development of the \$50-million strategy to help small rural and northern schools.

As a side note, I had the opportunity of meeting with Dr Downey last Thursday morning, and I was impressed with his ideas and his direction on the task that is before him. We look forward to receiving his recommendations so that action can be taken before the start of the next school year.

Dr Downey has met with the stakeholders from across rural and northern Ontario to help him formulate his recommendations. Our government is committed to en-

suring that all students have equal access to a quality education across the province. Dr Downey's report will help us ensure that students in rural and northern schools are provided with the best education opportunities possible.

By the time the Ontario budget was presented on March 27, our government had committed \$875 million more toward Ontario's public education system, based on the recommendations of Dr Rozanski. The budget itself responded to another central recommendation. Our multi-year funding approach commits the government to an increase of almost \$2 billion in the base funding target for education by 2005-06, compared to the funding announcements in last year's budget for the 2002-03 school year. We are on track to meet and exceed Dr Rozanski's recommendation that funding increase by \$1.8 billion over three years. In this upcoming 2003-04 school year, we will invest a record \$15.3 billion in Ontario's education system. This represents an increase of more than \$1 billion, or almost 8% more than the funding announced last May, while enrolment is projected to be 2% lower.

Our government is clearly focusing the education system on where it must be: improved student learning. We remain committed to a province-wide standardized curriculum for every grade, from kindergarten through the elementary grades and into high school, in response to parents' demands for a curriculum that is clear, consistent, and describes in detail what students should learn in each grade.

We also recognize the enormous contribution of Ontario's dedicated and capable teachers, and have implemented several initiatives to support teaching excellence. Among those currently in place is the professional learning program, which requires all certified teachers in Ontario to successfully complete 14 professional learning courses over five-year cycles to maintain their teaching certificate with the Ontario College of Teachers. In April of this year, more than 8,500 prospective teachers wrote the first Ontario teacher qualifying test, and 97% passed. Those who were unsuccessful will be able to increase their skills and will be eligible to rewrite in a future test. Parents want to be assured that teachers have the most up-to-date and skills and knowledge when they stand at the head of the class.

We support parental choice in education with the equity in education tax credit. Parents want the option to choose schools that are appropriate for their children's needs or offer a curriculum they desire. The equity in education tax credit provides our parents with a choice in the education of their children and greater certainty in making decisions about their future. It will increase accountability in the school system and lead to improvements in the quality of our education system and student performance.

Our government's support for equity and choice in education would provide the students with the added tools they need to succeed. The Right Choices for Equity in Education Act reinforces our commitment to help the

students of Ontario achieve success. It recognizes the fact that the right choices for one family or one child may not be the right choices for another, and hopefully makes it easier for parents to make the right choices for their own children.

Before I conclude, I want to ask a rhetorical question of the people listening tonight on the very complex Liberal platform to cancel all the tax credits. Where I come from, if you don't give a credit in taxes and you stop it, then that's a tax increase. If it's not, I want somebody from the Liberal caucus to stand up and explain to me how you're going to take more money out of somebody's pocket and not give them the tax credit.

I'm awfully glad that our party has decided to give the parents of the children in these schools some help, in some cases badly needed help. Because they are so committed to the school of their choice and the influence they can exert in that school as parents, which they cannot in either of the public school systems, they are willing to make the sacrifice. They are willing to contribute their \$7,000 per student for every student in Ontario. They are willing to do that, including their own kids, who will benefit from it. They have asked and are being given that tax incentive to send their children to the school of their choice, which they have an influence over and which they are convinced will give their children the kind of education they want and expect. So I'm wondering how someone is going to take away that tax credit without calling it a tax increase.

If I were going to comment on one other thing, I'm glad that our government has not promised that all 17-year-old and 18-year-old kids—that it will be compulsory, that they will be made to go to one of the public school systems.

I'm awfully proud to be able to stand up tonight and make my comments on The Right Choices for Equity in Education Act. I conclude my remarks now and I welcome questions or comments.

The Acting Speaker: Members now have up to two minutes for questions and comments.

Ms Di Cocco: I have to say that when I listen to the rhetoric and the justification for why we're going to take public dollars and put them into private schools when we cannot afford it, first of all, and second, when it goes against good public policy—96% of our students go to public schools and the dollars aren't there to fund public schools adequately. Despite the fact that this government touts how much money it has put back into classrooms, 38% of classes in this province still have more than 26 students in a class. There has been a 22% decrease in the number of elementary schools with a physical education teacher and there's been a decline of 29% in the number of schools that have a music teacher. There has been a 28% decrease in the number of schools with libraries staffed by teacher-librarians.

1950

Education is about an approach to learning that allows students to develop all the areas of talent they have, to tap into that talent. What we have here is a sense that we

now have to relegate education to one or two areas, and the other areas, such as librarians—a librarian is there so students can take information and use it effectively, to teach them how to use all that content and the great deal of information they're given. But we have a government that says it's OK to take hundreds of millions of dollars out of public education.

Mr Marchese: I say to the member from Perth-Middlesex, get rid of those written speeches they give you. They're not very good.

First, Rozanski did not confirm that your education policies are sound. I've heard that line before from your minister. Tell her to throw away that line and that speech; it's not good. Rozanski confirmed that you're underfunding the educational system to the tune of \$2 billion, including, member for Perth-Middlesex, that you've got to upgrade your benchmarks. Remember, your minister is still funding schools on a per-square-foot basis at, I believe, \$5.29 per square foot—1997 levels. Member from Perth, those benchmarks have to be upgraded—do you understand? He did not say your education policies are sound; he didn't.

Secondly, I've got to tell you, member for Perth-Middlesex, that teachers in the private schools don't have to write any tests; they don't have to do any professional development. Why not, member from Perth? Those students in the private schools do not have to write standardized tests that you say the others in the public system have to write. Why not? Do you understand there's a double standard? You're giving away taxpayers' money and mine. I want you to make them as accountable as you make the public system. Why aren't you doing that?

Why are you subsidizing rich people like parents who send their students to Havergal, where the tuition fee is \$20,000 and more a year? Why are you using my taxpayer's money for that purpose, member for Perth-Middlesex? It's wrong. It's dumb politics and bad policy.

Hon Mr Sterling: When this issue comes up in my riding and people talk to me about taking money away from public education, I say to them, "It takes about \$7,000 to \$8,000 to educate one student in our public education system or our Catholic education system. When this program is fully implemented, do you know what it will cost the Ontario government to educate a child at that stage? It will cost about \$3,500." And they say back to me, "Isn't that a good deal for the taxpayer?" Doesn't it make sense, then, that we are only funding half of the education of these children who, if we weren't funding them, would be in the public education system? They say to me, then, "It doesn't sound half bad."

The other part is that I was the one member of this Legislature who voted against the extension of funding to Catholic schools back in 1986: 117 to 1. I said at the time that if we fully funded the education system for the Catholic faith, which represents about 43% or 44%—the largest single religious group in the province—the day would come when some party, somebody in this Legislature, would say, "You have to fund the other

religious groups.” It just makes common equity, common sense. How can you say yes to the largest group but no to the smaller groups? It just doesn’t bite it with regard to equity and fairness in our society.

You guys are on the wrong side of this issue; I’m sorry.

The Acting Speaker: Further questions and comments? There’s one left.

Mr Ernie Parsons (Prince Edward-Hastings): The thing I find particularly ironic with this bill is that this is a government that wants to hold everyone accountable. Their election platform about municipalities having to hold referendums—well, I think that’s leading to them taking over municipalities, as they have effectively taken over school boards or taken away any power they have.

