



Legislative Assembly
of Ontario

Fourth Session, 37th Parliament

Assemblée législative
de l'Ontario

Quatrième session, 37^e législature

**Official Report
of Debates
(Hansard)**

**Journal
des débats
(Hansard)**

Wednesday 18 June 2003

Mercredi 18 juin 2003

Speaker
Honourable Gary Carr

Président
L'honorable Gary Carr

Clerk
Claude L. DesRosiers

Greffier
Claude L. DesRosiers

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Wednesday 18 June 2003

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Mercredi 18 juin 2003

*The House met at 1330.
Prayers.*

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

COMMUNITY HEALTH CENTRE

Mr Michael A. Brown (Algoma-Manitoulin): Last Friday at the Lester B. Pearson Centre in Elliot Lake, Mayor George Farkouh, my federal colleague Brent St Denis, MP, and I met with a large group of interested persons who have been working very hard in the community to establish a community health centre. Bob Campbell, co-chair Louis Ratthe and public relations chair Bob Whitehead introduced a number of speakers who outlined the advantages of community health centres. The group has put together a comprehensive primary care proposal that will serve not only francophones but the broader community. The proposal would see physicians, nurse practitioners, nurses and other health professionals providing patients with the appropriate professional for the appropriate need.

Over two years ago I directly presented this proposal to Minister Clement. Since that time, we've been waiting for answer.

On Friday, young people from the Clair Dimock and All Star children's daycare centres presented me with over 2,000 cards asking the government to approve a community health centre for Elliot Lake. Today, on behalf of all of those in Elliot Lake who support this proposal, I present these cards to the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care.

UNITED EMPIRE LOYALISTS' DAY

Mr Toby Barrett (Haldimand-Norfolk-Brant): It was six years ago that this government passed a bill proclaiming United Empire Loyalists' Day. Tomorrow, June 19—United Empire Loyalists' Day—we will once again commemorate the sacrifice and contributions made by thousands of United Empire Loyalists who fled persecution south of the border to make their mark in Canada. It's my honour tomorrow to host a flag-raising ceremony outside this Legislature to mark the occasion.

Last year in Norfolk county we welcomed close to 100 proud descendants of United Empire Loyalists for their national conference. Meeting with the many proud descendants of the Loyalist legacy gave me a chance to

reflect on my own Loyalist heritage. Officially, I am UE through the Bowlby family on my mom's side. I will mention as well that my middle name is Butler.

We are all benefactors of the Loyalist vision that founded our province and our Dominion. Evidence of their hard work and significant contributions to the Ontario we know today can be found throughout this great province. I urge all MPPs to pay tribute to our Loyalist heritage tomorrow morning. We're getting together at 10:45.

I wish to end by quoting the very motto of this province, "Loyal in the beginning, loyal remaining," a constant reminder of our Loyalist values. God save the Queen.

MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

Mrs Lyn McLeod (Thunder Bay-Atikokan): It is more than two years since the Minister of Health established nine regional task forces to determine the needs in the area of community mental health. The task forces were made up of mental health advocates who have worked hard, in good faith, to make recommendations to this government. They believe, or at least they believed, that this government actually intended to act on their recommendations.

These reports have been sitting on the minister's desk since December. The people who know what these reports contain are bound by a commitment to confidentiality that they were made to sign when they became members of the task forces, but they are getting increasingly frustrated by the complete lack of response from the minister.

In the absence of public access to the reports, we can be sure of two things: one is that the reports document the desperate need for community mental health services; the other is the fact that the release of the reports will embarrass a government that has refused even to acknowledge the real needs of community mental health.

No wonder they want to bury the truth of what's in these reports: an indictment of this government's failure to keep its promises on mental health.

This is the government that repeatedly promised that their law, Brian's Law, would be backed up with community support and treatment for those coping with mental illness. But community mental health agencies have had no increase in their base budgets for a decade; waiting lists of people needing help urgently are getting unmanageable; agencies find it impossible to deal even

with crisis situations. Waiting lists can be as long as five years. One agency, for example, that was designed to serve 12 clients now serves, as best they can, 250 people.

While community agencies struggle to meet the most critical needs, we know that people are being discharged from hospitals with no support, and that more and more people are being put in jail for their own protection because there is no place where they can get support and care.

It is past time for this government to release the reports that document these needs. It is time for this government to keep its promises to those with mental illness.

KINDERGARTEN

Mr Rosario Marchese (Trinity-Spadina): Currently, most children attend kindergarten for half-days every day or for full days every second day and it varies across the province. But an Alberta study found that full-time JK and full-time SK had a dramatic impact on children's mastery of key learning skills, particularly reading, and that it may be an important influence on their ability to succeed in the first years of school.

The study raises the question of whether it may be a mistake for schools to hold back on kindergarten time, as they may end up eventually paying the costs for students lagging behind.

Dr Jose da Costa, an education professor at the University of Alberta and one of the authors of the study, said the evidence should compel educational authorities to implement full-day, five-day-a-week kindergarten immediately, particularly for schools in low-income neighbourhoods. Yet Mr Christie, the marionette controlled by the Conservative government, through an act of malfeasance got rid of nine full-time senior kindergartens in the inner-city school area of Toronto.

New Democrats have a proposal. We've been talking about this for quite some time. We argue that full-time junior kindergarten and full-time senior kindergarten would restore equity to so many children who desperately need it in those early years. That study confirms it. Many have spoken about it; New Democrats would do it, and it's in our platform.

1340

GOVERNMENT'S AGENDA

Mr Gerry Martiniuk (Cambridge): I'm pleased to support our government's proposed initiative to permit Ontario homeowners to deduct up to \$5,000 of their yearly income interest costs from their Ontario taxable income, phased in over five years. This deduction will make home ownership more affordable, encourage new purchasers and create more jobs.

I am pleased to support our government's proposed initiative to prohibit strikes, lockouts and work-to-rule actions during the school year in the public and Catholic

school systems in Ontario. The education of our children is too important to be disrupted by labour strife.

I am pleased to support our government's proposed initiative to create 8,000 new positions for nurses over the next three years and the hiring of 1,000 new nurse practitioners over the next five years. The nursing profession is one of the pillars of our health care system.

GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY

Ms Caroline Di Cocco (Sarnia-Lambton): Yesterday, I reintroduced for the third time my private member's bill, An Act to require open meetings for provincial and municipal boards, commissions and other public bodies. This bill, along with Dalton McGuinty's commitment to good government, is the most marked difference between the provincial Liberal standards of more open and honest government versus the lower standards of Premier Ernie Eves.

In the 2002 report of the Information and Privacy Commissioner of Ontario, she calls for the need for an open meeting act with penalties and oversight—a much-needed law, such as the one that I tabled yesterday. This bill raises the bar of accountability and will ensure transparency in decisions made by public bodies who spend taxpayers' dollars. It adds a penalty to those who conduct meetings inappropriately behind closed doors. The Conservatives voted against this bill in 2002 after second reading.

Ann Cavoukian, Ontario's Information and Privacy Commissioner, states that people expect and demand greater levels of transparency in decision-making processes of government. Unfortunately, it seems that the provincial Conservatives have lost their way and have actually conducted themselves with less transparency, less accountability, and they accept lower standards of conduct across the board. This is yet another reason that it's time for a change in the province of Ontario.

NORTH BAY RELAY FOR LIFE

Mr AL McDonald (Nipissing): Last Friday, I had the opportunity to attend the Relay for Life in the city of North Bay. It was held up at the air force base. I had the opportunity of speaking from the stage, and when I looked out over the crowd, it was something to see, the crowd that was there. There were 138 teams participating in the Relay for Life, and they raised \$280,000 for cancer research. I'm very proud of this group because they raised more per capita than any city in the province.

The first lap was a lap of survivors. They read their names out. It was one way for us to stand there and applaud them for their courage and to support them in their battle. It was an incredible event. We have to thank the volunteers and the participants who made it what it was.

The Relay for Life is our way of remembering those we've lost to this terrible disease, to support and encourage those who are in the battle of this important

disease, and to celebrate those who have survived. I have to tell you that I was very proud just to be at the event. There was a young woman who had invited me to walk with her on Friday night. Unfortunately, her disease came back, and she wasn't able to be there with us that night, but I just want to extend our thoughts to her.

AUTOMOBILE INSURANCE

Mr Bruce Crozier (Essex): The people of Ontario are taking a pounding from skyrocketing insurance rates. Sadly, the Conservatives just sit there and make excuses for doing nothing while honest, hard-working people live in fear of their next insurance rate hike.

But the real tragedy is the NDP. Every time I look to their benches, it's like a time warp. It's almost as though I were peering back to 1989 and listening to Peter Kormos call over and over again for public auto insurance.

Now, the NDP promised public auto insurance. They pledged it with their heart and said it was the cure to all the woes of the world. Right there in their 1990 platform it said, "New Democrats for many years have proposed that Ontario have a driver-owned system of car insurance." They promised "a driver-owned car insurance plan that's fair, affordable and accessible."

Did they do that? No, they broke their promise. Where was Howard Hampton when the NDP broke that promise? Sitting at the cabinet table. Where was Shelley Martel when they broke that promise? Sitting at the cabinet table. Where was Marilyn Churley when they broke that promise? Sitting at the cabinet table. Where was Rosario Marchese when they broke that promise? Sitting around the cabinet table.

Where is their credibility an auto insurance? Nowhere.

TRANSPORTATION PLANNING

Mr Cameron Jackson (Burlington): On June 12, I raised concerns in this House with the Minister of Transportation about the government's plan to proceed with the environmental assessment for the mid-peninsula highway.

As you know, on Monday, June 16, the city of Burlington and Halton region filed a notice of application for a judicial review with the Ontario Superior Court. I have read this 30-page application. My community and I continue to hold to the belief that the province hasn't sufficiently examined the environmental impacts of building a new highway along the escarpment. We aren't sure the proposed route will solve all our transit issues, and we argue that the province is breaking environmental law by moving forward with this EA.

Yesterday in Divisional Court, a ruling found that sections of the Environmental Assessment Act amendments in 1996 limited the scope of an EA and they were struck down. In short, the government's EA process literally only asks the question, "Where will the pavement be put?" However, with yesterday's Divisional

Court ruling, the Ministry of the Environment has no jurisdiction to approve a scoped or pared-down environmental assessment whose terms of reference eliminate the question of a need for a proposed highway or consideration for alternatives to building this highway.

I have consistently supported the concerns of my community and the concerns of COPE and CONE. I again ask the minister to reconsider proceeding with this mid-peninsula EA and to get back to the table with the city of Burlington and the region of Halton.

Hon Frank Klees (Minister of Transportation): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: With all respect, I would ask the member from Burlington to read the needs assessment. He may get some information he didn't have before.

The Speaker (Hon Gary Carr): That's not a point of order. I usually look to the other side to do that.

Interjections.

The Speaker: I note that everybody is good-natured, which is very helpful on the issue.

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT AGENCIES

The Speaker (Hon Gary Carr): I beg to inform the House that today the Clerk received the report on intended appointments dated June 18, 2003, of the standing committee on government agencies.

You all stopped and thought I was going to read something very important here, didn't you?

Pursuant to standing order 106(e)9, the report is deemed to be adopted by the House.

I'm sure you didn't stop because I was saying so. It's coming toward the end of the session, and I won't be around here much longer. So it's what matters.

STANDING COMMITTEE ON REGULATIONS AND PRIVATE BILLS

Mr Rosario Marchese (Trinity-Spadina): I beg leave to present a report from the standing committee on regulations and private bills and move its adoption:

Clerk at the Table (Mr Todd Decker): Your committee begs to report the following bill as amended:

Bill Pr18, An Act respecting the County of Haliburton.

The Speaker (Hon Gary Carr): Shall the report be received and adopted? Agreed.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

HIGHWAY TRAFFIC AMENDMENT ACT (MOTORCYCLE HELMETS), 2003

LOI DE 2003 MODIFIANT LE CODE DE LA ROUTE (CASQUES DE MOTOCYCLISTES)

Mr Bartolucci moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 109, An Act to amend the Highway Traffic Act with respect to motorcycle helmets / Projet de loi 109, Loi modifiant le Code de la route en ce qui concerne les casques de motocyclistes.

The Speaker (Hon Gary Carr): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All in favour will please say "aye."

All opposed will please say "nay."

The ayes have it. Carried.

The member for a short statement?

Mr Rick Bartolucci (Sudbury): The police of the province of Ontario have asked me to introduce this bill. It amends the Highway Traffic Act to require motorcyclists to surrender their helmets for police inspection on request. This will save police forces across Ontario numerous hours that they have to wait in the courts processing these types of violations.

1350

JUNE 30, 2003 STATUTORY HOLIDAY ACT, 2003

LOI DE 2003 DÉSIGNANT JOUR FÉRIÉ LE 30 JUIN 2003

Mr Kormos moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 110, An Act to amend the Employment Standards Act, 2000 / Projet de loi 110, Loi modifiant la Loi de 2000 sur les normes d'emploi.

The Speaker (Hon Gary Carr): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

The member for a short statement?

Mr Peter Kormos (Niagara Centre): Ontario's workers are working harder, working longer, 12-hour workdays, 60-hour workweeks, in the Mike Harris-Ernie Eves Conservative Ontario. This amends the Employment Standards Act to provide that June 30, 2003, is a public holiday. That will permit hardworking people to have a long weekend, come the July 1st weekend, as compared to the regular two-day weekend that they would otherwise have. It's part of the NDP commitment to create two new statutory holidays for workers here in Ontario so that we have 10 stat holidays, in comparison to the United Kingdom and France, both of which have 13.

INTERNATIONAL DAY FOR THE ELIMINATION OF RACIAL DISCRIMINATION ACT, 2003

LOI DE 2003 SUR LA JOURNÉE INTERNATIONALE POUR L'ÉLIMINATION DE LA DISCRIMINATION RACIALE

Mr Duncan moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 111, An Act to proclaim March 21 as International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination / Projet de loi 111, Loi proclamant le 21 mars Journée internationale pour l'élimination de la discrimination raciale.

The Speaker (Hon Gary Carr): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

The member for short statement?

Mr Dwight Duncan (Windsor-St Clair): The United Nations commemorates International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination on March 21 of each year. That day commences the week of solidarity with people struggling against racism and racial discrimination. The people of Ontario abhor racial discrimination in all its forms, and therefore we believe this bill should be passed. It also reflects how much we abhor the fact that immigration would be part of the Tory's crime and punishment section of their campaign document.

SIR ADAM BECK MEMORIAL ACT, 2003

LOI DE 2003 À LA MÉMOIRE DE SIR ADAM BECK

Mr Hampton moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 112, An Act, in memory of Sir Adam Beck, to prevent the privatization of Hydro One Inc. / Projet de loi 112, Loi à la mémoire de Sir Adam Beck visant à empêcher la privatisation de Hydro One Inc.

The Speaker (Hon Gary Carr): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

The member for short statement?

Mr Howard Hampton (Kenora-Rainy River): This is an act in memory of Sir Adam Beck, the creator of Ontario's publicly owned hydroelectric system. It is to prevent the privatization of Hydro One Inc, which the government says it doesn't want to privatize.

PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION AND HIGHWAY IMPROVEMENT AMENDMENT ACT (NOISE REMEDIATION), 2003

LOI DE 2003 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR L'AMÉNAGEMENT DES VOIES PUBLIQUES ET DES TRANSPORTS EN COMMUN (RÉDUCTION DU BRUIT)

Mr Caplan moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 113, An Act to amend the Public Transportation and Highway Improvement Act with respect to noise remediation / Projet de loi 113, Loi modifiant la Loi sur

l'aménagement des voies publiques et des transports en commun afin de réduire le bruit.

The Speaker (Hon Gary Carr): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

The member for a short statement?

Mr David Caplan (Don Valley East): This bill amends the Public Transportation and Highway Improvement Act to require the Minister of Transportation to assess noise levels on highways after their construction, extension or alteration. When the noise level exceeds acceptable levels by five decibels or more, the minister is obliged to take all necessary steps to reduce the noise to an acceptable level within three years. This bill also requires the minister to establish and publish standards for acceptable noise levels for the operation of highways.

This bill is done to complement the extensive work and lobbying that residents of the community of Don Valley East have been doing to remediate the noise increases that have resulted from road repairs and other work on Highways 401 and 404 and the Don Valley Parkway that intersect in the heart of Don Valley East. They've been frustrated by the Ministry of Transportation, who have thrown up their hands when presented with their concerns, saying they have no mandate to solve these problems. With this bill, residents of Don Valley East can rest easier.

FIRE PROTECTION AND PREVENTION
AMENDMENT ACT, 2003

LOI DE 2003 MODIFIANT LA LOI
SUR LA PRÉVENTION ET LA PROTECTION
CONTRE L'INCENDIE

Mr Levac moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 114, An Act to amend the Fire Protection and Prevention Act, 1997 / Projet de loi 114, Loi modifiant la Loi de 1997 sur la prévention et la protection contre l'incendie.

The Speaker (Hon Gary Carr): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

The member for a short statement?

Mr Dave Levac (Brant): Given the results of several serious inquiries across the province, the bill requires that any proposals to reduce or restructure fire protection services in communities be approved by the fire marshal before being implemented. The fire marshal would then be required to do an annual report to the minister on any of these proposals that were reviewed.

AUTO-DIALER CRIME ALERT ACT, 2003
LOI DE 2003 SUR LES APPELS
AUTOMATIQUES D'AVERTISSEMENT
D'ACTES CRIMINELS

Mr Colle moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 115, An Act to enhance community safety and crime prevention by supporting existing auto-dialer crime

alert programs and encouraging the establishment of new auto-dialer crime alert programs in communities across Ontario / Projet de loi 115, Loi visant à améliorer la sécurité publique et la prévention du crime en aidant les programmes d'appels automatiques d'avertissement d'actes criminels et en encourageant la mise en place de nouveaux programmes semblables au sein des collectivités en Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon Gary Carr): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

The member for a short statement?

Mr Mike Colle (Eglinton-Lawrence): The bill proposes measures to enhance and support auto-dialer crime alert programs operating in Ontario communities and to encourage the establishment and operation of such programs throughout the province. Auto-dialer crime alert programs permit the transmission of voice and e-mail messages related to criminal activity and public safety to members of the public who wish to receive them.

1400

REGISTERED PLAN (RETIREMENT
INCOME) EXEMPTION ACT, 2003

LOI DE 2003 PORTANT INSAISSABILITÉ
DES RÉGIMES ENREGISTRÉS
(REVENU DE RETRAITE)

Mr Bartolucci moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 116, An Act exempting registered retirement plans from certain enforcement processes / Projet de loi 116, Loi portant exemption des régimes de retraite enregistrés de certaines mesures d'exécution forcée.

The Speaker (Hon Gary Carr): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

The member for a short statement?

Mr Rick Bartolucci (Sudbury): This bill provides that registered retirement savings plans, registered retirement income funds and deferred profit-sharing plans of plan holders are exempt from certain enforcement processes brought to them by their creditors.

Mr Howard Hampton (Kenora-Rainy River): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: I ask for unanimous consent for second and third reading of Bill 100, An Act respecting the Kawartha Highlands Signature Site Park.

The Speaker: Is there unanimous consent? I'm afraid I heard some noes.

PRIVATE INVESTIGATORS
AND SECURITY GUARDS
AMENDMENT ACT, 2003

LOI DE 2003 MODIFIANT LA LOI
SUR LES ENQUÊTEURS PRIVÉS
ET LES GARDIENS

Mr Levac moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 117, An Act to amend the Private Investigators and Security Guards Act to require a minimum level of training for licensees and to require that uniforms and vehicles of security guards be readily distinguishable from those of the police / *Projet de loi 117, Loi modifiant la Loi sur les enquêteurs privés et les gardiens en vue d'exiger un niveau de formation minimum pour les titulaires de licences et d'exiger que les uniformes et les véhicules des gardiens se distinguent facilement de ceux de la police.*

The Speaker (Hon Gary Carr): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

The member for a short statement?

Mr Dave Levac (Brant): This is a bill that is a duplicate of a previous bill that died on the order paper, and it is requested by all police services in the province of Ontario. The bill requires that applicants for licensing as private investigators and security guards have a minimum level of training before being licensed. The bill also requires that uniforms worn by security guards and the vehicles they use as security guards in the course of their employment can readily be distinguishable from those that we have in our police services today.

Mr John O'Toole (Durham): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: The Leader of the Opposition, Mr Hampton, asked for unanimous consent on Bill 100. I'm wondering if it was the member from Eglinton-Lawrence who declined to—

The Speaker: That is not a point of order. Just to correct the record, the member is not the leader of the official opposition.

EDUCATION AMENDMENT ACT
(APPROPRIATE USE OF TECHNOLOGY
IN SCHOOLS), 2003

LOI DE 2003 MODIFIANT LA LOI
SUR L'ÉDUCATION (UTILISATION
APPROPRIÉE DE LA TECHNOLOGIE
DANS LES ÉCOLES)

Mr Caplan moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 118, An Act to amend the Education Act to provide for the appropriate use of communications technology in schools by requiring boards to establish policies and guidelines governing the use of wireless communications devices by pupils on school premises / *Projet de loi 118, Loi modifiant la Loi sur l'éducation afin de prévoir l'utilisation appropriée de la technologie de communication dans les écoles en exigeant que les conseils établissent des politiques et des lignes directrices régissant l'utilisation par les élèves de dispositifs de communication sans fil dans les lieux scolaires.*

The Speaker (Hon Gary Carr): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

The member for a short statement?

Mr David Caplan (Don Valley East): This bill was created in response to the many parents and educators who have real concerns about the use of wireless

technology in our schools. Whether it's ringing cellphones, beeping pagers or instant messaging between students, I believe we need to ensure that all boards have rules governing their use.

This bill, if passed, will amend the Education Act to require boards of education to establish policies and guidelines governing the use of cellphones, pagers and similar devices by pupils on school premises and will ensure that these policies and guidelines provide disciplinary consequences for non-compliance.

Mr James J. Bradley (St Catharines): On a point of order, Mr Speaker, for my friend from Stoney Creek: I would like to ask unanimous consent of the House to hear Mr Jackson's statement again when he comes back, because I couldn't hear it for all the government ministers shouting at him while he was trying to speak. Do we have unanimous consent for that?

The Speaker: I'm afraid I heard some noes.

VISITORS

Mr Bruce Crozier (Essex): Speaker, I'd like you and the members to join with me in welcoming, in the west members' gallery, a long-time friend and long-serving member of the Essex South and Essex Liberal association, my friend Jake deJong.

The Speaker (Hon Gary Carr): I thank the members.

Mr Gerard Kennedy (Parkdale-High Park): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: Je souhaite la bienvenue à Guilaine et Michel Potvin, visiteurs dans la galerie ouest ici. Michelle and Guilane Potrin are interested in French education, and in support of a French school. They were fortunate, or unfortunate, enough to win a lunch with me here at the Legislature today. They're here, and I'm sure everyone joins me in welcoming them to the Legislature today.

The Speaker: We welcome our guests.

Just before we continue, in case we've missed anybody, I'll say it again: introduction of bills? I didn't think there was anybody left.

MOTIONS

HOUSE SITTINGS

Hon John R. Baird (Minister of Energy, Minister responsible for francophone affairs, Government House Leader): I seek unanimous consent to move a motion without notice, debate or amendment respecting today's sitting.

The Speaker (Hon Gary Carr): Is there unanimous consent? Agreed.

Hon Mr Baird: I move that, notwithstanding standing order 9 or any other order of the House, the House may continue to meet beyond 6 pm today in order that order numbers G43 and G53 may be called, and that im-

mediately following consideration of those orders, the Speaker shall adjourn the House until Thursday, June 19, at 10 am.

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

ORAL QUESTIONS

FISCAL AND ECONOMIC POLICY

Mr Gerry Phillips (Scarborough-Agincourt): My question is actually for the Minister of Finance, but I don't think she's here as yet. I'd been led to believe she would be here. Since the finance minister is not here, I'll go to the Premier.

Actually, the minister is just arriving, and I'll begin my question now.

The Speaker (Hon Gary Carr): If we could put the clock back and start again. The member for Scarborough-Agincourt.

Mr Phillips: Minister, from the statements we've seen from you in the media it seems that you believe Ontario's fiscal situation is getting worse. The budget assumed a 3% real growth, and I gather the indications now are that it may be lower or substantially lower. In the budget, there were some major risks—I think \$2.2 billion of asset sales that you planned—I believe about \$770 million from the federal government that assumed a \$6-billion surplus of the federal government. If growth indeed is 1% lower, I gather that we lose revenue of \$600 million.

Recognizing that Ontario appears to be facing a significant fiscal situation—the rating agencies indicate as much as a \$2-billion deficit—will you provide Ontario with an updated economic and fiscal outlook indicating how you plan to deal with these growing problems?

Hon Janet Ecker (Minister of Finance): We've balanced the budget in this province four times, we are going to do it for a fifth and, as the honourable member knows, we report regularly on the finances of Ontario. We will continue to do that as we have in the past.

1410

Mr Phillips: You've indicated, Minister, that you may have to take some fairly dramatic action. There are two areas that you can take the action in. One is to cut planned spending and the second is to delay the tax cuts.

It was exactly a year ago that you presented your budget of 2002 here in the Legislature. There you said, "Because of the temporary fiscal situation, the Ontario government has made the decision to reschedule certain major planned tax cuts." That was a year ago.

We face again, I gather, based on your comments, another significant fiscal situation. The question is this: recognizing that the problems are similar to last year, is the delay of promised tax cuts one of the options you're considering?

Hon Mrs Ecker: The situation is not similar to what it was last year. This year we are facing two significant

problems. One of them is the impact of SARS on this province and the second is Ottawa's totally inadequate response to dealing with that. I think the honourable member could have been helpful if, instead of standing here in your place and asking this question, you would join with us in the work that we're trying to do on behalf of Ontario residents to get our fair share of support for SARS. Our health community needs that, our business community here needs that and Ottawa needs to be at the table to help us in that regard.

Mr Phillips: I gather, Minister, you're saying the situation may be in fact worse than last year. I simply want to say to you that last year when you faced a "fiscal situation," as you called it—and I gather you're saying the situation may be worse—you made the decision to cancel scheduled tax cuts. You have indicated that you have to make some big decisions on behalf of the Eves government. You are, I gather, planning to make some substantial cuts in services. The people of Ontario at least want to be assured that as part of your plan to balance the budget you will do the same thing that you did last year: that you will make certain that one of the decisions that you will look at, and frankly we recommend, in dealing with this situation is to once again delay scheduled tax cuts. Is that one of the options—delaying scheduled tax cuts—you are looking at, or have you ruled that out?

Hon Mrs Ecker: First of all, last year we did not cancel tax cuts; as a matter of fact, our budget had additional tax cuts in it. This spring's budget had tax cuts in it.

I know the Liberal Party across the way has voted against every tax cut, every piece of tax relief we have given hard-working citizens in Ontario, including what is on the table right now: additional tax relief for seniors. They have voted against it every single time.

On this side of the House, we believe that tax relief is part of the economic plan that has allowed this province to grow as strongly as it has, that has allowed this province to have over a million new jobs, that allowed this province to rebound from what happened to us with the events of 9/11, and it is the same economic plan that will allow this province to continue to grow—not their plan, our plan.

PROTECTION FOR HEALTH CARE WORKS

Mrs Lyn McLeod (Thunder Bay-Atikokan): My question is for the Minister of Health. Minister, all of us in this Legislature have applauded the heroic efforts of our health care workers as they care for patients afflicted with SARS, often at risk to their own health and even their own lives. Our health care workers in turn have expected of both their government and their employers a commitment to provide the maximum possible protection for them.

As you know, one of the keys to proper protection for nurses and health care workers working in hospitals is to have properly fitted masks. It was in relationship to that,

at the request of nurses, that the Ministry of Labour undertook a little over a week ago to issue orders regarding protective equipment in hospitals and to undertake to proactively investigate high-risk hospitals and, indeed, committed to continue to visit all Toronto-area hospitals to ensure that our health care workers would be properly protected.

Minister, today the nurses' association of Ontario wrote a letter to your Premier indicating that the Ministry of Labour has ordered a halt to all proactive inspections for Toronto-area hospitals. The nurses want to know why the proactive inspections to protect our nurses have been halted.

Hon Tony Clement (Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): I think the best way to answer that is to refer it to the Minister of Labour.

Hon Brad Clark (Minister of Labour): I thank the honourable member for the question. It gives me an opportunity to clarify exactly what's been happening. There were two hospitals, actually, where the Ministry of Labour was called in specifically to deal with the fitting of masks. And with the greatest respect, they're respirators. They're N95 respirators; they're not masks.

The process is very simple. We provided to the Ministry of Health how the fitting should occur and the employers are responsible for doing it with their nurses. That's the way the law works. The Ministry of Labour does not go out and do fit-testing for all of the employers in the province of Ontario.

There have been complaints. The member is correct in that. As a matter of fact, from March 27 to June 16, there have been 21 SARS-related work refusals in the Ontario public service and there have been 31 SARS-related work refusals in various sectors, including the health care sector. Of these, 10 were related to the issue of wearing masks and gloves and one of these 10 was from nurses and physicians. We are enforcing the laws.

Mrs McLeod: The nurses' association considers it "completely unacceptable" that proactive inspections are only going to proceed now for categories 3 and 2 hospitals, where SARS has actually occurred.

My supplementary question should be redirected to the Minister of Health, because the nurses were even more disappointed and more concerned when they learned that the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care had replaced its original May 31 directives with revised directives that were issued just this past Monday, June 16, which in their view reduced the protection for the majority of health care workers. They believe it is premature to reduce the protection of these workers, and we would have to agree, given the fact that as of Monday when the protection was reduced, there were still 44 probable cases of SARS in the GTA.

I have to return with my supplemental question to the Minister of Health. Why was your ministry in fact working with the chief executive officer of Sunnybrook and Women's College Hospital, without consultation with the Ontario Nurses' Association, to revise the directives that had originally been issued on May 31, which

did provide an assurance that the maximum degree of protection would be provided to our health care workers?

Hon Mr Clark: I'll refer the matter back to the Minister of Health.

Hon Mr Clement: I can certainly confirm that there have been a series of new directives out to all health care venues, including acute care hospitals, but also to long-term-care facilities and physicians' offices. They reflect the latest that is known on a scientific basis as to the best infection control techniques that can be employed to protect health care workers, patients and our community. I signed off on those as the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care and Drs Young and D'Cunha issued those directives on the basis of our science committee and their recommendations and on the basis of extensive consultation with the hospital and other health care sectors.