They want to give away provincial money, taxpayer money—not Progressive Conservative money, not government money, but hard-working families’ money—and say, “We don’t need any accountability whatsoever for these dollars. Do what you want. You don’t need to hire qualified teachers. You don’t need to follow a curriculum. You don’t need to do testing. Here’s the money.”

It is so out of character with the rhetoric that they have used over the years about holding everyone accountable—

Mr Ted McMeekin (Ancaster-Dundas-Flamborough-Aldershot): And their own history.

Mr Parsons: And their own history. Their own history is, “If you’re someone on welfare receiving \$516 a month and you abuse that \$516, the penalty will be massive. We will take you off welfare for the rest of your life. It’s that severe a penalty for abusing \$516. But if it’s \$3,500, we don’t need to know what you’re doing with it. Just go and do it; just go and take it.”

That runs against not just this government’s rhetoric but against common sense. If someone is going to accept public money, there has to be some public accountability that goes with it. We cannot write blank cheques.

There are private schools out there which quite frankly are doing superb jobs and have chosen to voluntarily follow it. But we don’t do voluntary things in anything else, and we shouldn’t do it. We don’t do voluntary water testing any more. We don’t do voluntary speed limits. We should have accountability for every nickel of a taxpayer’s dollar that is being spent.

The Acting Speaker: The member for Perth-Middlesex now has up to two minutes to respond.

Mr Johnson: I’d like to thank the members for Sarnia-Lambton and Trinity-Spadina, the minister from Lanark-Carleton and the member for Prince Edward-Hastings for their responses, inquiries and, in some cases, statements.

The first thing I’d like to say is that I’m diametrically opposed to nearly everything the three members across the way said. I guess it’s ideology or whatever, but I really don’t think that the money you don’t take because you give a tax credit is our money. I think that belongs to the taxpayer. I think that belongs in the pocket of the guy

who goes up and down the street and in the coffee shop and to work every day. I don’t happen to think that that’s mine and I shouldn’t give it back. I really think that’s his money and their money. On occasion, if it has to and needs to—and it often does—the government should say, “Yes, I’m going to take it from you.” But I don’t see, in saying, “No, we’re not going to take it from you,” that I’m taking it out of the government’s pocket to give it away.

I just have a diametrically opposed vision of what government should be. It should provide the services and so on, but I don’t believe, in the words of the members for Sarnia-Lambton and Trinity-Spadina, that that’s our money and we’re giving it away. I think that is the money of those people who send their kids to those schools, and if we don’t have to take it away from them, then I’m saying I don’t think we should.

Interjection.

Mr Johnson: That’s why I wanted to stand up tonight and overshout the guy from Trinity-Spadina because he wants to talk louder than I do, and that’s why I wanted to stand up here and say that I support Bill 53.

The Acting Speaker: The floor is open for further debate.

Mr Michael Bryant (St Paul’s): The issue of public funding of faith-based schools is one which has profoundly divided our nation since before Confederation. The issue of achieving equity in religious education is one that has profoundly divided our province throughout most of its history. It is an issue that is divisive in the riding of St Paul’s as well.

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This bill is not a referendum on support for public funding of faith-based schools. About 75% of the beneficiaries of the private school tax credit, as envisioned in this bill, go to non-denominational schools. There is indeed a collateral effect upon faith-based schools in the province that are not Catholic schools.

What I’d like to talk about here this evening is why. What is the justification for continued funding of faith-based schools in the province of Ontario with respect to our Catholic system? Why would we look to extending funding to other faith-based schools that are not Catholic?

The historic reason for continuing our separate school system in Ontario does not really answer the question. Yes, at the time of Confederation there were those who championed minority religious education rights. Alexander Tilloch Galt in Lower Canada saw it as his mission to ensure that the Protestant minorities in Quebec were able to educate their children in their holy religion. In Upper Canada, R.W. Scott and the Scott Act and the resulting Quebec resolutions and the resulting entrenchment of religious school rights in the 1867 Constitution Act was a moment of recognition of the value of faith-based schools. But the minorities have changed and the numbers have changed, and today the number of Catholics and Protestants in Ontario is almost identical. The province is obviously very different, and simply saying that

we entrenched it in 1867 is an historic fact. It doesn't tell us anything about why we have continued to provide funding to faith-based schools for the Catholic system and it doesn't explain why we continue to wrestle with this issue in the province and across the country.

Historically, it was obvious. Professor McConnell of the University of Chicago Law School says that the historical evidence is powerful, that the public school movement of the 19th and early 20th centuries was a self-conscious attempt to spread Protestant values among the people, especially among immigrant groups with different religious backgrounds.

What that meant in Upper Canada was that the Catholic student had to provide the Protestant prayer, that the King James version of the Bible was what was being taught. There was coercion and alienation and discrimination against that Catholic minority in Upper Canada, so many fought to ensure that this would not happen.

As the century continued and we headed into the charter era, no longer, I think, is it totally accurate to say that our public school system was really a majoritarian Protestant-Catholic system. Nonetheless, there were remnants of the old Protestant system. So with the charter came judicial interventions time and again that held that in fact you cannot impose Protestant Christian teachings upon the public system.

Mr Justice Winkler in the 1980s said of a series of Ontario Court of Appeal decisions that the charter signified "the end of an era of majoritarian Christian influence, and the charter marked the beginning of a period of secularism in education."

This period of secularism ended the discrimination of majoritarian Protestant teachings as against non-Protestant minorities. It even ended any religious teachings against secular Ontarians. But what it did not do is remedy the continued minority religious situation in the province, whereby there was a secular system that was available to all Ontarians—our public school system, sanitized by the charter, with Protestant or other religious teachings, prayers and symbols removed. There was the Catholic system for Catholic Ontarians who wished to send their children to a publicly funded Catholic school. It might not have been exactly what all Catholic families wanted. In the riding of St Paul's, within a block you've got St Mike's private school and you've got Holy Rosary Catholic school that is part of the separate school system, and families have a choice. They can send their children, if they wish, to Holy Rosary; it may not have as much Catholic or religious content as they may wish, so if they wish they'll send their kids to St Mike's. But the accommodation is there.

Where's the accommodation of non-Catholic Ontarians, I ask, who wish to send their kids to religious schools? Right now they have no choice but to send their children to independent and private schools.

There was an effort in the 1980s among Jewish day schools to join the North York school board. In my view, that is the way we ought to provide equity in religious education funding—not through a private tax credit but

through the recommendation of the Shapiro commission in 1985. His report of the Commission on Private Schools in Ontario recommended an associated-school option whereby religious schools would associate with public school boards, meet the public school criteria, meet the public school teaching certification criteria and meet the curriculum needs and demands, but they would be different schools.

We have in Ontario a long history and a long tradition of public schools with a different orientation. It's really a misnomer to refer to our Catholic system as a separate school system. There was a Privy Council held in 1928: separate schools are but a special form of the common schools, funded by the public purse, but they are still public schools with public school rules and public school accountability.

We have other different forms of public schools in our system. The alternative schools, as the Toronto District School Board says, are a departure from mainstream schooling, but they're still part of the public system. We have special-education-oriented schools; linguistic schools; French immersion schools. These are public schools with a very specific orientation. "Thus we can have associated schools," says Commissioner Shapiro, former Deputy Minister of Education, former principal to McGill University. It would have public school accountability, but it would be this accommodation so needed to permit equity in education.