If the honourable member has an individual or an organization that wishes to comment on the directives, we do invite that kind of commentary, because there is always an opportunity to improve where necessary, and we're certainly willing and able to do that.

Mrs McLeod: Minister, this is not "an organization"; this is the body representing the Ontario nurses who are out in our hospitals day in and day out, concerned, coming out of frightened families who know that they're putting their safety, their health and even their lives at risk to do their jobs and who ask at least that their government and their employers provide them with minimum protection. That is a highly abstract and theoretical answer to an organization that represents nurses.

Minister, let me read to you what the nurses have asked the Premier: "I ask you," Premier, "to direct the MOH/LTC to reinstate precautions in the directives that fully protect all health care workers in patient-care areas and ask you to direct the MOL to reinstitute proactive health and safety investigations, with sufficient resources to complete them forthwith."

They go on to say, "Failure to meet these obligations, in our opinion, would also constitute statutory negligence on the part of this government. We urge you in the strongest terms not to stand back and knowingly aid and abet those employers who continue to put our members' lives at risk."

Minister, how do you answer the nurses who say that your government is knowingly aiding and abetting employers to put health care workers' lives at risk?

Hon Mr Clement: To the Minister of Labour.

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Hon Mr Clark: I take great exception to what the member opposite has just said. The reality is the system is working. With the greatest of respect, the process has been this way for many years. You know that. The employer is responsible for fit testing and safety precautions. There are joint health and safety committees in the hospitals. If the nurses have concerns about these issues, they take it to the committee.

Twenty-one SARS-related refusals, 31 in the health care—10 in the health care sector, one from the nurses and physicians. The Ministry of Labour has investigated

the matters. They have issued orders where orders are necessary in two hospitals. The orders have been complied with.

The Ministry of Health has made very clear what the guidelines are and my ministry is responsible for enforcing them. If the nurses have concerns, they do exactly what they're doing now. They take it to the joint health and safety committee, and if they still have concerns, they bring it to the Ministry of Health, and it inspects, investigates and does orders.

HYDRO ONE

Mr Howard Hampton (Kenora-Rainy River): My question is for the Premier. Today I tabled the Sir Adam Beck Memorial Act, which would make it illegal for any government to sell Hydro One. One year ago your government passed legislation giving yourself the power to sell Hydro One. Four months ago you said, in anticipation of an election, that you were not going to sell Hydro One. One month ago we saw your budget, which shows you intend to sell over \$2 billion in public assets, but you refuse to tell the people of Ontario what assets you'll sell. So that the people of Ontario can be absolutely sure, will you pass the Sir Adam Beck Memorial Act so that Hydro One will remain in public hands?

Hon Ernie Eves (Premier, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs): As the leader of the third party knows, we have stated that we would not part with control of Hydro One. Even if Hydro One were to have been sold a year ago, it wouldn't have generated anywhere near the \$2 billion or \$2.2 billion that he claims it would. Actually, the net book value the province would have been able to book as a net benefit would have been about \$200 million to \$400 million at most.

Mr Hampton: Premier, it's a simple request. Will you pass legislation that ensures Hydro One remains in public hands? You should be able to answer that yes or no. What is so confusing are the answers you give. One day you say, "We're not interested in privatizing Hydro One." The next day you say, "We wouldn't be interested in giving up control of Hydro One." Then we see your budget, which is deteriorating every day, which is now a \$4-billion problem rather than a \$2-billion problem. I think the people of Ontario deserve a straight answer. Will you pass this bill that will ensure that Hydro One, that not any part of it can be sold off, yes or no?

Hon Mr Eves: We don't have to pass the bill. We've made the commitment to the public that we are not parting with control of Hydro One, and we're not. Now, any part of it is a different question. The answer to that question, any part of it, is no. The reality is we are not parting with control of Hydro One.

Mr Hampton: Premier, you're starting to sound like another political leader in this House, who when first asked said, "Yes, I would sell Hydro One," and then three or four months later—

Mr Garfield Dunlop (Simcoe North): Who's that?

Mr Hampton: It's the Liberal leader who said this. Then three or four months later he said he wouldn't sell Hydro One.

Premier, the reality is this: people know there is an election coming and what people are concerned about is, if you should be re-elected, or frankly if the Liberals were elected, what would be sold off right away? Hydro One. That's exactly what would be on the chopping block. Yet you say Hydro One is not for sale. So if it's not for sale, will you pass this legislation, which clearly says it's not for sale now, it's not for sale after the election, it's not for sale, period? Will you pass it, yes or no?

Hon Mr Eves: We've said no. We've made the commitment that we are not parting with control of Hydro One. No more need be said.

WEST NILE VIRUS

Mr Howard Hampton (Kenora-Rainy River): Premier, I am sending you over a letter, and I am sending over a letter for the Minister of Health. You would have received this letter earlier today from the Toronto medical officer of health, Dr Sheela Basrur, and the chair of the board of health for Toronto, Councillor Joe Mihevc. The letter states that without 100% funding for West Nile prevention, Toronto cannot put in place the required surveillance and prevention program to fight West Nile.

Premier, next week, you will head off on your summer holidays, and the reality will be that municipalities and health units will be left holding the bag. Will you do the right thing? Will do what Dr Basrur and the public health unit of Toronto want you to do? Will you assure them of 100% funding so that those municipalities and public health units that have to fight West Nile virus this summer will be able to do that? Will you do it now?

Hon Ernie Eves (Premier, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs): I refer the question to the Minister of Health.

Hon Tony Clement (Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): I want to assure the honourable member, the leader of the third party, that in fact the province will be paying, as a result of the Premier's announcement earlier last month, 100% of the costs of larvicide, 100% of a province-wide, comprehensive public education campaign, all lab testing for human cases, dead bird surveillance and transport to testing, all adult mosquito surveillance, a new Web-based integrated information system, an early warning surveillance system and a provincial prevention control coordinator.

As a result of the Premier's leadership and his announcement, we are there to protect the people of Ontario when it comes to West Nile virus. We can't offer 100% protection, because there is a risk. But we are doing everything that we can do to educate, to inform and to ensure that larviciding and surveillance take place so that the people of Ontario are protected as much as possible as anywhere else in North America from this deadly disease.

Mr Hampton: Premier, last summer your government dropped the ball on West Nile, and over 1,000 people got sick.

In the gallery today is Janet Chappel. She knows all too well what happened. Her husband, Dr Robert Grisdale, was a very healthy, active 52-year-old until last summer, when he contracted West Nile virus on the Labour Day weekend. He is still recovering from encephalitis. Dr Grisdale and Janet Chappel want to know how many people will get sick this summer before you realize that this is a provincial issue, that mosquitoes do not respect provincial boundaries, that you're putting municipalities in the position where some of them will not have the money to do the full surveillance and the full prevention. If one municipality cannot do the work, then you put literally hundreds of thousands of people at risk.

Premier, the question is this: are you going to mismanage the West Nile virus the way your government did last summer and risk illness among thousands of people, or are you going to provide 100% of the funding for the full surveillance and prevention program that municipalities and public health units need? Which is it going to be?

Hon Mr Clement: Let me say to anyone who has been affected by West Nile virus, including Dr Grisdale, that it is unfortunate when anyone contracts this disease.

The fact of the matter is that there have been people all over North America who have contracted the disease, and I would not be honest to this Legislature if I stood in my place today and said that no one would be contracting the disease in the future. The fact of the matter is that West Nile virus is among us, West Nile virus is a threat, and we have to do everything we can do as individuals to protect ourselves and our families and to be part of the solution. But insofar as the Ontario government is concerned, with our seven-point action plan, announced on March 22 by myself, with the new province-wide larviciding standards that were announced on May 13 by the Premier, and with the budget announced by our Minister of Finance, which dedicated \$100 million over five years, we are at the forefront in battling this disease. Indeed, I would say that we are in the forefront in all of North America in battling this disease. For that, the people—

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

GOVERNMENT CONTRACT

Mr Dwight Duncan (Windsor-St Clair): I have a question for the Minister of Health. I want to ask you about a contract given by your ministry that's found in public accounts.

Around the time Tom Long joined the Monitor group, the Ministry Of Health gave the Monitor group contracts worth almost \$3 million. Can you tell the House today what Mr Long's company did to get that \$3-million con-

tract, and why money that was budgeted for health care, nurses, hospitals and doctors was used for that contract?

Hon Tony Clement (Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): If the honourable member would send me over particulars, I'd be happy to look into it.

Mr Duncan: The details are contained in the public accounts, which I would have assumed that you would have been aware of. They're out of your ministry. I want to remind you that this is not the first time one of Mr Long's companies has had a contract with the government. Around the time that he joined the Monitor group, the Ministry of Health entered into contracts worth \$3 million. That's \$3 million for his company.

We'd like three things from you today. First, will you agree to release the contract with Mr Long's company, the Monitor group? Second, will you release the results of the work that they did for your government? Third, will you release the request for proposals for the contract, if there was one? Will you agree to release that information today?

Hon Mr Clement: I will take those questions under advisement and get back to him as soon as possible.

PUBLIC SAFETY

Ms Marilyn Mushinski (Scarborough Centre): My question is for the Minister of Public Safety and Security. Some weeks ago—

Interjections.

Ms Mushinski: I know the Liberals across the way don't want to hear this question, but I'm going to ask it because the people in my riding of Scarborough Centre want to hear it.

Some weeks ago, this Legislature voted to endorse Ontario beginning discussions with Ottawa to transfer the responsibility of immigration pertaining to Ontario from the federal to the provincial level.

I know that this is something that we on this side of the House strongly believe in, as evidenced in this plan for the future called The Road Ahead.

I know that one of the concerns stems from the shocking revelations from the federal Auditor General that under the current federal Liberal government, tens of thousands of persons ordered deported from Canada are actually missing.

Minister, can you update us on what we have learned to date about this situation?

Hon Robert W. Runciman (Minister of Public Safety and Security): I thank the member. I very much appreciate her concern.

Several weeks ago, Auditor General Sheila Fraser did draw attention to the fact that federal officials had lost track of some 36,000 individuals who had been ordered removed from this country. She also expressed concern that many of these people might pose a safety risk to Canadians. The federal Liberals, in typical fashion, said, "Don't worry; be happy." Well, we are worried and we're not happy. We've called on the federal government to provide us with details on these people. What are the

criminal backgrounds, if any? What potential security risks do any of these individuals pose to this province and this country? Ontarians have a right to know.

Ms Mushinski: Thank you for that, Minister. I agree with you: Ontarians do have a right to know.

Let me ask you: if in the course of cleaning up the mess that the federal Liberals have created, which they so often do, is the Ernie Eves government developing any overall plans or systemic oversight into how to prevent this kind of catastrophe in the future? Specifically, I would like to know what our government is doing to keep our neighbourhoods safe from those who may be using Ontario to further their illegal activities?

Hon Mr Runciman: First and foremost, we are convinced that the best time to prevent this abuse in the future is before persons who are not citizens seek entry into our country. That's why we support the North American security perimeter concept, and why we believe it's important for our province to have a Quebec-like agreement to provide Ontario with greater control over immigration.

We want biometrics to be used on documentation, so that it is almost impossible to use forged or faked documentation to gain entry into Canada.

Finally, the federal government needs to deal with those who transport these individuals. Too many airlines allow travellers on to flights with very little or no documentation. When this happens on more than two or three occasions, we believe the landing privileges of these carriers should be suspended.

The Speaker (Hon Gary Carr): Just before we continue—if we could stop the clock for a quick moment. Members are trying to be cute and hold up copies of it. I would appreciate it if you wouldn't do it. The other side will get copies out there. I know a couple of members are doing it. I would just appreciate it if you wouldn't do it.

Interjections.

The Speaker: I know you know what's in it, so you probably don't need to read it.

ENERGY CONTRACTS

Mr Michael Bryant (St Paul's): My question is for the Premier. Is the Premier still here?

The Speaker (Hon Gary Carr): If we could just stop the clock. I've got one yes and one no. Maybe we could go to the Deputy Premier then?

Mr Bryant: Few tactics offend consumers more than negative-option billing. Consumers end up stuck with a contract by default instead of by actively agreeing to a contract. It is the scourge of a predatory practice where a consumer gets stuck with a contract because of a tactic that is undertaken that is extremely offensive to consumers. When the cable industry did this, consumers went through the roof, and the government had to step in and fix it.

We have learned, thanks to a notice provided today by the Ontario Energy Board, that your government has recently passed a regulation to permit negative option

billing for electricity contracts. When this government is pretending to protect consumers with a bill before the House on this very subject on the Ontario Energy Board, how on earth could you open up this practice, when your record in terms of protecting consumers on the energy front has been a disaster? How could you have passed this regulation and hurt consumers in this fashion?

Hon Elizabeth Witmer (Deputy Premier, Minister of Education): I'll refer that to the Minister of Energy.

Hon John R. Baird (Minister of Energy, Minister responsible for francophone affairs, Government House Leader): What the member opposite says is not, in fact, the case. What we have done is put in place a set of initiatives and protections that have existed for many years for both electricity and natural gas. These are the exact same consumer protections or go substantially further, as we have for folks with mortgages, for subscriptions and for insurance.

Interjection.

Hon Mr Baird: Not at all, I say to the member for Windsor.

Many consumers in the province of Ontario have sought the stability of fixed-rate contracts for either gas or for electricity. People don't want a short time period or an action on their part to throw them on to a volatile spot market—a market they sought to avoid.

Mr Bryant: That is just not the case. This is what the Ontario Energy Board says: "Under new regulations passed by the Ontario government, natural gas and electricity supply contracts can be automatically renewed for one year." The consumers have to cancel the contract in writing within 30 days after receiving it. "If the consumer does not respond to the renewal notice"—it says here in the Ontario Energy Board notice—"and does not cancel after receiving the first bill, the contract is renewed for one year." That's negative-option billing.

To make matters worse, they're going to be signing on to a contract that takes them out of the price cap. You are forcing consumers off the price cap. Not only are you asleep at the switch, as you have been when it comes to electricity consumers for the past eight years, you are now actively working to create conditions that are going to royally harm consumers. How on earth could you have passed this regulation without telling the public, without telling consumers, and leave consumers in a situation where they've got negative-option billing and they are stuck with contracts that they simply don't deserve?

Hon Mr Baird: The member opposite doesn't let the facts get in the way. In fact, what we've put in place are some protections for consumers, to ensure that they have the ability to escape a volatile spot market if that's something that they have made a choice to do.

What we've said very specifically is, it's much like car insurance, who don't cut you off immediately if you don't renew your notice; there's a 30-day period where you have an opportunity to go back to the spot market, and then you've got a further 35 days after you get the first bill.

Many consumers, whether they be in the case the member opposite talks about, electricity—I assume he wouldn't be talking about consumers that are large commercial or industrial users—choose the benefits of a fixed-rate contract. We want to ensure that those protections for consumers that are in place, and others, are there; those consumer protections were in place for many years in Ontario.

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IMMIGRANT SERVICES

Mr John O'Toole (Durham): My question is for the Minister of Citizenship. As you're aware, about 60% of all Canadian immigrants settle in Ontario. I think that's actually very good news. In fact, Ontario is a great place for all of us to live. Ontario has welcomed approximately 120,000 immigrants in the past 10 years. In light of the high volume of newcomers to our province, what is our government doing to assist newcomers to become established in this wonderful province? I could add, is the federal government responding with their fair share of funding?

Hon Carl DeFaria (Minister of Citizenship, minister responsible for seniors): I thank my colleague the hard-working member for Durham for the question. Cultural diversity is one of our province's greatest strengths. Ontario spends approximately \$55 million a year on settlement, language training and labour market integration plans. Ontario provides language-training classes, services and job training, settlement services and business information for immigrant entrepreneurs.

Our government is doing its share but the federal government is not. Almost 60% of all of Canada's immigrants come to Ontario and settle here. The federal Liberal government spends less than 40% for integration programs in Ontario. Let me be clear: Ontario immigrants are not getting the fair share that immigrants in Quebec get. That's not fair.

Mr O'Toole: Thank you very much for that honest and passionate response. I know you take the issue of immigration very seriously.

It has come to my attention that the federal government keeps talking about increasing the number of people encouraged to come to Canada. Some say it's in the order of about 1%, which you know would come to about 300,000 immigrants a year. This increase would amount to about 80,000 immigrants over what Canada currently welcomes. I am curious about your previous response, that Ontario is paying its share while the federal government continues to deny equal treatment in Ontario. What is our government's position on increasing the opportunities for all new Canadians fairly, whether its Quebec or Ontario?

Hon Mr DeFaria: Yes, the federal Liberal government is talking about increasing immigrant levels, but it does not talk about increasing funding support for immigrants. Our government believes that increases in immigration must go hand in hand with increases in

federal funding. For example, a new immigrant to Quebec benefits from more than three times as much in federal funding as a new immigrant to Ontario. Ontario taxpayers are left to pick up the tab. Again, I say that's not fair. We have a made-in-Ontario plan to fix that.

The Speaker (Hon Gary Carr): Stop the clock. I just asked you to not use the props. I'd appreciate it. Two minutes after I ask it, you do it. You wonder why I get frustrated in this job. I've asked politely. What happens is that when you do it, then the other side does it. I know you think you're cute, but it just gets it up. I'd appreciate it if you wouldn't do it. Sorry for the interruption, but we have stopped the clock. The leader of the third party.

AUTOMOBILE INSURANCE

Mr Howard Hampton (Kenora-Rainy River): I have a question for the Minister of Finance. Recently, the Consumers' Association of Canada completed an exhaustive comparison of auto insurance rates in five Canadian cities, including Vancouver, where they have public auto insurance, and Toronto. This report concludes that the "fairest method for determining how much a consumer should pay for auto insurance is their driving record. The association does not support the discriminatory rating practices used in cities such as Calgary and Toronto."

This is yet another reason why private auto insurance results in much higher auto insurance premiums. All kinds of people are singled out on the basis of irrelevant factors, like their age or their gender, and forced to pay higher insurance rates than other drivers with exactly the same driving record that they have.

Minister, two simple questions: will you stop this kind of discriminatory insurance rate-setting that is central to the private insurance industry, and will you establish in Ontario a non-profit, public auto insurance system that will give the drivers of this province at least a 20% break in their insurance rates?

Hon Janet Ecker (Minister of Finance): We certainly appreciate and understand the pressure consumers are having with auto insurance. That's why we are taking the steps we are to bring better benefits to consumers and to put steps in place to help moderate the increases. One of the other things the honourable member knows is that there are checks and balances built into the system to ensure that ratings and rating factors are not discriminatory, and if that is the case, the superintendent can certainly take action on that.

But again, I find it a little ironic that the honourable member would raise in the House auto insurance when his own government at the time had the opportunity to do what he is now advocating. They didn't do it because they said it would cost too much. They didn't do it because they said it wouldn't work. So I do find his concern today a tad ironic.

Mr Hampton: The reason the NDP government didn't do it at the time was because Ontario's economy was in a very deep recession.

The consumers' association gives us a number of examples of lower rates—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon Gary Carr): Order. We'll let the member start again and have his time. It's just that they wouldn't be able to hear the question. The leader of the third party may start again.

Mr Hampton: The consumers' association gives some examples of the discriminatory practice and what it means. For example, they cite a young man with a perfect driving record in Vancouver with a 1992 Honda Civic. In Vancouver, he would pay \$1,378 for auto insurance. The same young driver in Toronto, subject to the discriminatory practices, with the same driving record, same car, would pay \$3,191. That is the difference between a public system where you're rated on the basis of your own driving record and the discrimination that is practised by the private insurance companies in Ontario.

Minister, my question to you is, do you stand by that unfairness or are you going to bring in a public insurance system which rates drivers on their own driving record and gives those who drive well a break on their insurance premiums?

Hon Mrs Ecker: The honourable member may think that bringing in a public system miraculously provides new monies to pay for the services consumers get. As he well knows, public systems find their savings in other things, like reduced benefits; in subsidization from other taxpayers, for example. It is not the solution he is making it out to be.

Secondly, if he was so concerned about helping consumers, as we on this side of the House are, with auto insurance, why is it that he voted against when we brought down the sales tax on auto insurance to help consumers? He voted against that. He obviously didn't think that would help consumers.

Thirdly, when we brought in legislation that would expand the rights of innocent victims to sue, that would expand the opportunity for consumers to get faster treatment when they were injured, he voted against that legislation.

EDUCATION TAX CREDIT

Mr Gerard Kennedy (Parkdale-High Park): I have a question for the Minister of Education and Deputy Premier. I want to ask you about your private school tax credit that you have endorsed as Minister of Education, the bill being rushed through the Legislature and subject to closure yesterday.

You know, Minister, as you heard in estimates, that the money you're allowing, the millions of dollars, is being captured by high-end school tuition increases. You're sending this money out in public cheques to Albert College, \$29,000; they're going to increase their tuition next school year to \$31,000 courtesy of you. Similarly, Appleby College, thankful for your support, will be able to put their tuitions up from \$35,100 to

\$36,850. Ashbury College, \$28,850; after your donation of a new tax credit this year, it's going to be \$30,200.

So I want to ask you, Deputy Premier, how can you proceed with diverting hundreds of millions of dollars away from public education that lacks the basics when your tax credit is being captured up by high-end private schools in this fashion? How do you justify that?

1450

Hon Elizabeth Witmer (Deputy Premier, Minister of Education): I'll refer that to the Minister of Finance.

Hon Janet Ecker (Minister of Finance): I think, to the honourable member, we should be perfectly clear what the record is. This side of the House believes that the public education system is one of the basic building blocks for economic growth for the future success of our communities. That's why we have taken steps to increase the amount of money for public education, to raise the standards for public education, to ensure that parents have the supports they need so students can succeed—all of those being steps that they voted against.

Now let's look at the equity in education tax credit. We on this side of the House believe we should respect parental choice. On that side of the House in the Liberal Party, they only respect parental choice when it's the choice the Liberal Party wants them to make. We do not agree with that approach, and we've been very clear about that.

Mr Kennedy: We now have a clear illustration of the essential problem. There's no Minister of Education over there.

This is what the last Minister of Education, who is the Minister of Finance, said. She said, in a letter of January 13, 2000, that extending funding "would result in fragmentation of the education system in Ontario and undermine the goal of universal access."

Well, that's exactly what has happened. What has happened under this government is a 50% increase in enrolment in private schools, now 10 times the growth, such that one in four new Ontario students is going to private school, up from one in 16 under the previous government.

Again I want to ask you, since the Minister of Education won't defend public education, perhaps the Minister of Finance will tell us now if she's proud of how she has succeeded in fragmenting public education. And will she reconsider giving high-end schools the ability to raise tuition while public school students are denied English-as-a-second-language programs, denied textbooks and denied the class sizes they need to succeed?

Hon Mrs Ecker: The Minister of Education on this side of the House needs no lesson, sir, from you about how to advocate on behalf of public education. When we brought in higher standards, the new, tougher curriculum, standards for teacher professional development, all standards to raise the quality of education, that side of the House voted against it.

Secondly, when we brought in steps to respect parental choice, that side of the House voted against it.

Thirdly, no one on this side of the House would be supporting the equity in education tax credit if it were to take one dollar out of public education. That's why on this side of the House we have increased funding for public education by over \$2 billion, because we believe it is an important support for economic growth and the quality of our communities.

SARS

Mr Garfield Dunlop (Simcoe North): My question today is for the Associate Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. Yesterday, a representative—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon Gary Carr): Stop the clock. We'll let the member speak. He's having trouble. We'll just let them settle down.

The member for Simcoe North has the floor.

Mr Dunlop: Yesterday, a representative of Health Canada, Dr Paul Gully, commented on Ontario's response to the SARS outbreak while speaking at a global conference in Malaysia. Dr Gully was reported in today's National Post as saying that the fight against SARS is complicated because, "A shortage of nursing home beds means seniors, those most susceptible to SARS, can spend too much time in acute care hospitals, risking exposure."

I would like to ask the associate minister, is there any truth whatsoever to this claim?

Hon Dan Newman (Associate Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): It's always a pleasure to respond to the honourable member from Simcoe North.

I was disappointed to read those comments this morning, because the exact opposite is true in Ontario, and Health Canada ought to know that. The fact is, our government's response to the SARS outbreak included transferring non-SARS alternative level of care patients out of GTA hospitals and into two long-term-care facilities to help relieve the pressures on the hospitals. I want to add today that an additional facility was ready to assist, if needed.

If we indeed had a shortage of nursing home beds in Ontario, these transfers would not have been possible. It's pretty simple math. It's more than ironic that the federal government is spending so much time criticizing others when they should be spending their time, and most importantly their money, helping the people of Ontario recover from the consequences of SARS.

Mr Dunlop: I thank the associate minister for his response, but I'm not the least bit surprised to hear that there's no truth to the federal government's latest accusations. I agree that the Chrétien Liberals should step forward and keep their pledge of SARS assistance to Ontario. It seems that they're not even taking our request for SARS assistance seriously. That's a real disappointment, but again, it's not surprising, coming from the same government, the federal Liberal government, that doesn't give us a single penny for long-term care here in Ontario.

Long-term care for Ontario's seniors may not matter to the Liberals in Ottawa, but I know that it matters to the people of Ontario, and I know that it matters to the people in my riding of Simcoe North.

I ask the associate minister if he could speak about the absence of federal support for long-term care in this province.

Hon Mr Newman: I once again thank the hard-working member from Simcoe North for his question.

Ontario's population is growing and aging, and while the Ernie Eves government has made record investments in the sector, Ottawa is nowhere to be found. It's just like the federal government's lack of response to SARS. Ontario has spent almost \$1.5 billion on SARS, including compensation and recovery, and we need the federal government to provide immediate, significant federal disaster assistance to this province. The federal disaster assistance program, designed for situations just like this, provides for up to 90% assistance to the province, and that's exactly what we expect. We expect the federal government to contribute at least \$150 million in a down payment immediately, followed by the balance of more than \$900 million. We expect this for the people of Ontario.

PROPERTY TAXATION

Mr Ernie Parsons (Prince Edward-Hastings): My question is to the Minister of Finance. Since 1997, about 10,000 Ontario property owners have signed up for the managed forest tax incentive program. It's a good program. It says, "Look, we recognize there's very little cash flow off a managed forest, so in return for your preserving the forest, we will assess a property at farm evaluation, and thus farm tax rates." It's an excellent program. It worked well. Unfortunately, though, in the last year the Municipal Property Assessment Corp, instead of assessing it on the basis of a woodlot, has chosen to assess it at its highest and best use. That has driven the tax rates up 200% to 600%, and it's causing the people who own these woodlots to be unable to continue to remain in the program.

Minister of Finance, you have the authority to have an impact, to evaluate it, as the commitment was made, at the farm tax evaluation level. Will you immediately implement that?

Hon Janet Ecker (Minister of Finance): Obviously, the honourable member has not been informed. I'd be quite happy to share correspondence with him. We have agreed to make sure that the assessment methodology that MPAC uses on managed forests is for current use. We've also made some other improvements to make sure that those who are protecting that land can indeed continue to protect it.

Mr Parsons: That's an excellent answer. Someone needs to tell MPAC and someone needs to tell the property owners, because as of yesterday afternoon, the municipalities were still continuing to set the evaluation

and in fact have sent the tax bills out and received interim payments based on the highest and best use.

So if indeed this has happened, it's great news, but I would then ask you, will you ensure that municipalities refund the money for the high tax rate that has been paid previously? They have paid it at the high rate, and the landowners are still out of pocket by a considerable amount. I'm assuming you're going to make it retroactive, because that was a commitment from 1997. Will you ensure that every property owner receives a rebate for their managed forest?

Hon Mrs Ecker: If there's a particular municipality and the honourable member wishes to send the information over to me, we'll certainly take a look at it. But we have communicated with MPAC; we have communicated with stakeholders. We are moving to ensure that the property tax assessment for managed forests continues to support those owners who are protecting very important land.

1500

TENANT PROTECTION

Mr AL McDonald (Nipissing): My question is for the Associate Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. I understand that June 17 was the fifth anniversary of the Tenant Protection Act. We've come a long way since the introduction of this act in protecting tenants' and landlords' rights. We've seen record investments in the rental housing stock and protection for tenants.

The Tenant Protection Act protects tenants against excessive rent increases by limiting above-guideline increases based on capital improvements. Dalton McGuinty has another idea to provide real rent control to tenants across this province. Minister, could you tell this House a little bit more about Dalton McGuinty's nonsense plan and how it will affect tenants in the province of Ontario?

Hon Tina R. Molinari (Associate Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing): I want to thank the member for Nipissing for this very important question. When I look at the platform that the Liberals are proposing, I can see similarities between their policies now and the Liberal housing boondoggle in 1985. At that time, the then Liberal housing minister, Alvin Curling, suggested, "Rent controls could be lifted ... if the vacancy rates reached comfortable levels of about 3%."

This may sound familiar—

The Speaker (Hon Gary Carr): I'm going to interrupt the minister. Stop the clock. I would ask the members: you know you can phrase a question and get into that, but when you just simply ask a question like this—last warning—you know it has to relate to your own ministry.

I would say that there's a way to get into that very, very easily without being so blatant. If you do it—last warning—you lose the question and I go on in the rotation. I would thank all members. I'll let you wrap up. Again, if I could be very clear to those who are writing the answers and so on, so I don't need to get up again in

the days coming up, if it does get to be something as blatant as that one clearly was, without any spin whatsoever, then I'm simply going to go on to the question and you're going to lose it.

Minister?

Hon Mrs Molinari: The Liberal platform, in comparison to what we have in place today, if they were to consistently go on the 3%—a Globe and Mail article of June 16 said that the vacancy rate in Toronto jumped to 3.5% in April. So I'm just trying to point out that the truth is that the Liberals' real rent control is really no rent control for Toronto.

Mr McDonald: I understand our legislation was so much stronger. I wonder, Minister, if you can speak to this and what the differences are between our protection plan and that of the Liberal government.

Hon Mrs Molinari: The Tenant Protection Act that we have in place is far-reaching and far beyond what the opposition has put in place in the past. I want to highlight that in the past under the Liberal government, there were several examples of unacceptable rent increases, which averaged 12% annually. One such example was a tenant in Brockville. The landlord had asked for a 26.5% increase. However, under the Liberal rule, the landlord wasn't awarded the 26%; they were awarded 29.5%.

This is difficult to—

The Speaker: I'm sorry. We're going to continue on. Again, I know it made it a little bit difficult when you were into the second question. I thought you would have been able to ad lib it. I understand that sometimes that's not possible. But just for everybody, I want to be very clear that if it happens tomorrow, we go right over to the other side. We're not going to put up with that any more.