Thus the departure that this bill takes in terms of the history of the treatment of religious schools in Ontario, in Upper Canada and in Canada. In Upper Canada throughout its history, from the Scott Act to the Quebec resolutions to the BNA Act through to extensions of separate school, Catholic school, funding, there has always been a sense that it has to be done through a public system. This bill is a departure from that in that it takes public funds and doesn't try to integrate religious schools through a public system, as has been our tradition and our history, but instead says, "We'll provide a tax credit by way of accommodation."

Here are some of my concerns. First, I think we have to recognize that public school solutions are lasting solutions. Tax credits come and go; ashes to ashes, dust to dust. Tax credits come and go with a simplicity that ought to breed skepticism among supporters of this particular bill, skepticism as to the overbreadth of the tax credit, 75% of which does not cover faith-based schools; skepticism as to the reliability of the voucher approach. Changes to the Catholic separate school system, major reforms in Ontario, would require a walk into the jungle of elected and bureaucratic trenches well dug, and rightly so. Changes to a tax credit require an amendment, c'est tout; it's over. They come and they go.

If we wish to entrench a long-term answer to inequity in religious school funding, it has got to be through a public school system. It has got to be brought forward in a way that doesn't seek to divide.

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I recognize that there are members on the government side who are not simply here to play upon a wedge issue. I understand that. I understand that there are differing and varying motives on the government side. I've heard them. I've heard the member from Scarborough East say the private school tax credit approach is about achieving competition as between private schools and public schools, confirming, I think, public school supporters' worst fears. I've heard the finance minister say that this is about school choice. I've heard and I know that for the member from Thornhill, with whom I have shared a stage, along with Commissioner Shapiro, at a Canadian Jewish Congress plenary session, this bill is about faith-based funding. I understand that. I understand that there are differing purposes that have been articulated by the government.

But I think that that very small minority of families who send their children to non-Catholic religious schools, that 3% of the schoolyard population, ought to look upon the private school tax credit solution very carefully and with great skepticism. Many private schools wish to stay private. The head and principal of one of the largest and most prominent girls' schools in the country, Bishop Strachan, in the riding of St Paul's, courageously, two years ago, spoke against this private school tax credit on the basis that in the long term it was going to be divisive and harmful to the public school system and to society at large.

Private schools inevitably contain a myriad of different circumstances. Some students are there for religious and cultural reasons, yes. But I say to you and I say to Ontarians, this is a very, very small minority of Ontarians, and that particular issue ought to be addressed not through this overbroad tax credit, but through a system that directly addresses the accommodation of those particular needs. That is affordable and that is in the long-term interests of Ontario. That is not divisive. That is, if anything, assisting to associate a religious minority with the broader public system.

Some people attend private schools for reasons of geography, family tradition, school philosophy, language arts programs in the particular school. Some do because their families always sent their children to private schools. I respect, and I think everybody in this House respects, that independence and that choice. The question is, what are Ontario taxpayers going to provide in terms of support for those private schools?

Historically, what Ontario has done is said, "If there is a need in the public school system for greater flexibility and accommodation, we will do that through the public school system, not through private school tax credits." I know it is not an American invention, but it is one that interestingly was rejected by President Bush Sr. When the proposal of tax credits came before President Bush Sr, he vetoed it on the basis that he saw it as divisive and harmful to the public system. Yes, we have to create alternatives for that 3% of families of the Ontario schoolyard who attend non-Catholic religious schools,

but Bernard Shapiro, the commissioner, said, and I can tell you he still says today, the way to do that is through the associated school option, not private school tax credits.

I want to say in closing that this issue is here with us to stay. People who supported the Scott bill in the 1860s and the Quebec resolutions in 1864 in the debates make it very clear. "OK, fine, I'll support it," they say to R.W. Scott, "but only to get some closure on this issue. Let's get this done once and for all so we can move on and put the politico-religious battle behind us." I know there was a sense among those who debated this issue when Bill Davis brought it to this Legislature that, "We need to address the extension of separate school funding once and for all." Yet it's still with us.

I didn't know what to think when I read the last, closing line of Franklin A. Walker's *Catholic Education and Politics in Upper Canada*. He writes in 1974—this is his last line—"And everyone is grateful that politico-religious battles in Canada belong only to the past." They don't belong to the past. They are with us for good. We can't tuck them away and put them into a budget and think that the tax credit is the final answer. An associated schools option is but one answer—I believe the better answer and the better approach—but it will require amendments as well.

As the Canadian ethnic and religious garden diversifies, and as we have an increasingly multicultural society, we will have to deal with this issue again and again and more and more. We can't just put it away by pretending that somehow people will just forget about their religious convictions. For a very small minority of Canadians, a religion is not a hobby that can be dealt with on the weekends. For them, it involves an obligation to teach their children and pass along their holy language and their holy religion. It is for them a way of life. In the same way that many of us wouldn't even dream of pulling our kids out of a public school system, they wouldn't dream of not having their children continue their religious and cultural heritage. If we are going to accommodate those Ontarians and that conviction, and if we are going to say as a province and a government that in the long term we are going to address and respect faith-based communities and the role faith plays in our society, we must find a way to do it without dividing Ontarians along lines that don't belong in this debate.

This shouldn't be about the broader private school world versus the public school world. I believe that the way to move forward with this issue and, in the long term, address it is to find ways to bring those private, independent religious schools that are currently self-segregated out of the system, into our system—not for the purposes of assimilation, hearkening back to the historic reason for minority religious education rights; no, not for reasons of assimilation, but for reasons of profound accommodation: to try and find a way that we can work together with a system that doesn't continually divide, although I recognize that we are always going to have a number of Ontarians who feel very strongly that

not a single public dollar goes toward religious school education. There will be also a small minority of Ontarians that believe there ought to be no-strings-attached, full funding of religious schools.

I don't know if the answer is in the middle. It's not a middle-way approach. This isn't an ideological moment. It's how we as Canadians deal with this critical minority and respect faith-based communities and the role that faith plays in our province. I hope, as the years go forward and we continue to deal with this issue—because this issue is going to be an election issue and it is going to be an issue that is dealt with by the next government. There are going to be further judicial challenges, no doubt, and there is going to be further angst amongst members that we need to deal with this issue once and for all and put it behind us. We won't; we can't. Unfortunately, for this issue, the simple way is not the best way.

I look forward to hearing members' comments, but I hope everybody in this House realizes that when we're dealing with the very small religious minorities that wish to send their kids to religious school, the politics of this is one thing; addressing and accommodating their needs in a way that is quintessentially Canadian—consistent with the traditions and history of Ontario, but consistent with the new era of the charter that respects religious minority education—is going to be one of our greatest challenges.

I have invested a lot of my own time as an MPP in my community, through town hall meetings, constant meetings, hours upon hours of letters, speeches—every effort that I can, to try and meet with the community on this issue. I will continue to do that, but I simply cannot support this bill.

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The Acting Speaker: Members now have up to two minutes for questions and comments.

Mr Prue: I listened with some considerable interest to the speaker from St Paul's, especially when he was talking about the historical perspectives of our schools. Being one of the older members of the Legislature, although definitely not the oldest, I remember quite clearly the schools of the 1950s in Toronto, having attended schools which were quite profoundly Protestant in nature. Every day we said the Lord's Prayer in the King James version, and when people stopped at the Catholic version—and we did have Catholics in our classes—that was not considered appropriate. I remember later on, when they stopped at the Catholic version without the last two lines, that we had members of faith communities continue to say the last two lines, much to the consternation of the teacher at the time. I do remember that.

But I want to say that in the evolution in the 50 years since I first started to attend school, there has been a profound change in our school system: a school system where, yes, I did know a couple of Jewish students and a couple of Catholic students—I don't think there were any other religions that I can remember at the time. We now have almost a complete, I would suggest, melting pot in our school systems. We have Muslim students and Jewish students and Hindu students and Jains. We have

Shinto students and people who have no beliefs at all. We have people who are Native Canadians who have a spiritual value. It seems to me that the coexistence you see today is something to marvel at, not something that we should in any way denigrate.

I'm not sure, having listened to the member for St Paul's, that the associate school option is the right way to go. I remain to be convinced on his last statement. It's not assimilation but profound accommodation. If we can do it, so much the better, but not to the detriment of the public school system.

Mr Bart Maves (Niagara Falls): I say to my friend opposite, the member from St Paul's, this is probably one of those issues where you should have just sat down and let someone else speak. Over here, as we listened to your speech, the comment was, "Boy is he dancing on this one."

I've got to tell you, I look back at the member opposite when the tax credit issue was first brought up—what's his quote in the Toronto Star on May 12, 2001? He said, "I can't suck and blow on this (the tax credit). I've got to support this. It's a step in the direction of equity." How has he voted on it so far? With his party, in opposition to it.

I don't blame him for being confused and a little disheartened. Other members of his caucus have supported it in the past. Monte Kwinter, for example, said, "I've always supported it. As a matter of fact, I advocated it for 16 years. Since before the last election, I sponsored a rally outside of Queen's Park. We had 5,000 people in support of the position that there is a real issue of discrimination." How did he vote on this in this Legislature? Opposed.

His own leader—let's talk about Dalton McGuinty's position. It said in 1998, in an article in the Canadian Jewish News: "Opposition leader Dalton McGuinty told Ontario's Jewish leadership that he had no ideological opposition to ensuring public funds support ... day schools. It is believed that this is the first time any provincial party leader has made such a declaration."

In 2001 he said, "I believe that parents"—this is McGuinty again—"should have the right to choose a school that best meets the needs of their child. I think that's a good idea. It's an idea whose time has come."

Interjection: Who said that?

Mr Maves: Dalton McGuinty. In an interview with the Ottawa Citizen, the Citizen said, "If you end up in government," Mr McGuinty, "would you repeal this tax?" "Yes," he said. Then they said, "Will you provide families with a tax credit?" "If we're looking at equity, yes, somewhere down the road." He doesn't know where he stands. Finally, in this Legislature, he's totally opposed to it.

Later on I'm going to read some more of the Liberal quotes. They all show similar flip-flopping and lack of position on this issue, as did the member for St Paul's.

Mr McMeekin: I think when it comes to surface contradictions, there are enough of them to go around on all sides of the House. One of the honourable members

on this side pointed to some of the correspondence back and forth with the UN, but I won't go there.

I want to just say thank you to the speaker from St Paul's who, I think, brought some helpful and thoughtful reflections to this debate and, dare I say it, even some profound insights. To look for the third way—or the right look in one's eye—as one approaches policy is often very difficult. As one who believes that tolerance always begins at the point of difference, I know just how troubling it can sometimes be to seek out and find that third appropriate, accommodating way.

I was particularly impressed that he made reference to the folly of thinking that this tax credit in its current form—and by the way, we are the only province in all of Canada that would provide this kind of funding to independent schools this way. In virtually every other province where independent schools are funded, they are in fact funded through an affiliated model, if you look at what's going on there.

The concept of once and for all I think has its own inherent contradictions. There's no equity to this. This tax credit, if passed in its current form, will prescribe to those who avail themselves of it a very inequitable situation, potentially for some considerable time.

I'm with the member from St Paul's, who I think was professing a desire to try to find ways where we might broaden the concept of what constitutes public education and actually move toward a just and equitable solution that's accommodating for people who have these special needs.

Ms Marilyn Mushinski (Scarborough Centre): It does give me pleasure to respond to what I know must have been a particularly difficult speech for the member for St Paul's to make, because I recognize the incredible diversity he has in his riding of St Paul's. The reason I say that is because I know in my riding of Scarborough Centre, we too have the same kinds of diversity issues, certainly in dealing with a challenge such as the equity bill that is before us today.

To continue with what my friend from Niagara Falls was saying, some of that conflict clearly does rest within his own party. For example, I listened with some interest to the legal arguments that my friend from St Paul's made because I know he is a lawyer and certainly he has spoken quite eloquently in the past on constitutional matters. Yet it's interesting that when the United Nations Human Rights Committee handed down its decisions, Monte Kwinter was quoted as saying, "I now call on the government of Ontario to respond in a positive way to this United Nations Human Rights Committee ruling."

It's interesting that Mr McGuinty said, "If we're looking at equity, yes, somewhere down the road," but in another breath, "McGuinty said while he has long recognized that it is unfair that religious schools do not receive funding, he cannot commit to funding private education." Therein lies the dilemma.

The Acting Speaker: The member for St Paul's has up to two minutes to respond.

Mr Bryant: I thank the members for Beaches-East York, Niagara Falls, Ms Mushinski and the member for Ancaster-Dundas-Flamborough-Aldershot for their comments.

This is a complicated issue. I'm not pretending that it isn't a complicated issue. That is why this is difficult. I'm saying that if we approach this complicated problem with, in my view, an oversimplified response, in the long term we'll not obtain the consensus to have a lasting solution. While it may be a quick answer to the issue, it's not in the long-term interests of the province or even of those who support faith-based education to support this particular proposal.

Sure it's complicated, so if you want to cut and paste different parts of what people say, then you can catch them out. I understand that. I do that in opposition, and I understand the government members over there are doing that. That's their job. They're supposed to be here to criticize this speech. You're right, I say to the member for Niagara Falls: the easy thing to do is just not to say anything at all. But there are times and there are issues that we face sometimes, as legislators and in our ridings, when we feel compelled to rise in our place and try to explain our position, however imperfectly, in 20 minutes.

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I can just say that I do not believe this simplified answer is any satisfactory way to address this incredibly complicated problem. What Shapiro advocated and what I am advocating on my own behalf here, as a member in this Legislature, is admittedly complicated and more difficult than simply implementing a tax credit, but in my view it is the longer-term solution. On this issue we have a disagreement and we're going to have a debate, but I say to the government members, this particular solution will not in the long-term achieve any broad consensus that will have a lasting solution, in the public interest or when it comes to supporting faith-based communities.

The Acting Speaker: The floor is open for further debate.

Ms Mushinski: Mr Speaker, I must add that I really enjoyed being part of the official party with you on Friday during the visit of the Duke of York. I appreciate that.

I am particularly pleased to rise in support of The Right Choices for Equity in Education Act. The 2001 throne speech promised parents in Ontario both flexibility and choice in education for their children. I believe The Right Choices for Equity in Education Act would assist parents who want more choice for their children's education, which of course includes the choice to send their children to schools that offer their religion, their culture and their values. In some cases, certainly in areas of my riding, the three are not even distinct; they are part and parcel of the same thing.

In the words of my colleague the Honourable Jim Flaherty, who instituted the equity in education tax credit during his incumbency as Minister of Finance in 2001, "Ontarians have taken to heart the fact that we are one of the most diverse and cosmopolitan societies in the world.

Ontarians don't need any longer to be told that they are diverse or how, from a top-down, government-approved perspective, their diversity should be recognized and expressed."

Mr Flaherty went on to say, "They still want top-quality public schools, and I am quite confident that most Ontario parents will continue to choose to send their children to those schools as long as they meet their children's needs. But a significant number of our fellow citizens and taxpayers know that their children will be best served by an independent school because of the unique educational, cultural"—Caroline, you should be listening to this—"or religious opportunities independent schools provide."