The member of the NDP, new question?

SERVICES EN FRANÇAIS

FRENCH-LANGUAGE SERVICES

M. Gilles Bisson (Timmins-Baie James): Ma question est au Chair of Management Board. Monsieur Tsubouchi, j'ai eu la situation juste dernièrement que la communauté de Hearst voulait faire application à un de vos programmes provinciaux à travers le Patrimoine vital. Quand ils ont été pour faire l'application à Patrimoine vital, spécifiquement le programme numéro 5, ils ont visité le site Web du gouvernement et ont trouvé aucun français, premièrement sur le site Web, mais quand ils ont téléphoné pour avoir les applications en français pour être capables de faire application au programme numéro 5, la ville de Hearst et le conseiller, M. Rhéaume, ont été dits qu'il n'y avait pas de formulaire en français du tout. Quand il a demandé de parler à quelqu'un en français pour être capable de traiter cette demande, on lui a dit, « Il n'y a pas de personnel dans le staff du Patrimoine vital pour être capable de traiter la demande. »

Monsieur le ministre, pensez-vous que c'est acceptable que ce gouvernement ne donne pas de services en

français à la communauté de Hearst et autres communautés francophones ?

Hon David H. Tsubouchi (Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet, Minister of Culture): I'm not clear about the program the member is talking about. Maybe he could clear that up in the second part of the question. I'm not quite sure if he was asking me—he started by asking me as Chair of Management Board. I'm assuming you're asking me as the Minister of Culture.

Mr Bisson: Chair of Management Board.

Hon Mr Tsubouchi: Chair of Management Board for a heritage program?

M. Bisson: Chair of Management Board, faisant affaire avec les services en français pour le programme Patrimoine vital. C'est l'un des programmes clés de ce gouvernement.

Hon Mr Tsubouchi: Once again, I'm not quite clear on the program. Usually the heritage programs are through the Ministry of Culture, so I'm not aware of what he's asking me for. If he's asking about whether or not the services should be in French, they should be, and certainly I'll look into it once I have the details from the member.

M. Bisson: Je ne sais pas quoi dire à ce point-ci. Que le ministre de la Couronne ne sait pas son propre programme, qui est le Patrimoine vital—straight translation, "Living Legacy." Je penserais qu'au moins le gouvernement saurait son propre programme. La ville de Hearst a fait demande sous Patrimoine vital pour être capable d'avoir une application pour des fonds pour le reboisement dans la région de Hearst. Quand la municipalité, à travers le conseiller, M. Rhéaume, a fait application, on est allé au site Web. Il n'y avait aucun service en français. Vous êtes le ministre qui s'assure que tous les services du gouvernement sont donnés en français.

Deuxièmement, quand il a parlé au staff, on lui a dit qu'il ne pouvait pas avoir un formulaire en français et, numéro deux, qu'il n'y avait aucun staff pour traiter sa demande en français.

Je vous demande de corriger ce programme et cette erreur. Allez-vous le faire, oui ou non ?

Hon Mr Tsubouchi: The member has now cleared up what the program was. He said Living Legacy. Living Legacy is natural resources, not Management Board. No wonder I don't know the program. It's not my program. Ask the right minister, for God's sake.

WALKERTON TRAGEDY

Mr James J. Bradley (St Catharines): I have a question for the Minister of the Environment. We've talked with Anne Fraser from Walkerton about the difficulties her family is having with the government compensation package. Anne is the mother of three teenagers. Prior to Walkerton she was a regular mom with a regular job, with a regular family, regular lifestyle. She lived in a three-bedroom house with her kids. She was in good health except for a bad knee.

Anne is the mother of three teenagers, but that's about all that remains in her life. After she drank contaminated water in May 2000, she had to quit her job. She has chronic diarrhea, her joints are constantly aching, her muscles are weak, her vision is impaired. She's a 40-year-old, she says, but she feels like she's 70. She can go to work and come home and that's it for her. She doesn't dare do any more, she says. She has had to sell her three-bedroom house and has moved into a basement apartment with her kids.

I ask the Minister of the Environment, why is your government preventing a woman with so many problems from getting adequate and fair compensation as a result of the situation in Walkerton when your government promised that you were going to provide that to her?

1510

Hon Jim Wilson (Minister of Northern Development and Mines, Minister of the Environment): I'd be happy to look into the case that the honourable member has brought forward if he wants to provide me with the details. We take these matters quite seriously on this side of the House.

Mr Bradley: The Premier of the province is likely to show up in Walkerton sometime to have a flashy announcement about the water centre in Walkerton. When he is there, would the Minister of the Environment suggest to the Premier of this province that he meet with Anne Fraser and others who, after months and months of working with adjustors, have lost any hope that they will receive anywhere near the amount of compensation needed to cover expenses such as she has had to cover thus far and will have to cover the rest of her life? She's been in and out of hospitals and doctors' offices since she fell ill. She's had to travel to London, Kincardine and Owen Sound. Her entire family has faced hardship, and the government is only willing to give her \$7,500 to cover everything—her travel, her medical bills, her lost days, her pain and suffering—\$7,500.

Will you suggest to the Premier of this province that when he goes up to Walkerton to make his announcement with so much fanfare, with the Tory cameras going behind them because you'll have them there for campaign purposes—will you ask him to meet with Anne Fraser and the others who are hard done by because this government is failing to keep its promise to the people of Walkerton?

Hon Mr Wilson: Well, I think our government responded very quickly and in a fair manner to the needs of the people of Walkerton. I come from that part of the province and I know first-hand that we were on the ground responding.

With respect to compensation claims and the needs that certain people have now, there is a court-monitored process in place. Mr Flaherty was the Attorney General at the time and responded very quickly to make sure that a fair process was in place. You know, coming from not too far away from Walkerton, I've not heard a lot of complaints.

I will take very seriously the matter you've raised, and I'll get back to the honourable member if he provides me with all of the details. I want to make sure the honourable member is telling the family involved, though, that they have rights under the court process, and we want to make sure that they exercise all of the rights that they have, because we want to be fair to them.

VISITORS

Mr Peter Kormos (Niagara Centre): When she was six years old, Alicia Harvie rescued her mother and sister from their burning home. Today, Alicia, who is now eight, was honoured by receiving the Ontario Fire Marshal's Fire Safety Award. Alicia Harvie is here, with her sister, Thya Harvie, her mother, Amanda Harvie, her dad, Brian Levesque, and fire prevention officer Tom Nenadovich and his wife, Linda Nenadovich, from Welland. I hope the House will join me in welcoming them.

The Speaker (Hon Gary Carr): We welcome our honoured guest.

PETITIONS

MUNICIPAL RESTRUCTURING

Mr Marcel Beaubien (Lambton-Kent-Middlesex): I have a petition signed by thousands of people, and it reads as follows:

"Whereas the citizens of Kent county and Chatham had no direct say in the creation of the municipality of Chatham-Kent in 1997; and

"Whereas the Ontario government, by regulation and legislation, forced the amalgamation in accordance with the Meyboom report against the will of the elected local and county officials; and

"Whereas the municipality has not delivered the promised streamlined, more efficient and accountable local government, nor the provision of improved services at reduced costs;

"Therefore, be it resolved that we, the undersigned, demand that the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Immediately rescind the forced amalgamation order and return our local municipal government to the citizens in a two-tier model of government to be approved by referendum by the electorate in the 2003 municipal election."

HOME CARE

Mr Rick Bartolucci (Sudbury): This petition again concerns the termination of homemaking services by the Manitoulin-Sudbury Community Care Access Centre.

"Whereas we are outraged by the community care access centre's decision to cut homemaking services to seniors;

"Therefore, be it resolved that we petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"(1) Provide enough resources to the Manitoulin-Sudbury Community Care Access Centre so that they can provide homemaking services; and

"(2) Instruct Associate Minister Dan Newman to attend a public meeting in Sudbury with MPP Rick Bartolucci to hear stories about what will happen when homemaking services are cut off to these clients."

Of course, I affix my signature to this petition, as I did last week and yesterday, and I give it to Brittany to bring to the table.

WASTE MANAGEMENT

Mrs Leona Dombrowsky (Hastings-Frontenac-Lennox and Addington): "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas we strenuously object to the proposed Richmond landfill expansion by Canadian Waste Services; and

"Whereas fractured limestone is an inappropriate location for a landfill; and

"Whereas the town of greater Napanee produces less than 1% of the waste sent to the Richmond landfill; and

"Whereas the Ernie Eves government has indicated that they will break their promise that no community should have to accept waste against their will; and

"Whereas the courts have ruled that the present terms of reference are invalid;

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

"We request that the Conservative government keep their promise, stop the expansion of this landfill and make waste reduction a priority for Ontario."

I will affix my signature to this petition because I am in full agreement.

SERVICE DE DIALYSE

Mr Gilles Bisson (Timmins-James Bay): J'ai une pétition et c'est M^{me} Thérèse Bezel qui l'a organisée à Kapuskasing pour Marie-Ève Chainey. Elle se lit ainsi :

« Nous, les soussignés, demandons au gouvernement de l'Ontario d'agir sans délai dans le dossier de Marie-Ève Chenier qui requiert le service quotidien de dialyse à la maison. Marie-Ève était candidate pour recevoir ce service sous peu. Cependant, mercredi dernier, faute de financement de gouvernement de l'Ontario, l'hôpital Riverside d'Ottawa lui a refusé ce service. Nous demandons au gouvernement conservateur de Ernie Eves d'écouter ses citoyens et de rapidement agir. »

J'ai signé cette pétition.

TRADITIONAL CHINESE MEDICINE
AND ACUPUNCTURE

Mr Alvin Curling (Scarborough-Rouge River): I have a petition here in support of the regulation of traditional Chinese medicine and acupuncture.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas traditional Chinese medicine ... including acupuncture, has been practised successfully for over 5,000 years and has improved the health of billions of people worldwide with an emphasis on prevention and treating the cause of illness and not just the symptoms; and

“Whereas there are thousands of unregulated individuals practising acupuncture and traditional Chinese medicine in Ontario without any regulations, standards of care or professional training requirements; and

“Whereas the failure of the provincial government to protect consumers by regulating TCM/acupuncture places Ontarians at risk because any person can now practise TCM and acupuncture without any qualifications or standards whatsoever; and

“Whereas TCM/acupuncture is regulated in over 40 states in the US and in the provinces of British Columbia, Alberta, Quebec, and these jurisdictions have passed legislation to regulate practitioners of TCM/acupuncture in order to provide safe, effective and high standards of care to the general public; and

“Whereas hundreds of thousands of Ontarians have experienced the benefits of TCM/acupuncture and are culturally linked to traditional Chinese medicine, given the diverse origins of so many Ontarians; and

“Whereas we spend over \$2 billion a month in Ontario on western medical treatment and virtually nothing on preventive, complementary or alternative medical practices such as TCM that not only prevent illness and promote wellness, but also save taxpayers billions of dollars in drug costs and hospital stays;

“We, the undersigned, urge the provincial government of Ontario and all MPPs to pass legislation as soon as possible based on the British Columbia model to allow for the regulation of TCM/acupuncture and establish a college of TCM/acupuncture of Ontario, and set standards of care and training qualifications for practitioners in Ontario so that all Ontarians can safely enjoy all the benefits of TCM/acupuncture from highly qualified and trained practitioners.”

I will affix my signature for I am in full agreement and Caitlyn will take it to the desk.

The Deputy Speaker {Mr Bert Johnson): The Chair recognizes the member for Durham.

OAK RIDGES MORaine

Mr John O’Toole (Durham): Thank you, Mr Speaker. It’s a surprise that you said “Durham.” I’m pleased to present a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario on behalf of my constituents in the wonderful riding of Durham. It reads as follows:

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the Oak Ridges moraine is an ecological treasure that warrants protection and careful stewardship now and in future generations; and

“Whereas the province of Ontario has recognized the importance of the moraine with the passage of the Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Act, 2001, to protect natural and water resources, preserve agricultural land and provide clarity on where development can and cannot occur; and

“Whereas the act has resulted in certain limitations on citizens’ use of their own property within the moraine;

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

“That the Parliament of Ontario take action to ensure there are no undue restrictions on Oak Ridges moraine residents making minor improvements to their homes and property; and

“That the province of Ontario work” together “with municipalities and landowners to ensure the interpretation and enforcement of the act continues to fully protect the moraine while also giving residents the right to fair and reasonable enjoyment of their property.”

I’m pleased to read this in the presence of the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, as well as present it to Lucas, who’s from the riding of Oxford and is serving us here in the Legislature.

1520

AUDIOLOGY SERVICES

Mr Steve Peters (Elgin-Middlesex-London):

“Listen: Our Hearing is Important!

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas services delisted by the Ontario provincial government now exceed \$100 million in total; and

“Whereas Ontarians depend on audiologists for the provision of qualified hearing assessments and hearing aid prescriptions; and

“Whereas new provincial government policy will virtually eliminate access to publicly funded audiology assessments across” this province; and

“Whereas this policy will lengthen waiting lists for patients and therefore have a detrimental effect on the health of these Ontarians;

“Therefore, be it resolved that we, the undersigned” residents of Peterborough, Stratford and Pembroke, “demand the Eves government move immediately to permanently fund audiologists directly for the provision of audiology services.”

I’m in full agreement, and I’ve affixed my signature hereto.

ITER

Mr John O’Toole (Durham): It’s a pleasure to see you in the chair, Mr Speaker. I have another petition here from my wonderful riding of Durham.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the proposed ITER fusion research facility would result in 68,000 person-years of employment and an estimated \$9.4 billion in foreign investment;

"Whereas ITER would bring international scientists and researchers to Canada and place our nation in the forefront of new developments in research and technology;

"Whereas ITER is strongly supported by business, labour, educators, elected officials and citizens throughout Durham region, the host community;

"Whereas the province of Ontario has already recognized the economic importance of ITER to Canada and the world by committing \$300 million to support the Canadian ITER bid;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, respectfully petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows: that the Parliament of Ontario take the necessary steps to strengthen the Canadian bid for the ITER research facility, including the commitment of more funds and other resources to support a" greater "Canadian bid; and that the province of Ontario ask the federal government to show the leadership and commitment necessary for Canada to win the ITER bid."

I'm pleased to present this—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Bert Johnson): Further petitions?

VISITORS

Mr Marcel Beaubien (Lambton-Kent-Middlesex):

On a point of order, Mr Speaker: I would like to recognize the grade 5 students, the teacher and the parents from the Sacred Heart Catholic school in Parkhill, Ontario.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Bert Johnson): That is not a point of order, but we welcome them to our Legislature.

SEXUAL HARASSMENT

Mr Pat Hoy (Chatham-Kent Essex): "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas sexual harassment is the most significant occupational health and safety hazard for women in the workplace; and

"Whereas the Ontario Human Rights Code guarantees the right to work in an environment free from sexual harassment, there is no effective remedy under the current legislative regime to immediately stop the sexual harassment, remove the dangerous behaviour and keep workers in their jobs;

"Whereas sexual harassment can occur in any workplace setting, can cause health and safety risks and lower employee productivity;

"Whereas employers often fail to develop strict anti-harassment policies in the workplace, because presently it is simply left to their own goodwill to implement such policies;

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

"That measures contained in Bill 55, the Occupational Health and Safety Amendment Act, presented by Pat Hoy, MPP, Chatham-Kent Essex, be immediately enacted. This bill puts teeth in the right to be free from workplace sexual harassment and provides enforcement mechanisms that operate to immediately stop the harassment and to protect and keep the worker in their job."