This bill, Bill 53, speaks to many crucial aspects of life in Ontario. We've heard a little bit about the historical perspective of Ontario and what Ontario is. Perhaps more important than our diversity, which has become our calling card around the world, is indeed the history of our diversity. Independent schools are both a reflection and a barometer of the range of this diversity.

I will be providing some detail a little later about some of the schools that are part of this program but, first, if you will allow me, I'd like to explain how the program itself works.

For 2002, the tax credit reimbursed 10% of the first \$7,000 of tuition fees, for a maximum tax credit of \$700 per child, and 10% of the first \$3,500 of tuition fees for a child of kindergarten age, for a maximum tax credit of \$350. If the Legislature approves this bill, the tax credit rate will rise to a maximum of \$1,400, or 20% per child for 2003, 30% for 2004, 40% for 2005, and 50% for 2006 and beyond.

Both the schools offering the credit and the parents claiming it must meet certain eligibility criteria. Since my esteemed colleagues have already provided the members of this House with those details, I don't propose to repeat them. But while many of the independent schools that are part of the program are for religious, linguistic or cultural instruction, others are not. They run the gamut from arts and sciences to specialized programs for students who are academically gifted. Still others are for an alternative model of education based on a specific set of values and criteria. I'd like to offer some examples of the kinds of schools that we're talking about.

The Leonardo Da Vinci Academy of Arts and Sciences in Etobicoke is one such institution. According to its mission statement, "The Leonardo Da Vinci Academy aims to instill a love of learning and to challenge students to develop their whole potential in the manner inspired by Leonardo. The goal is to nurture the growth of responsible individuals who are rooted in their heritage, in balance with their world, and secure on the path to self-knowledge within a Catholic setting."

This is an independent school. Founded in 1983, and inspired by the genius of one of the world's greatest thinkers and creators and, of course, artists, the Leonard Da Vinci Academy offers an academic program from preschool to grade 8. The academic program focuses on

academic excellence, independent thinking skills and self-discipline, promoted within a healthy Catholic environment. In keeping with Da Vincian principals, the overall program includes a well-balanced curriculum of studies in sciences, arts and humanities. A rich after-school program of diverse clubs and sports serves to further enhance learning, promote school spirit and develop social skills and responsibility.

On the school's Web site, principal Sal Ritacca, offers this statement: "The degree to which any useful philosophy of education is successfully implemented is readily measured—one need only observe the children. Children who have been encouraged to 'Think like Leonardo' will be freed from 'limitation' thinking, will have a healthy self-esteem, and a heightened respect for the world. They will be joyful and autonomous participants in their own learning and self-discovery." So you see, even though the Leonardo Da Vinci Academy does have a Catholic focus, it also expands to incorporate the vision and the philosophy of the great man himself.

Let me offer you another example. The Grey Gables School in St Catharines offers a teaching program that combines the superb practices of the Montessori method with those of the world-renowned international baccalaureate program and Dr Renzulli's triad enrichment model, along with some practices from Rudolph Steiner's Waldorf schools and Dr Thomas Berry's story model for global education.

The Grey Gables Arts and Sports Academy is incorporated into the international baccalaureate programs for Grey Gables students and offers them unique and exceptional opportunities to pursue their passion for the arts or sports.

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Grey Gables School is recognized for extremely high academic standards and courses that are taught by an extraordinary and caring faculty who set high standards for themselves and their students in order to inspire them to reach their potential. The academic program is complemented by opportunities for students to participate in varied and dynamic extracurricular and leadership activities as well as community service initiatives, and I think that's a very important part of the all-rounding of a student, certainly not just in the independent school system but most certainly in the public school system.

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Grey Gables School is recognized for its high academic standards and courses that are taught by an extraordinary—as I've already said—and caring faculty who have set high standards for themselves. The academic program is complemented by opportunities for students to participate in varied and dynamic extracurricular activities.

The Right Choices for Equity in Education Act clearly is about that: it's about choices. I can't think of anything

more equitable than an act that speaks to maximizing choice and opportunity in this province. It's about freedom; it's about flexibility; it's about the flexibility to make a judgment on what will best serve the religious, cultural and educational needs of one's children.

We of course believe in a strong publicly funded education system and we believe in respecting the right of parents to choose. We believe that our children and their parents must come first in Ontario's diverse education system. In 1995, when we took office, education funding stood at \$12.9 billion. The government has increased funding in this province for the education system every year since then. With the enhancements announced in the 2003 budget, education funding for the upcoming 2003-04 school year, including direct provincial transfers and education property taxes, stands at a record \$15.3 billion, the highest level of education funding in Ontario's history.

The projected base target for school boards for the 2005-06 school year will be almost \$2 billion, or 14%, higher than the 2002-03 education funding level announced in the 2002 Ontario budget. This will enable the education system to focus on what every parent wants—certainly they tell me in my riding of Scarborough Centre—which is improved learning and higher achievement for our students, something that was unheard of in the 10 lost years before we were elected in 1995 as a government.

The tax credit is funded from the tax system and does not remove funding from public education. How many times until the Liberals are going to get it? It does not remove funding from public education. What it does is increase the number of educational opportunities available to our children.

In the 2003 Ontario budget, we proposed to accelerate the tax credit phase-in schedule announced in the 2002 budget. That would increase the tax credit rate to 20% of eligible tuition fees for 2003, and further increase it by 10% a year, until the credit is fully implemented in 2006 at a 50% rate, as I've said earlier.

As has already been stated in this House, especially by the Attorney General, the tax credit can be claimed on up to \$7,000 of eligible tuition fees per child, which is about the average per-student expenditure on public education in this province.

The 2003 budget also proposed to legislate the remaining steps of the tax credit phase-in to establish this plan in law.

The equity in education tax credit benefits the parents of Ontario. Our tax credit will help middle- and lower-income parents to exercise their choice to preserve their cultural and religious diversity. Our government recognizes that in a diverse society such as ours, parents will choose schools that are appropriate for their children's needs or offer a curriculum that they desire.

The equity in education tax credit provides our parents with a choice in the education of their children and with greater certainty in making decisions about their future. It will increase accountability in the school system and lead

to improvements in the quality of our education system and student performance.

Our student support for equality and choice in education would provide our students with the added tools that they need to succeed. It supports our parents' fundamental right to have input into their children's education, and it gives them the flexibility they need to make the choices for their children at a time in their development when it is most crucial.

The Acting Speaker: Members now have up to two minutes for questions or comments.

Ms Sandra Pupatello (Windsor West): I'm very happy to be here to listen in on the debate tonight, because we know that tonight's debate really is central to what we'll be talking about during the upcoming provincial election. It identifies how different we are. One party, namely the Ontario Liberal Party, believes that public education is the great equalizer out there for all kids, no matter where they come from.

As we watch the debate unfold and meet the people who are affected on both sides, it takes many of us back to our early years and our own public education and what it meant to our parents and grandparents that kids from around the world would come here, or be first-generation Canadian from immigrant parents, and realize that our school system is meant to give every single one of us a fair and equitable chance.

I believe the government has gone down the road to throw that right out the window. I believe that this move toward tax credits for private schools, just to give more opportunity to take kids out of the public system, is wrong-headed. It goes in absolutely the wrong direction from where we should be going.