I, of course, have signed this petition.

DIALYSIS

Mr Gilles Bisson (Timmins-James Bay): I realize I was being blocked by the member from Algoma, who's just getting in my way.

Interjection.

Mr Bisson: He meant well, he meant well. I don't say anything bad.

I've got probably the better part of a couple of thousand names that were gathered by Thérèse Bezel, who went around with other volunteers in regard to Marie-Ève Chenier. It reads as follows:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"We, the undersigned, are asking the government of Ontario to act without delay in the case of Marie-Eve Chenier, who requires the daily home services of hemodialysis. Marie-Eve Chenier was one of the candidates scheduled to receive this service. However, the lack of funding by the Ontario government has forced the Riverdale Hospital in Ottawa to eliminate Marie-Eve from the program. Marie-Eve was advised of this decision last Wednesday. We, the taxpayers of Ontario, ask the Conservative government of Ernie Eves to listen to its taxpayers and act promptly so that Marie-Eve can get her hemodialysis."

I have signed that petition, and I congratulate all who worked on this.

HIGHWAY 407

Mr John O'Toole (Durham): With your permission, Mr Speaker, I just wanted to make a comment. To the students from Sacred Heart school, the member from Lambton-Kent-Middlesex is one of the best members in this House.

I'm privileged to read a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario on behalf of my constituents in the riding of Durham:

"Whereas the timely and efficient movement of people and products is crucial to the success of the Ontario economy;

"Whereas the province of Ontario is meeting the challenge of traffic congestion in the greater Toronto area by making improvements to our highway networks and by improved public transportation;

"Whereas the further construction of Highway 407 eastward into the Durham region would improve the flow of traffic in Durham region and throughout the GTA;

"Whereas the citizens and municipalities of Durham region have faced uncertainty over the final alignment of

the proposed 407 highway for many years and are entitled to a timely resolution to this matter;

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

“That the Parliament of Ontario take all necessary steps to fast-track the extension of Highway 407 eastward into the regional municipality of Durham, while also ensuring that all the necessary environmental assessment and public consultations are followed.”

I’m pleased to sign this, endorse it and hand it on to Timothy, who is the page serving his last week here in the Legislature.

HYDRO RATES

Mr Michael A. Brown (Algoma-Manitoulin): “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the Royal Canadian Legion branch 429 in Wawa has a long-standing tradition of promoting the mandate and ideals of the Royal Canadian Legion in serving Wawa;

“Whereas the members of the Royal Canadian Legion branch 429 in Wawa are the contribution that the branch has made in serving the Royal Canadian Legion in Wawa;

“Whereas this long-standing tradition has been compromised due to negative changes in the local economy, changes in provincial legislation respecting charitable gaming laws, and other socio-economic changes within society in general;

“Whereas the deregulation of hydro in the province of Ontario has had a devastating effect on the branch to pay the power rates;

“Whereas the cumulative effect of all of the above changes has jeopardized the future and integrity of the organization;

“Whereas a motion has been unanimously passed at the general meeting of the Royal Canadian Legion branch 429 held on June 12, 2003, requesting the executive to write to the government of Ontario with regard to the outlandish power rates and request immediate action by the government;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to immediately and retroactively reduce the electrical distribution charges in the Great Lakes Power area so that Great Lakes Power customers no longer pay the highest power rates in Ontario.”

This is signed by president Richard Watson and by Eric Mitrikas, the first vice-president of the branch.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

ONTARIO ENERGY BOARD CONSUMER PROTECTION AND GOVERNANCE ACT, 2003

LOI DE 2003 SUR LA PROTECTION DES CONSOMMATEURS ET LA RÉGIE DE LA COMMISSION DE L'ÉNERGIE DE L'ONTARIO

Resuming the debate adjourned on June 17, 2003, on the motion for second reading of Bill 23, An Act to amend the Ontario Energy Act, 1998 and the Municipal Franchises Act in respect of consumer protection, the governance of the Ontario Energy Board and other matters / Projet de loi 23, Loi modifiant la Loi de 1998 sur la Commission de l'énergie de l'Ontario et la Loi sur les concessions municipales en ce qui a trait à la protection des consommateurs, à la régie de la Commission de l'énergie de l'Ontario et à d'autres questions.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Bert Johnson): I think in the rotation of things, the NDP caucus has the floor. So I recognize the member from Timmins-James Bay.

Mr Gilles Bisson (Timmins-James Bay): Mr Speaker, I am so glad you recognized me in this debate. This is a really important debate. I've got to say that I'm quite happy today to have an opportunity to speak to this, because we are talking about probably one of the most fundamental issues to not only to the Ontario economy but specifically the northern economy.

You'll know that in the place I come from, northern Ontario, we have the largest hydro utility customers in the province of Ontario. In fact, the one customer who buys more hydro than anybody else in Ontario is in the city of Timmins: Falconbridge. They operate the metallurgical site in Timmins, where they operate three different lines—a refinery, a smelter and a concentrator—and the zinc plant, and are the biggest utilizers of electricity in the province of Ontario.

You have other companies like Tembec who operate everything from paper mills to saw mills and pulp mills, all across not only my riding, but other parts of the province. You have customers like Domtar, Buchanan and a number of other mills who are some of the highest utilizers of electricity in the province of Ontario. So if anybody is affected by hydro policy in this province, it is certainly those particular employers in northern Ontario, because they are about the largest users of hydro in Ontario. A lot of people don't recognize that. They would think GM, Ford or one of the big auto plants would be the biggest customers. But in fact, it's mines and mills, because of the amount of electricity they have to use for the processes of extracting ore from the rock into finished product.

1530

I have to say to the Minister of Energy: John, we told you so. We stood in this House, my leader Howard

Hampton, myself and others—well, you weren't the Minister of Energy at the time. We told Jim that and he didn't believe us. We told Jim, now Minister of the Environment, and part-time Northern Development and Mines, "If the government moves to deregulate and the government moves to privatize Hydro, it would be a disaster to the economy of Ontario and its citizens." When we looked at the experiences of deregulation and privatization across not only North America, but into Europe and other places, there are no real examples that you can point to that say, "Wow, here's a place where we've opened the market and we've deregulated and privatized, and hydro prices have gone down over the longer term." Now, in California, one could argue that initially there was a bit of a drop in prices, but after the companies got the greed factor in and they started trying to figure out how they could gouge more and more money—like the insurance companies are doing in automobile insurance and other insurances—they couldn't help themselves. They started taking huge profits, to the chagrin of the California economy. In fact, as the leader of deregulation, California is now moving in the opposite direction. They're saying, "What a disaster." It has led to all kinds of problems: brownouts in California, higher energy prices, plant shutdowns, seniors and people on fixed incomes who can't afford to pay their electricity rates—everybody was a loser. Finally, California had to start moving in the other direction.

Remember that song, Alberta Bound? I can sing it, Speaker; I know the words, and my guitar is in the back. If you let me bring it in, I'll sing it.

Interjection.

Mr Bisson: Speaker, are you trying to say you don't want to hear my lovely voice?

The Deputy Speaker: Don't ask me now.

Mr Bisson: OK. Maybe another time. Maybe we can do it in another venue.

Alberta, the one province in Canada that's probably the most Conservative of provinces—for years they've elected more right-wing governments than Ontario; it was either Social Credit or it was Conservative. And even their flirtation with privatization, as we pick up the *Globe and Mail* and the *National Post*, those right-wing papers—which I like to read every morning, because they tell me what the other guys are doing. About a month ago they were running articles saying that, basically, they've had to admit that deregulation and privatization was wrong, that it doesn't work and that it has led to higher prices.

I'm just going to use the opportunity of this debate to say what it has meant to people and industries in northern Ontario. On a number of occasions, I've raised in this House the bills that citizens in my constituency were having to pay when it came to higher Hydro rates. I was telling you about a number of small businesses in my riding—restaurants, tool and dye shops, carpentry shops, welding shops—who contacted me over the year to say, "Gilles, if I was paying \$600 or \$1,200 for electricity on a monthly bill last year, prior to deregulation, I'm paying

twice that and more now. Tell me how I'm a winner, Gilles, with privatization and deregulation." A lot of them didn't really understand the issue, because most people, let's admit it, don't follow the details of what government does. All they really pay attention to is the final effect. In fact, I've had a lot of small businesses come to me and say, "Gilles, how come my Hydro rates went up? I used to pay \$600 last year; I'm paying \$1,200 to \$1,400 this year for the same amount of electricity." I said, "Well, did you know that Ernie Eves opened the market and then basically had to backtrack somewhat and put a cap in place that really doesn't apply to you because of the usage of electricity you have?" They said, "No, I wasn't aware of the details. All I know is I'm paying more." In this House, I've raised all kinds of examples of businesses in my riding that have been negatively affected by Hydro deregulation and the failed attempt to privatize.

I've raised cases of individuals, like Mr Bergeron in Kapuskasing, who's a senior on a fixed income; he's now retired. He's had to pay over double what he used to pay before.

I have other cases here. I just happened to open my householder and I've got another one here. Mr Hansen on Government Road, when you look at the hydro bills, was basically paying—I believe if I take a look at this, this is for the month of March. March this year, he had to pay \$542 for electricity. Can you imagine paying \$542 for electricity in the month of March? In March the year before, he was paying but half that. If you take a look in the winter months, it was even higher. If you take a look at the period of February, he was up to \$834. How can this gentleman afford to pay that?

Mr Adams, again from Kapuskasing, brought in his hydro bills and he's upset. He says, "Here I am in the month of May and I'm having to pay \$660 for electricity." May 2003: \$660 for electricity. If you keep on going through the bills, the month before he was paying—I've got to get the right page. That's the other thing. These bills have become so complicated to read. We've unbundled the price, and you can't even read the bill any more. Here we've got \$318 that he paid the year before compared to \$660 this year.

Hydro bill after hydro bill has demonstrated that the whole policy of the government to open and deregulate the market has been nothing but a disaster. We have been saying since before the onset of deregulation and privatization that hydro bills would go up. The government said, "Oh, Howard Hampton, you don't know what you're talking about. You're just saying that because you're fearmongering." Here we are but a year later—just barely a year later—and in fact what we said was right, because hydro prices have gone up.

That's why we, in our Public Power platform, are advocating that we put an end to deregulation and privatization so that at the end we're able to put hydro back under public control so that we can bring some stability to rates and provide power at cost to consumers

because, quite frankly, electricity is a big part of what drives our economy.

We believe that. It's something we want to do. We know it's something you can do, because we did it before. If you look at hydro prices in Canada, the cheapest rates for electricity are where? The province of Quebec and the province of Manitoba, and both have public hydro. It's a little bit like the auto insurance issue that we raised today, but that's for another debate.

You would also know that my colleagues Tony Martin, Shelley Martel and Howard Hampton, all of us northern members, have kicked off a northern tour. We're travelling this spring and summer to communities across northern Ontario to talk to communities, industry and individuals about what's happening in their communities vis-à-vis job losses that we're seeing happen.

In fact, I was in Sault Ste Marie on Monday—that's why I was not here—with my colleague Mr Martin where we boarded a Beaver airplane at the bush plane museum in Sault Ste Marie to go and visit the communities of Wawa, Dubreuilville and White River.

These are some of the notes I took when I was in these meetings. Quite frankly, what these people are telling us is really scary. For example, we spoke to Norm Lecuyer who is, I believe, the general manager for River Gold, and he basically talked about how energy prices for River Gold in Wawa have led to over \$200,000 more in actual cost to the company as compared to last year. The government and others say, "Well, \$200,000, they're a profitable company. They can probably absorb that."

Mining is a very finite business. You have to spend money on exploration every year to replace the ore that you've identified and mined this year so that in future years you have ore that's identified to mine in the following years. What he told us is, "That \$200,000, we had to get it by cutting our exploration project back by over \$200,000." He's saying, "What this is doing is shortening the life of the mine." Monsieur Lecuyer said they basically could not afford to pay these rates for hydro, because it was cutting into their bottom line to the point that it's making it difficult for them.

I don't believe River Gold is in a position of having to shut down, thank God, and I don't want to see that, but I can tell you that an extra \$200,000 in costs to that company is a lot. This is a government that likes to take pride in saying, "We lowered taxes." Well, yes, you lowered taxes. Sure, you might have lowered \$20,000 in taxes for River Gold last year, but you're charging them \$200,000 in extra energy charges. That is not a good thing. Plus, you also regulate how we price gas in the province of Ontario, which is yet another debate. Gas costs for these companies are going through the roof and leading to very bad times.

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We went to Dubreuilville and we spoke to a number of people there. Mr Leo Raymond was there, who is the mayor of White River. We met with Mr Mike Mantha, who is the IWA rep there, and a number of other people, including Mr Dave Jennings, who is the manager of the

local mill in Dubreuilville. In Dubreuilville there is a forestry operation, in a community of 1,000 people, that employs 450 people. As a result of the energy prices of Great Lakes Power in that community, energy prices for Dubreuil lumber have gone up by 75%. You tell me what business is able to make a 75% increase on the selling price of an item over one year. Even MPPs only got 25% last time, and we, as New Democrats, think that's somewhat excessive considering what other people are getting. We don't see people in the retail business increasing their prices by 75%.

Imagine what would happen if the province of Ontario or the government of Canada were to say, "We're increasing our taxes to corporations by 75%?" They'd be saying and doing what's happening in Dubreuilville. They're going from employment of 450 people and dropping down to 150. That's a lot of jobs in a community of 1,000 people.

When we sat down there and talked to the workers, they were plenty upset. They were saying, "We can't afford to sit around in Dubreuilville for the next year wondering if we're going to get rehired. We're going to start looking for jobs elsewhere if we can find them."

For Dubreuilville that's a huge issue because their municipal assessment is going to go down. They can't sell the houses, so the houses are going to go vacant. When the company reopens to full employment levels, once we fix the problems with hydro and a couple of other issues, where is Dubreuilville going to get these qualified workers who understand the plant? The skilled tradespeople, the skilled men and women who work in the plant and understand the production methods, the people who are harvesting in the bush: you just don't go get those people in downtown Toronto. Those are skills that are learned over a lifetime. You can't replace them just like that.

One of the things the company and Dave Jennings were telling us was that it's bad enough that we have to lay off. They feel really bad about it but they're saying that if this goes on for any period of time, they're really worried about what it means overall when they come to reopen and get back up to employment levels. They're saying, "Where are we going to find all these people? Are they going to be willing to come back?"

I guess the bad part of this answer is that they'll come back if the economy is bad elsewhere, which is a double whammy, and they won't come back if the economy is good elsewhere.

Mr Garry J. Guzzo (Ottawa West-Nepean): What did Bob Rae say Saturday night?

Mr Bisson: Bob Rae restructured those communities. As a New Democrat, I can tell you that when Sault Ste Marie, Kapuskasing, Sturgeon Falls, Atikokan and Thunder Bay were going down the tubes, our government was there. We sat down with the communities, the companies, the unions and the workers. We said, "Let's help to restructure," and we restructured those companies, and those communities survived.

I represent Kapuskasing. I was not the member for Kapuskasing at the time, it was Mr Len Wood, but I can tell you that when Kapuskasing was going through what Dubreuilville is now, we were there as a government looking for solutions. The solution the company and the workers brought forward was employee ownership.

I'm not arguing that we have to do employee ownership in Dubreuilville, but if it's the only option, maybe the government should be at the table. Here's the message we were told by the communities of Wawa, White River and Dubreuilville: the government is missing in action. They said they had been trying to get hold of ministers to deal with their issues. They've been trying to get hold of the Minister of Energy, who will not get back to them. They've been trying to get hold of the Minister of Northern Development and Mines and the Minister of Natural Resources, who supposedly represent northern ministries, but who can't find time to get off their busy schedules in downtown Toronto and go into the north and deal with the issues.

They are at least thankful that my colleague Tony Martin and I, and later on Shelley Martel and Howard Hampton, are taking the time to talk to these communities. They know that if we, as New Democrats, were given the opportunity to govern again, we would deal with these issues. Why do I say that? Tony Martin knows. He comes from Sault Ste Marie. His city is alive today because of the NDP government. St Marys Paper, Algoma Steel, Algoma Central Railroad are all major employers in the community of Sault Ste Marie. If hadn't been for Tony Martin and the NDP, those things would never have been restructured. Why? Because Conservatives believe in non-intervention in the economy. Their philosophical, ideological and political belief is very simple: let market forces dictate. If market forces dictate that a mill has to close in northern Ontario, well, that's the way it's got to be. That's why government is not responding. Well, as a New Democrat, I don't accept that.

Government has a responsibility. The economy of Toronto has certain synergies so that we know it will sort of look after itself to a certain extent. But with economies like Wawa, Dubreuilville, White River, Smooth Rock Falls, Cochrane, Kirkland Lake, Kapuskasing, Sault Ste Marie, and the list goes on, the synergies of Toronto are not there. Government has to be at the table.

So when we met these people, they said, "If you can bring but one message back, tell them to give us a call. Tell them to come and visit us. Set up an interministerial committee to deal with the issues.

Interjection: I've been up there.

Mr Bisson: You've been up there? You wouldn't even know where to find the highway. My point is, imagine that you've got a community of 1,000 people and you're losing 600 jobs, as you are in White River. The White River plant—

Mr Tony Martin (Sault Ste Marie): It was 285.

Mr Bisson: It was 285 jobs. Excuse me. I correct the record.

In White River, a community of 800 to 1,000, people are losing the only employer in town, Domtar, that has large numbers. There are some business opportunities there as far as local hotels, tourist outfitters and others are concerned, and they're much needed, but the cornerstone of the economy for these people is those particular mills. You've got companies, as in White River, that are basically shutting down and saying to workers, "We're down for six months to a year." Why? Because electricity costs are too high, we have problems with allocation of timber, and yes, the American dollar is low and that's affecting our trade with the United States. Yes, there are other issues, but they're saying to us, "At least deal with the issues the province has responsibility for." If we had the government move on hydro issues and deal with the MNR issues, it would mitigate some of the dangers we're having on the other side of the equation leading to the announced shutdown.

So you've got that community's major employer going down for six months to a year, and they're worried about the same thing: what's going to happen down the road?

Mr Guzzo: Saturday Night, Focus Ontario, what did Bob Rae say?

Mr Bisson: Oh, the judge.

You have to intervene in those situations. You cannot take a noninterventionist approach to the northern economy, as you should not take a noninterventionist approach to other parts of our economy across this province. Government has a responsibility, and what we're trying to tell you is that as we tour the northern part of the province on our northern economic tour, people are telling us the government is missing in action. We need to get an interventionist government that is prepared to work with us as communities to try to find solutions.

I'm going to Smooth Rock Falls in my riding. I go there almost every weekend, but I'm going to be setting up a meeting and will continue the tour with Smooth Rock Falls, Cochrane and Kirkland Lake in a couple of weeks. I already know where we're going to meet because I've been talking to some of these people in my riding, and I'm sure it's the same thing in the other communities. They're having one heck of a time. What is it? It's electricity prices directly under the control of the province of Ontario. In the case of Smooth Rock Falls, it's the availability of chips, with sawmills shutting down across the province because of electricity prices and, yes, CVA. They're in the position of not having enough chips to go around.

Marathon is in danger of shutting down as well. Smooth Rock Falls is now down for two weeks, and god knows what's going to happen. Bowater is another. What ends up happening is that those communities are saying, "We need the government at the table to deal with this. We have a loss of chips. How are we going to deal with that?" Do you know what the government's response has been up to now? "Chip roundwood." Can you imagine? They're taking dimensional-sized saw timber that should

go into sawmills and they're going to be chipping it. What a waste of a resource to do that.

There are certainly other things we can do. We've got timber that's going over to Quebec every day by way of Highway 101. The government could at least stop that timber from going over there, so that we can at least process it here.

We'll continue with our northern tour and continue advocating that this government has a responsibility. If they're not willing to take it, we will.

The Deputy Speaker: Comments and questions?

Mr Raminder Gill (Bramalea-Gore-Malton-Springdale): The member just spoke for about 20 minutes, and he hasn't said much. One of the things he said was the government was missing in action. How wrong could he be? The government that has created more than a million jobs in this province is the best government there has ever been. The government has created jobs for 625,000 people who were on welfare; a record amount of health care spending because of the job creation we've done.

1550

The SARS crisis, one of the unique crises to hit this city, was handled very well. Where are the federal Liberals, who should be at the table? I think that's the government the member opposite is talking about when he says, "The government is missing in action." He means the federal government is missing in action, where there's no strategy to help Ontarians, to help Toronto to fight SARS.

Of course the members opposite always have this fearmongering. Not too many weeks ago, not even a year ago, they talked about how bad the situation was going to be regarding the double cohort. Let me assure you, Mr Speaker, and through you the member opposite, that the so-called perception that there would not be enough spaces was a myth. There are going to be plenty of spaces. I've been talking to a lot of university kids or kids who will be going to university. They are getting their first, second or third choice. I'm so very pleased that the system that we forecast was going to work is working. I can assure you that we want to continue on this, The Road Ahead, our beautiful platform. There will be good times ahead for everybody, including the opposition.

Mr Michael A. Brown (Algoma-Manitoulin): I listened carefully to the member for Timmins-James Bay as he discussed the impact of electricity rates on various communities across northern Ontario.

Mr John Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands): Tell us about Wawa.

Mr Brown: The member for Kingston and the Islands wants me to tell them about Wawa. I would tell you quite clearly that the people in Wawa have signed literally hundreds of cards, hundreds of names on petitions. There is to be another demonstration, I believe this Sunday, as they complain about an electricity policy that has increased rates by at least 40%, in some cases as much as 80%, and is putting many small businesses out of business. We've had three or four just in the last month that

had to shut down. We have Dubreuil Forest Products, as the member clearly mentioned, that has seen an increase in the price of producing their product. The electricity price is now roughly \$5 million a year versus what was \$2.5 million before this re-regulation of the hydro-electricity market.

I want to tell my constituents in that area that there is some hope, and the hope is in response to many of the petitions they've read in concerning rural and remote rate protection. The Minister of Energy has said, "We are ... continuing discussions with the company to look at broader mitigation measures that may be available to address the needs of commercial and industrial customers in the Algoma-Manitoulin area." He assures us that he's "treating this ... as a high priority." Well, the "high priority" is getting higher every day. People are losing their jobs, some are losing their businesses and some will soon lose their homes.

Mr Martin: The member for Timmins-James Bay makes the case for northern Ontario very effectively and passionately, and I certainly agree with him. I was there on Monday, when we visited those communities that are being attacked, that are hanging on by their fingernails, that are going to wither on the vine very soon if some action isn't taken.

We hear of promises from the government to look into this. Yesterday I asked the Premier a question about Wawa and hydroelectricity, inviting him up to the rally on Sunday, and his response was, "Yes, we're hearing. We understand." But alas, when we speak to the people in places like White River and Dubreuilville and Wawa, they say that the government is missing in action. They're not telling them that. They've been trying to get a meeting with the Minister of Energy for over a year now. He won't return their calls. He won't respond to their letters. He won't meet with them. Mr Brown, their member, had them down here not so long ago for a meeting with officials. Did the minister show up to that meeting? No, he didn't show up. It's suggested that he was just down the hall in his own office. He could have at least popped in, and didn't.

This community, northern Ontario, a community in itself, deserves better. They deserve that this government live up to its responsibility, live up to the role it was given when it became government, and in these difficult economic times, with the perfect storm now overhead, to come up and meet.

Last Thursday in Manitowadge, the reeves and mayors of the area of north Algoma had a meeting. They suggested an interministerial task force be formed, that all of the ministries get together: the Ministry of Northern Development and Mines, the Ministry of Natural Resources, the ministry of economic development, and the Premier's office. Come on up. Sit around a table. Talk with folks. There are answers. We know there are answers.

The member for Timmins-James Bay spoke of the response of our government from 1990 to 1995 to some very difficult challenges, that we were there, giving

leadership, being a partner and providing resources so that those industries could be turned around. It can be done again. Where there's a will, there's a way.

These communities have a lot of talent, a lot of energy and a lot of passion for this. They love their communities. They want them to survive. They will sit down with government, and together we can all come up with answers.

What is there in this bill that we're debating today that will give any relief? Absolutely nothing.

Mr Guzzo: I want to say it's always a pleasure to listen to the member from Timmins-James Bay in this House. I mean that sincerely. He brings a very, very serious point of view here. I am one who accepts what he says with regard to the communities that he represents, and indeed his friend across the way.

But I find it very interesting. I listened with interest to what he said about what the government that he was part of did for these communities. They responded to them in a manner which they felt was appropriate, subsidizing with taxpayers' money businesses that were not competitive for the sake of the jobs in the communities, with the very important reliance in the communities on those jobs to keep those places healthy, financially and otherwise.

On Saturday night on television, I listened again to his leader who was the Premier of the province at the time you carried it out. I was fascinated to hear what he was saying and the advice that he was giving this government. He was belittling this government for subsidizing hydro rates, something that you did in your government with pride, that the Liberals under Mr Peterson did, and that we continued to do under Mr Harris when we took over in 1995. But he says it's ludicrous to continue to do it now in a world economy. He says it's foolhardy and it's going to be very difficult to face reality at a point in time when we have to come to grips with the issue.

As the minister has said and as this bill indicates, we need to find and encourage new supplies. It's the supply side that is killing us.

To have the change in pace that I'm experiencing today from the member from James Bay is astonishing, and I think he should apologize.

The Deputy Speaker: The member for Timmins-James Bay has two minutes to respond.

Mr Bisson: First of all, I want to thank the members from Algoma and Sault Ste Marie for commenting on my presentation.

To the member from Ottawa West, no, I'm not going to apologize; quite frankly, the opposite. You're arguing that somehow subsidizing an industry is a bad thing, but you're the guys who are subsidizing hydro and you see that as a good thing. I think that was an odd argument.

The point being that when we restructured Kapuskasing, Sturgeon Falls, Algoma Steel, St Marys Paper, Abitibi, and all others, it wasn't subsidies that we gave those companies. We didn't go to them and say, "We're going to subsidize you with taxpayers' money." Workers sat down and we facilitated a process where workers

renegotiated their collective agreements. They gave money in exchange for shares, as they did in Spruce Falls and Kapuskasing, where they said, "Yes, we're going to give some of our holiday time. We're going to give you whatever, in exchange for getting shares of the company." Later on, when the company made money, they were able to sell those shares and walk away with better than \$100,000 in share value of Tembec. We didn't give subsidies. It was restructuring.

We dealt with hydro issues, for example, at Spruce Falls. That was one of the big issues. Our government was there, and we didn't subsidize; we dealt with the issues.

To the member for Bramalea-Gore-Malton-Springdale, who said that he didn't know what I was talking about and I didn't say much, well, tell that to the more than about 600 workers at Falconbridge who are about to lose their jobs this summer on a three-month layoff, or the 85 other workers who are going to be laid off permanently. Talk to the Smooth Rock Falls workers who were laid off for two weeks and are threatened with complete closure of the plant within a year. Talk to the workers in Cochrane who are being laid off and who are on temporary layoff now. Tell it to the workers at Tembec in Kirkland Lake who have been shut down altogether by your government. Tell the workers at Domtar in Sturgeon Falls who have lost their jobs entirely in that community that we're not talking about anything in this House. Tell the workers in Dubreuilville and White River. How dare you come into this House and say we shouldn't be raising these issues—

The Deputy Speaker: I just want to remind the members that it's out of order to carry on conversations across the floor. If you want to carry yourself across and have a polite conversation, that might be quite permissible. Other than that, I'll use the authority you've given me to enforce the rules that you've decided you want.

1600

Hon Tina R. Molinari (Associate Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing): I would like to take a few minutes to speak about Bill 23, the proposed Ontario Energy Board Consumer Protection and Governance Act, and specifically the enhanced communications mandate the proposed legislation has given to the Ontario Energy Board and the appointment of the OEB chair, the Honourable Howard Wetston, to carry out this mandate.

In preparing for today's session, it struck me just how vital energy is to this province. Business, industry and, most importantly, the people of this province all depend on reliable, affordable energy.

Last fall this government introduced our action plan to lower hydro bills. It lowered electricity prices for families, farms and small businesses. It put forward bold steps to encourage energy conservation and to foster the development of alternative energy.

Today we are here to discuss the next phase of the government's integrated energy strategy. Bill 23, the proposed Ontario Energy Board Consumer Protection

and Governance Act, provides further evidence of the commitment this government has to protecting consumers and businesses. This bill, if passed, is the culmination of a process that began last fall, when Premier Ernie Eves listened to people's concerns and ordered a review of the Ontario Energy Board.

Governments are judged on many things, but in the end they are often judged on two areas: how well they listen and how well they communicate with the public. I think this government has done an excellent job on both accounts. That is why I am proud to rise today to support the passage of Bill 23.

Bill 23 is the result of the government having listened to the people of this province. It will result in increased communication with the public on energy matters. If this bill is passed, it will ensure the people of Ontario will get the information they need to become informed energy consumers. This proposed legislation also puts into law a requirement that the Ontario Energy Board increase its communications mandate. This is an important step and one that will pay great dividends to the people of this province.

But before I speak about this enhanced communications role, I would first like to congratulate the Minister of Energy for the effort he put into the review of the Ontario Energy Board and the resulting—

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker: Order. Some would say, I guess, that I'm not speaking loudly enough when I say you can't carry on conversations and shout across the floor. I don't know that if I turned up the volume and shouted it out you would listen to me. But I'm telling you that I take absolutely no pleasure in asking somebody to leave this chamber, and I don't want to do it. So what am I supposed to do? Talk louder? Unless you hear me and you understand it, I'm sorry but it's going to be a short afternoon. I'm going to be here all afternoon, but somebody's not.

The Chair recognizes the Associate Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, from Thornhill.

Hon Mrs Molinari: Thank you very much, Mr Speaker, and thank you for taking a lead role in this House in making sure everyone is listening to some of the important information we have to share.

It's also an opportune time, as the Minister of Energy is here—I was in the process of congratulating the Minister of Energy for the effort he put into this review of the Ontario Energy Board and the resulting creation of Bill 23. He is a perfect example of a minister who cares and listens to the people of Ontario.

As the minister prepared Bill 23, he conducted an impressive consultation process. The consultation paper was posted on the ministry Web site. More than 1,500 letters were sent to MPPs, stakeholders, associations, consumer groups and municipalities. The minister received 78 written submissions, and he met personally with 25 different groups. He is also to be applauded for listening to the people of Ontario and making sure that

their concerns and their ideas were incorporated into this bill.