I believe that our schools should be filled with kids from everywhere, with all of us getting equal opportunity, and that that education system has to be great. It has to give all that we have to offer our children. It has to be filled with proper supports for kids who need assistance in the classroom. It has to be filled not just with the basics but with the extras, because art matters and music matters and phys ed matters and health matter. Our curriculum has to be that fulsome and wholesome that people don't go looking for extra in some other system.

I ultimately believe that Windsor is the great, diverse community it is because our public education system was there for our kids. I believe that all of us who do well in this society do well because of our public education system.

When we come to vote on this, it is ultimately that much of a fundamental issue.

Mr Prue: I listened to the member from Scarborough Centre, as I always try to do. I try not to heckle her, although she's constantly doing that to me. I listened to her, and she was talking about good private schools. I have no doubt in my mind that in this fair province there are some good private schools. But what she didn't talk about, what she never once said about those good private schools, is how much it costs per year, per student to attend them. As we all know, we spend about \$7,500 per

student per year in the public school system to educate all the students: those who are good, those who need special attention, those who are having problems, those who have family and emotional problems.

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We know some of those private schools that print their rates: Havergal College, \$20,000. We know all of those schools. When you spend two and a half times what you spend in the public school system, you have to think they are at least as good. I would contend that for two and a half times the price, they probably are at least as good as the public school system. But what she didn't talk about is all the other schools. Many of these small ones are unregulated schools. They don't have the stature of Havergal or Upper Canada College, and a lot of them are in financial and other difficulties.

I ask you why you didn't mention St James International Academy, which is the subject of some 30 lawsuits, where people and teachers have not been paid for years and where there are people from the Chinese community who have been ripped off, member from Scarborough Centre, by a system which you have no controls on. I would suggest to you that that's the real difficulty. You want to give money to the parents of private school students but you do not put any controls whatsoever on them. That is the problem of this whole bill. You deregulated—and freebees—and no thought about the student in the end.

Mr Maves: I want to commend the member from Scarborough Centre on her comments—always wise and reasonable comments on every issue when she stands in this Legislature.

I encourage the member from Windsor West to go back and rethink her quotes that public education is the great equalizer. The great equalizer in the world is actually education. It's not public education, it's not separate school education, it's not independent school education, it's not home school education; it is education that is the great equalizer. We shouldn't be prejudiced against one way of learning or another way of learning in Ontario.

On this issue, I stood up earlier and read a quote from the member from St Paul's, who said, "I can't suck and blow on this. I've got to support this" tax credit. "It's a step in the direction of equity." Then he turned around and voted against this bill every time, proving that, yes, indeed, he can suck and blow on this issue.

But when one goes through all the different quotes from the Liberals on different issues, there's a great one on this issue. If this doesn't define Liberals in Ontario, I don't know what does. This is from Greg Sorbara, a member of the Liberals opposite, to the Liberal Party leader. Here's his quote, and I urge you all to pay attention. On this issue he said, "The Liberals were equivocal. We were not violently opposed or thoroughly in favour. But while in power we did nothing about the issue, and we're avoiding it now. We see the merits of both sides of the issue, in typically Liberal fashion." Now, if that doesn't define a Liberal, I do not know what quote does. The Liberals on this issue and on just about

every other issue facing Ontario cannot make up their minds.

Ms Di Cocco: I have to say that it's interesting to listen to the member from Niagara Falls.

I want to read again from the draft submission that the Ontario government thoughtfully made to the United Nations. I have to say, one of the arguments that was put forth was by Madam Justice McLachlin, who considered this issue under the charter. I'm going to read something she said about this that was submitted by the government to the United Nations. This is what she said about fully funding public schools: "Its objective, the record shows, is to foster a strong public secular school system attended by students of all cultural and religious groups. Canada in general and Ontario in particular is a multicultural, multi-religious society. A multicultural, multi-religious society can only work, it is felt, if people of all groups understand and tolerate each other."

It goes on to say, "According to the Shapiro report submitted in evidence, the public school context represents the most promising potential for realizing a more fully tolerant society. Children of all races and religions learn together and play together. No religion is touted over any other. The goal is to provide a forum for the development of respect for the beliefs and customs of all cultural groups, and for their ethical and moral values." I believe they had it right here.

The Acting Speaker: The member for Scarborough now has up to two minutes to respond.

Ms Mushinski: I'd like to express my thanks to the members for Windsor West, Beaches-East York, Niagara Falls and Sarnia-Lambton for their submissions to my submission.

In response to what both the members for Windsor West and Sarnia-Lambton said—it's interesting, because I know the member for Sarnia-Lambton referred to the United Nations Human Rights Committee's decision, and my colleague from Niagara has already stated a quote from the Ontario Hansard of 16 November 1999 by Liberal MPP Monte Kwinter, who said, "I now call on the government of Ontario to respond in a positive way to this United Nations Human Rights Committee ruling."

But interestingly enough, on January 21—this is just a couple of months later—Dalton McGuinty wrote a letter to Lloyd Axworthy—remember him?—saying: "I urge your government to reject the UNHRC's request." So again, there are clear indications of the Liberal unrest and inability to take a stand on this particular issue.

And I would suggest, if I may, to my good friend from Beaches-East York, that, yes, I may heckle occasionally, but not all the time, and it is in a nice way, because I have the highest respect for the member for Beaches-East York. He and I used to serve on a municipal council together. But I would say to him, don't go there when you talk about private schools. I remember going to Sault Ste Marie and listening to a situation there regarding a teacher in the public school system who had been moved from board to board, and that was a disgrace on the public education—

The Acting Speaker: Thank you. The floor is open for further debate.

Ms Di Cocco: I stand to speak on Bill 53. This bill is entitled The Right Choices for Equity in Education Act. What I'm going to try to discuss tonight are four different aspects of this bill. One is about the finances and the public policy facts, another is about the philosophy under which this bill supposedly comes, and some other areas about the impact that's happened in public education over the last eight years.

First of all, the tax credit last year was postponed because it was deemed unaffordable. It was supposed to have started last year, but these tax cuts, and this tax credit particularly, were postponed. I believe one of the members talked about the fact that if you postpone a tax, then it's considered a tax hike. I believe I understood that. I find it interesting, because they did that last year but they don't consider that a tax hike.

First of all, this tax credit will be a tremendous financial hardship, because the cost of this tax credit is anywhere from \$300 million to \$500 million when it's fully implemented. We don't really know what the cost is going to be, because the tax credit may push more people into the private system. This money has to come from somewhere. We constantly hear that the \$500 million—or potentially \$500 million—won't cost anything, but it will. It is going to be taken out of public education. Public education is where 96% of our student population in Ontario go. They all go to public education.

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Secondly, I believe it's poor public policy. It's poor public policy because one of the strongest aspects that has shaped and created our tolerant society and tolerant community, with all its diversities, to work and understand and accept one another and in turn created this Canadian model of multiculturalism, is our strong public education system. One of the reasons that our population is woven into such a strong fabric with all of its diversity is because of our public education system. When children of various religions and nationalities sit side by side, learn together, play together, share their values and traditions, that's when the barriers truly come down; that is when there is acceptance of those differences. That's why we have to protect public education. I believe we heard the former Premier, Bill Davis, speak with great emotion about saving and protecting our public education system.

When we had our comments, I certainly spoke about the submission made by the Ontario government in 1998 to the United Nations committee. Its submission is in total contradiction to what is being said in this House today. It astounds me that exactly what we hear over and over again is a contradiction of what is in black and white. This is a thoughtful submission that was made to a United Nations committee on the value of public education and justifying, if you will, the position of the Ontario government in protecting public education. Over and over again, what they said in this submission is in direct contrast to what they're doing today under this bill.

These are the consequences of, I believe, failed education policy. That is what we have seen over eight years. We have had three and a half times as many lost student days as the previous two governments combined. That has led to a great deal of instability in the system and an erosion, constantly creating a crisis in our public system, therefore opening the door to suggesting, "Do you know what? Maybe we should be funding our private education system so that we can alleviate the burden of pain for our public education system." I believe that may have been the intent.

First of all, the government cannot afford the money for this education tax credit; it is going to undermine our public education system. More importantly, that money is needed, as we have seen in the report that was handed out not long ago. We know that we have to put money back into the system to restore it. I believe it is \$2 billion that has to be restored, according to Dr Rozanski, immediately into the system. That is an incredible amount of money. That's what he said.

We're also, as you know, taking the education portion of our property tax from seniors. The education portion of their property tax is going to be rebated to seniors. That means that approximately \$450 million less, I think the figure was, is going to be directed to education. That's a lot of money that is going to be taken out of our public education system.

I've heard a number of government members talk about all this money they're putting back into the system, but I want to talk about some of the consequences we've had with regard to even our public spaces these days, because after 1998 when they began this notion of user fees that are required now to pay for schools, to pay for gyms, to pay for classroom spaces and schoolyards—for instance, community basketball teams used to go and use these facilities. Now they have to pay a great deal more money than they did before and it has become inaccessible for these community sports. These low-entry costs to sports are now becoming unaffordable because the school space they require is too expensive.

I talked about this the other evening when we were again debating one of the bills, because I think it's really important. We have a sedentary lifestyle these days; our children have a sedentary lifestyle. The consequences of this mean we're going to have many more cases of juvenile diabetes, many more cases of obesity and many more cases of heart disease and other diseases linked to a sedentary lifestyle. That's what is happening today because we watch TV and our children watch TV many more hours than when I was a child. Not only that, we now sit in front of a computer monitor and children do not get the exercise they need. Not only have the spaces now become inaccessible because of the cost, we have fewer phys ed teachers and recreational opportunities for our students in the system because these are now considered frills. We are doing a great disservice to our youth in both of these areas, and it is very nearsighted, in my opinion, to allow this to happen.

I'm going to give a couple of examples of exactly how much costs have gone up to use public space in schools—public space that has already been paid for by public dollars. The Barrie Royals have a basketball club of about 1,200 kids. Their school space has gone from \$3,000 a year to \$50,000. We're not talking about students and parents who can afford to pay hundreds of dollars to play community sports. These are house leagues. They're not travel sports. Not only are there physical benefits of phys ed and the activities of basketball for young people or any sport, but it also keeps them off the street, yet here we've got school space in Barrie that's inaccessible because it has gone from \$3,000 to \$50,000.

Deep River is a one-high-school town. In Deep River there's a Dr David Lee who is a physicist. Five years ago, he volunteered to start up a basketball club. Again, the costs went from \$1,000 to \$10,000. Why am I saying this? I'm saying this because of the consequences of the funding formula and how they have created a system that is now breaking up our accessibility to our public schools, even after school, because they have now become inaccessible, thank you very much to the narrow-minded policies of the government.

2110

Here we've got this happening, and on the other hand, you have the government saying, "But we want to fund private schools. We're going to take \$500 million"—from \$300 million to \$500 million; as I said, we don't know the numbers yet—"and put it into private schools." There is a choice. A private school is just that, it's a private school. Unfortunately, we also want to do this with no strings attached.

It's important to me that we have a public system that works. What we have now is an erosion in our public school system that is, in my view and my understanding, unprecedented. It is unfortunate, because our public school system has been earned through a great deal of pain, a great deal of understanding about what education is to people, how everyone learns differently, how we all have different abilities in our intellect. Yet what we've got now is a very narrow focus on learning that is jeopardizing good education for our children.

What we have is larger class sizes. Our specialist teachers have decreased by 22%. How does that make our system better? I don't know how. I don't see that it does. Somehow we figure that teacher-librarians are expendable. They have had a 28% decrease. We have information overload in our students. The ability to organize that information and the ability of our students to understand or have more critical thinking when it comes to that information is where teacher-librarians come in. They help them do the research and help them to make sense out of that information overload. What have we done? We've cut them. We have 28% fewer teacher-librarians.

We have 42,000 students on waiting lists for special education. Many of our students cannot be the best they can be because they have been waiting two and three years to be assessed. In my days when I did some teaching—and I taught music—my greatest success was when

I could get students who had some difficulties to achieve and be the best they could be. Then you know that you are really doing a good job, because it's easy to teach the student who is gifted and can learn in spite of the teacher. But it is those who require special education who need the extra effort by the professionals. What we have is 42,000 students waiting.

We have English-as-a-second-language programs; it takes seven years. I certainly didn't have an English-as-a-second-language program when I began school in this country when I six years old. I know that we have learned a lot since then, and yet what have we done? We have a 63% increase in the number of schools reporting English-as-a-second-language students, but we have had no programs since 1999-2000.

Another amazing part for me is that since 1997-98, we've had a 55% increase in the number of schools that are reporting fundraising for classroom supplies. This fundraising is not for the extras, it's for actual classroom supplies.

I talked about the community use of schools but there has been a 113% increase in the number of schools reporting fees for community use. All I can say is that in my area I see so many schools that are closing. We have a school that is full, that was shut down just last year—this was the last year, and in September the school will be shut. The school had a 95% capacity and it had a full junior kindergarten, but the funding gives school boards a bonus, if you want, if they can warehouse students. That's what's happening in my riding. I find that very troubling, to say the least.

I believe that we have an obligation in this province. We have an obligation to return stability to our schools and, more importantly, we have an obligation to value and to have educators understand that we value their work. We value the other encompassing aspect of schools, and that is that the community uses the schools for their community sports, for Girl Guides, for Boy Scouts, for all of those various community activities where a school used to be the hub, where they used to meet, where they used to go after school hours and where volunteers, parents and others would work with students.

Now what happens is our schools are dark in the evenings. If there's a soccer team that wants to use a schoolyard now, or a baseball team, it's very rare any more, because it's all shut down and padlocked. We have lost a sense that our school is not just a place where you have people go to learn from 9 to 3 or 9 to 4, but it's a place that had space for the community as a whole.

I have many examples of very good programs where volunteers would be bringing in children, young people and youth from the community and they'd come together and organize teams of basketball, indoor soccer etc. And what do we have? These spaces now have become unaffordable. I think it is a crime.

While this government pretends that it has money to pay for private schools, it does not have proper funding to make sure that all of the 96% of children who go to public schools in this province are given the best quality

education so that they can be the best they can be. I think this government has forgotten and has lost its way from the time of Premier Davis.

The Acting Speaker: For the last time this evening, up to four members have up to two minutes for questions and comments.

Mr Marchese: I say that the member for Sarnia-Lambton has made a good case to show how the public school system has received less and less over the last eight years under this government than any other previous government. She talked about the fact that we have fewer librarians, fewer music teachers, fewer people using our schools because they can't afford it and so on.

Yet this government has been able to find, to date, 120 million bucks to fund private schools such as Upper Canada College and Havergal, just up the street. They've been able to find 120 million bucks from somewhere.

The member from Scarborough Centre says it's not coming from the public system. Where is the money coming from, if it isn't coming from the public system? Where is the \$120 million to date coming from, member from Scarborough Centre? Tell us that, whenever you get another opportunity, or any other Tory member who is going to respond in the next two minutes.

2120

The member for Niagara Centre says the great equalizer is not public education but education in general, which includes private schools. Ha, I think to myself. Is it a level playing field when a wealthy child is educated in a private school with ample resources both at home and in the private school, while a child in an inner-city school in a public system languishes without adequate textbooks, without support from librarians, music teachers, physical education teachers, educational assistants and special-ed services? That's not equity. I don't know what Flaherty and Ecker are thinking, but that's not equity.

New Democrats would tax those wealthy individuals who can afford to send their kids to Havergal and Upper Canada College and restore some of the money they have taken from me and put it back to a public system where it belongs. That's what we would do.

Mr Maves: I've been searching all night and I found this wonderful quote from Gerretsen, the member for Kingston and the Islands. The member upset me so much, I dropped my book and lost my place and now I'm not going to be able to read the quote. I'm going to have to inform Mr Gerretsen that he helped them out and he looked after them, but he didn't know—

Mr Bruce Crozier (Essex): Just make it up like you usually do.

Mr Maves: No, I never make it up, I say to the member opposite. I go by Hansard and I go by other reliable sources.

Speaking of reliable sources, this debate has produced a lot of quotes from the Liberals. I read one earlier from Mr Sorbara that just defines Liberals to a T. I happened to come across another one from the same Mr Sorbara, and it's about this issue. Mr Sorbara is a member of the present Liberal Party and a member currently from the

Liberal opposition bench, right now a man very much in charge of the Liberal Party platform. Here's what he said, "I support in principle the notion that denominational schools could have support from the public taxpayer base," but this tax credit, "You're putting the money in the hands of parents, rich or poor, and that's a really crazy thing to do." He thinks putting money into the hands of taxpayers—their money, leaving their money in their hands—is a crazy thing to do.

I've lost my place in the book here to find the quote from Gerretsen, but last week we were in here and he was talking about the seniors' property tax credit. He said that the principal reason—now I'm paraphrasing, Speaker, I wish I had the quote—for the existence of government is to tax people. Now that doesn't surprise me. It's an NDP philosophy too, and it goes hand in hand obviously with Mr Sorbara's quote that putting taxpayers' money in the hands of the people is a crazy thing to do.

As we go forward in this debate, I look forward to collecting more quotes like this from the members opposite.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker: Order. We're getting there and we are going to get there.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker: Please don't make me stand up. Let's just do this. I will recognize the member from St Catharines. Please listen attentively.

Mr James J. Bradley (St Catharines): I'll try to be non-provocative as always and very reasonable with both government and opposition.

I want to comment on one important aspect the member for Sarnia-Lambton raised, which is a little broader issue than perhaps she intended, but it's the issue of user fees. I've been observing for some period of time the number of kids, young people particularly, who are not able to take part in activities because of user fees. In my own community, the local politicians will say, and I think with justification, that because they've been downloaded upon, they have had to raise their user fees. In various schools, which used to be used for such things as Girl Guides and Boy Scouts and other constructive activities, the fees for the use of the schools or the schoolyards have gone up considerably. As a result, a lot of young people are not able to engage in what I call productive and useful activities.

Within the context of the public school building, we have seen this as a community centre and when the member identifies that, if I can broaden it a bit, I think of municipalities as well making decisions that I think ultimately may keep their tax rate down, and indeed they won't be able to raise taxes if this government is re-elected. They will be forced to go to more and more user fees, which are toughest on people or families which have a modest income. I think all of us in this House, regardless of our political affiliation, want to see young people involved in productive and constructive activities that will enhance their citizenship and their character. I

think what the member describes happening with user fees is militating against that.

Mr Prue: I rise to respond to the member for Sarnia-Lambton and I congratulate her for what she had to say. I want to tell you that we in the New Democratic Party are unequivocal in our opposition to this bill. We are opposed to it and we say quite bluntly and quite categorically, “No money to private schools.” It’s as simple as that. We are not going to equivocate here in any way.

We believe that our public school system is crumbling. We believe that it needs \$1.5 billion in extra money now, not over three years. We believe that the local school boards should be given back autonomy, instead of having it taken away from them. We believe in full-time staff, including principals and vice-principals and caretakers and secretaries and everyone who looks after those kids every day.

We believe in financing sufficient that crumbling buildings, particularly in older towns and cities—including Toronto and all over Ontario where those schools are starting to crumble, where the roofs are leaking and where everything is going to pot—can be fixed.

We believe that our playgrounds are places not only for kids during the day but for kids and adults at night and that user fees are killing ordinary programs around this city and around this province and they need to be fixed.

We also believe that the money that is being spent here has to come from somewhere. Where is this money coming from? If it’s not coming from the schools, as so many Conservative speakers have said, where is it coming from? Is it coming from the hospitals? Is it coming from daycare? Is it coming from seniors care? Is it coming from money that should have gone to municipalities? Where is the money coming from? If the money is there, it should be spent where it is needed, and that is in our school system—not in the private school system and not in systems where people already have enough and don’t need our money.

Mr Maves: On a point of order, Mr Speaker: Since the members opposite were afraid I would misquote their

colleague, I wonder if I could have unanimous consent to read the quote as it is verbatim in Hansard?

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker: I’m sorry, I hear at least one no.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker: Just as long as everyone knows that, like in a classroom, one person is going to keep us all here. I can take another speaker and keep you here for quite a bit.

The member for Sarnia-Lambton to respond.

Ms Di Cocco: I want to thank the members from Trinity-Spadina, Niagara Falls, St Catharines and Beaches-East York. I do have to say to the member for Niagara Falls, don’t throw stones, as I believe was said the other day, if you live in a glass house.

First of all, when you want to talk about the notion of changes—your government had a paradigm shift when it came to its presentation to the United Nations on public education versus private funding. When you want to talk about what Ernie Eves, the Premier of Ontario, says today and what he said in December 2001, that he thought this, “was kind of ludicrous myself,” when he was talking about school tax credits, “without standards”—he said it was ludicrous. He also mentioned, when he was talking about tax credits, schools teaching hatred—he went that far. I don’t want to go there, because I believe there’s a glass house over there.

That is my issue with this government, because they have had a paradigm shift in their philosophy, and they did not go into the election in 1999 with any notion of public funding for private schools. They didn’t go into the election in 1999 saying anything of that nature. I take exception to this notion that others have had a paradigm shift when in fact it is their policy that is moving this province in the wrong direction when it comes to Bill 53.

The Acting Speaker: It being almost 9:30 of the clock, this House will stand adjourned until 1:30 tomorrow afternoon.

The House adjourned at 2130.

CONTENTS

Monday 16 June 2003

SECOND READINGS

The Right Choices for Equity in Education Act (Budget Measures), 2003, Bill 53, Mrs Ecker	
Mr Marchese	1199, 1204, 1207 1218
Mr Clark	1203
Ms Di Cocco	1203, 1207, 1215 1216, 1219
Mr Prue	1204, 1211, 1214, 1219
Mr Murdoch	1204
Mr Johnson	1205, 1208
Mr Sterling	1207
Mr Parsons	1208
Mr Bryant	1208, 1212
Mr Maves	1211, 1215, 1218
Mr McMeekin	1211
Ms Mushinski	1212, 1215
Ms Papatello	1214
Mr Bradley	1218
Debate deemed adjourned	1219

TABLE DES MATIÈRES

Lundi 16 juin 2003

DEUXIÈME LECTURE

Loi de 2003 sur les bons choix pour l'équité en matière d'éducation (mesures budgétaires), projet de loi 53, M^{me} Ecker	
Débat présumé ajourné	1219