As this review was conducted, it became very clear that when it came to energy issues, the people of Ontario wanted more information. They said they wanted to make informed choices and didn't feel there was a place to find the information they needed. They wanted to know where there was a place they could turn to, someone who would be on their side. They wanted an agency that would listen to them and would help them when they needed it.

I'm proud to say that with this proposed legislation, Bill 23, the Ontario Energy Board Consumer Protection and Governance Act, this government has taken the important steps to make sure Ontario consumers can now turn to the energy board for their energy and information needs. This proposed legislation ensures that Ontario consumers will have the tools they need to manage their energy bills. Bill 23 ensures that the Ontario Energy Board will also have greater transparency. As part of this proposed bill, the OEB now has a responsibility to explain what they are doing and, most importantly, why they are doing it.

But we all know that it's people who make legislation succeed, and that's why I would like to again congratulate the Minister of Energy on his appointment of the Honourable Howard Wetston as chair of the Ontario Energy Board. Mr Wetston has extensive experience as an administrator, legal counsel and adjudicator in a wide range of organizations. It is my belief that the people of Ontario will soon see the positive impact he will have on the energy industry in this province. The new chair of the OEB has worked for the National Energy Board. He was also involved in the deregulation of the transportation industry in Canada. So clearly he understands many of the issues we face today. But even more impressive is that he has also worked for the Consumers' Association of Canada and was the commissioner of the Competition Bureau for the federal government. The Honourable Mr Wetston is a former federal judge and most recently vice-chairman of the Ontario Securities Commission.

But don't take my word for it. I'd like to quote from the Hansard record of the standing committee on government agencies, which recently reviewed Mr Wetston's appointment. A member of the official opposition, the member for St Paul's, noted, "We believe that the Honourable Mr Wetston is in fact very qualified and is best prepared to take on this challenge," while the member for Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke noted that he too supported this appointment. He cited Mr Wetston's impressive experience. His comments: "I particularly like what he said about transparency, about consumer protection and about an honest and frank recognition of a very complex set of forces that are at play on an absolutely vital public interest."

But what impressed me the most with regard to the Hansard report was when Mr Wetston himself spoke, and he noted, "The legislation, if it's passed, requires the OEB to take on a higher role for the education of Ontario's consumers. I think that's really critical. One of

the first things I will try and do is really beef up our capacity to educate Ontario consumers about energy.” He went on to say, “I learned that when I was general counsel to the consumers association ... we had to try and get government to be more transparent.” Clearly we have the right person in place to make sure the spirit and intent of Bill 23, the proposed Ontario Energy Board Consumer Protection and Governance Act, is carried through.

1610

In the little time I have left, I would like to talk briefly about some of the other important aspects of Bill 23. This bill, if passed, is another key part of our plan to protect Ontario’s energy consumers and to ensure an efficient and effective regulatory process is in place to meet the needs of our growing energy sector. This government met with the people and asked them what changes were needed at the Ontario Energy Board. We listened and acted on their concerns. The people told us that the Ontario Energy Board process needed streamlining. They said the decision-making process had to be improved and made faster.

We are a government that listens. Not only are we a government that listens, we are a government that acts on what we hear from the people of Ontario. In this, we listened and acted. The people told us that the Ontario Energy Board needed to improve its day-to-day operations. We listened and we acted. Our review told us that funding for the Ontario Energy Board should continue to come from the users, and this legislation, if passed, ensures that this happens. We were also told that for the Ontario Energy Board to be an effective regulator, it had to attract the best and brightest people in the industry. This proposed legislation allows us to do just that.

We have heard a lot in the process of the consultations, and the Minister of Energy, in his work throughout putting together this bill, consulted with various stakeholders and consulted with a large group of people. That is what this government is all about. In all of the legislation we put forth and the types of decisions that we as a government make are decisions based on the consultation process, based on what the people of Ontario are telling us that they want, what their priorities are, because any government of the day needs to listen to those they represent. This government is a government that in fact does listen.

There are several pieces of legislation this government has put forth that have been along the same lines of consultation, but the one we’re talking about today is Bill 23. The title of the bill is An Act to amend the Ontario Energy Act, 1998 and the Municipal Franchises Act in respect of consumer protection, the governance of the Ontario Energy Board and other matters.

I talked about a number of things that came out, and things that we listened to and acted on. Through the consultations, we were also told that the Ontario Energy Board needed greater accountability. Accountability for this government is a key and very important factor. It’s been seen in a number of other areas that we hold ourselves accountable to the people of Ontario. We hold

ourselves accountable to the decisions we make. We hold ourselves accountable to the consultation process that we’ve gone through. So accountability is a great factor for this government, and it was a great factor here. We listened to what we were told.

This legislation proposes the establishment of an advisory committee of stakeholders, industry representatives and independent members who will review the Ontario Energy Board’s performance, a stakeholder group made up of a number of people who are industry representatives, people who are reflective of what we need to go to to get the advice we need. This is where the accountability factor comes in, and this is where we listen to the people of Ontario.

The Ontario Energy Board has an obligation and a duty to act in the best interests of consumers. It is my belief that if passed, Bill 23, the proposed Ontario Energy Board Consumer Protection and Governance Act, puts in place the legislation that we need to ensure that it has the mandate and resources needed to make this happen.

This government recognizes that in order to have legislation passed, in order for legislation to be successful, resources need to be invested in those areas. As a government, we are committed to investing the resources needed for legislation that we need to pass and make sure that the people of Ontario are well represented.

This legislation is very much the same as a number of other pieces of legislation that this government put through because it has the accountability and it has the resources backing the legislation that we put through.

This government also recognizes the importance of protecting consumers. We recognize that consumers had great concerns over the energy cost and energy prices in the province of Ontario. Our Premier took a leadership role in that. Our Premier listened to the people of Ontario; our Premier is one who is of a consultative nature. That is why the Minister of Energy went out and did a clear consultation, because that is the direction that we’re getting from our Premier—a Premier who represents the people of Ontario. It’s important not only that we protect consumers but it’s also important that consumers feel that they are being protected by the decisions that this government is making.

This bill recognizes the importance of listening to the public and acting on their concerns. I’m very proud of the fact that this bill recognizes what we’ve heard from the people of Ontario. It accounts for all of the things that we’ve heard and all of the things that the Minister of Energy has heard in his consultation process. The Minister of Energy is a very energetic minister who is out there talking to all of the people and making sure that the legislation that he brings forth is legislation that is fair legislation and has accountability. It also shows the people that we actually listened.

In listening to the people, it was clear that changes were needed into the Ontario Energy Board. This bill is very reflective of that. Bill 23, when passed—if passed—makes those changes. This is not change for change’s sake, because you can make changes and not improve

things. This is change that is needed and change that is necessary. This proposed legislation will make the Ontario Energy Board the effective regulator that this province needs.

I again want to talk about how important it is that everyone in this House recognize that this bill is a bill that was created by the people of Ontario because of all the consultation that was done. This is something that they told us they needed, and it's very reflective of that. Energy in the province of Ontario is vital. It's vital to our economy; it's vital to our future growth. It's one thing that all of the people of Ontario use. Every day, every hour, every minute, every week and every day, our consumers use energy. It's very important; it's one of the most important things in our priorities.

This proposed legislation, Bill 23, protects consumers and will help us meet our future energy needs. In the future, there will be a need for more energy. Our Minister of Energy has gone out and consulted on how we can have the energy that we need for the future of Ontario because, as we move forward in the next few months and the next few years, and especially with the summer coming and the heat coming, a lot of people will be turning on their air conditioners, and energy will be used much more so in the hot summer months. We as a government want to make sure that we have the energy we need for the future. It's something that I hear from my riding of Thornhill. My constituents are very concerned about the fact that the energy that we need in the future—will we have enough energy? Will we have the kind of energy that's environmentally safe? Will we be able to provide as much energy as all of the constituents of Thornhill, and for that matter all of the constituents in Ontario, need?

1620

I believe that this bill is reflective of what this government is all about. What this bill does is take into account everything that the Minister of Energy has heard, everything that the Premier of Ontario hears when he's out talking to people, and everything that I hear from the people of Thornhill. All of the MPPs, all of caucus have had an opportunity to have input into this bill. I know that the opposition has also had an opportunity to have input into this bill. I don't know if they took the opportunity for that, but they did have it, because in a consultation process, we consult with everyone in the province of Ontario, and everyone has the opportunity to improve any legislation that we put forth and put in front of this House. So I would encourage the members of the opposition to clearly read this legislation and see that it does reflect the people of Ontario and the consultation process that took place. I'm sure that in reading it clearly and understanding it, they will see that this legislation should be passed and supported. So I look forward to the full support of the House.

The Deputy Speaker: Comments and questions?

Mr Gerretsen: It may very well be that new consumer protection is required. I don't think anybody disagrees with that. We should have been discussing this

kind of a bill two years ago, before the market was opened up. That's when the people needed the protection.

It's kind of interesting. The real issue when it comes to electricity is the one that was identified by the member from Ottawa West, a member of the minister's own party. The real problem with respect to energy in the future is going to be: where is the extra, additional supply going to come from? That is the issue. You can talk about all the consumer protection legislation in the world, and certainly it's needed. People have to know what's happening in the energy market. But if you don't have enough supply, and if we have to import the energy from outside of Ontario and keep paying the kind of rates that we have been paying for the last year or so—which are much more than the 4.3 cents per kilowatt hour that we're charging the people of Ontario—then in effect the taxpayer or the ratepayer or somebody is going to have to pick up the difference. The difference right now is already at least \$600 million. If you include the start-up costs, we're talking about an extra \$2 billion that has been added on to the stranded debt of Ontario Hydro or to the debt of the power generation organization, whether it's in the one company or in the three different public companies that are out there right now.

So consumer protection is important. There is absolutely no question about it. But what are we doing about supply? That is the real issue. I'll be talking about that shortly when it will be my time to speak on this bill.

We can talk about consumer protection all we want, but if the supply isn't going to be there to satisfy the needs of the consumers of Ontario, we are going to end up paying much more than we're currently paying. That's the issue that I'd like this member to address.

Mr Martin: I appreciate the opportunity to respond to the speech by the member for Thornhill and to focus on perhaps one thing that she said, which is that this bill is somehow a reflection of voices out there in the province of Ontario that told the government what was needed so the government put it together in this bill.

I beg to differ. In fact, that is not what this bill is about. The bill is about further damage control. The government ran into a juggernaut when it took on this challenge of privatizing and deregulating hydro. They immediately went scurrying, as they always do, for scapegoats. They scapegoated Ontario Hydro and Eleanor Clitheroe. That wasn't good enough, so then they decided to scapegoat the Ontario Energy Board and Floyd Laughren.

No one and nothing in this province is safe from these guys if it's to their end, if it will benefit them as they perceive it. There are no sacred cows here. They're gone. They'll bring in a bill or do the smoke and mirrors required to coat over that and suggest that somehow they're going to improve the situation or the lot.

I'll tell you, if you really want to understand the energy history and situation in this province, I suggest you pick up Howard Hampton's book, *Public Power*, and have a read. It's a very excellent read. It's not an expensive book, and it's available out there now.

Mr Brown: How much is it?

Mr Martin: It's \$21.95. It's a bargain. It'll give you all that you need to know on public power, on power in Ontario.

Mr Brown: Who's the ghostwriter?

Mr Martin: Howard Hampton wrote it. Then if you want to know what we're going to do as a government once we get elected to solve the hydro challenge—

The Deputy Speaker: I'd like to remind the member that we don't use those kinds of props. There might be another venue somewhere in another building or something where you could do those kinds of commercials.

Comments and questions?

Hon Doug Galt (Minister without Portfolio): I'm very pleased to respond to the member from Thornhill. What an excellent speech the member made.

Mr Gerretsen: On a point of order, Mr Speaker: Today on at least three occasions the Speaker of this House has indicated to the government members not to hold up their dead-end book called *The Road Ahead*. This member did it again, and I would ask you to tell him not to use any props.

The Deputy Speaker: It's definitely a point of order. I did not see it. I think I would have recognized it. The Chair recognizes the member for Northumberland.

Hon Mr Galt: Unfortunately, I lost the first minute of my two-minute response. I wanted to compliment the member from Thornhill on just an exceptional speech, as usual. What else would you expect from a Conservative, especially the member from Thornhill? Just a marvellous, marvellous job.

This bill is about protecting the energy consumers of the province of Ontario. It's certainly something the Liberals obviously didn't do when they were in office; the NDP certainly didn't. They were buying some rain forest, as I remember, and that was to protect the consumers? I don't think so. They let the debt take off to over \$30 billion—closer to \$40 billion was the debt of Ontario Hydro. That was not the way to protect the Ontario power consumers.

This bill is going to give more say to consumers in matters of energy, and I'm certainly pretty proud of our government and the select committee on alternate fuels for coming in with that kind of report. As a matter of fact, it was a unanimously accepted report by all parties. I'm sure the consumers we'll be protecting with this bill are in fact very pleased with that select committee's recommendations that are out there at this time.

I again congratulate the member from Thornhill for just a tremendous speech.

Mr Brown: I was very much interested in what the member for Thornhill had to say, and I think the member for Kingston and the Islands probably put it best when he said that the real problem here is with supply. No significant supply in this province has come on-line since the New Democratic Party finished Darlington. When they finished Darlington, we put 4,000 megawatts of supply into the grid. Since then, there has been really no significant new supply.

We are facing a situation in Ontario where we are told that within the next 10 years or so we need to build 10,000 to 15,000 new megawatts of electricity. No amount of consumer regulation, no amount of government intervention, can change the fact that we need supply or we will never be able to protect consumers, we will never be able to have a strong economy, we will never be able to continue to build this province that, for many years, generated much of its economic activity through its very low-cost, reliable electricity policy.

I would take members back to 1990, when there was a plan, a 25-year plan, for public electricity to be built. It had been going through the environmental process. That public power plan back in 1990 proposed a number of alternatives for new generation. With the coming of a new government in 1990, that public power plan for new generation in this province was killed. And at that point there was no plan for public power in Ontario.

The Deputy Speaker: The Associate Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing has two minutes to respond.

1630

Hon Mrs Molinari: I'm happy to hear some of the comments from my colleagues: the member for Kingston and the Islands, the member for Sault Ste Marie, also my most esteemed colleague, the member for Northumberland, who is also the government whip and does an excellent job at that as well, and the member for Algoma-Manitoulin.

I want to again stress that this bill is a bill of accountability and is one that provided for the minister to engage in a consultation process, and this bill was created in that consultation process. I also want to highlight the fact that this government took action when energy prices were rising. Our Premier made a statement that they were frozen at 4.3 cents per kilowatt hour because that is what the consumers were requesting, that the government take a stand on this.

I want to read into the record support of our nominee, the Honourable Mr Wetston. I also have a quote from Mr Conway, who is a Liberal member: "I want to just very briefly recommend to the committee the concurrence in support of this nominee, who obviously comes to this responsibility with a very, very powerful and, I think, impressive resumé. I was particularly struck by his testimony here today. It is, as my friend Bryant says, not going to be an easy job."

So there are a number of people around this House, and also on the opposition side, who do support the Honourable Mr Wetston in this appointment.

For the record, I have to also state that the NDP voted against this. It's important that everyone recognize the importance of this bill and that it goes through. I would encourage the members to really clearly think of Ontarians when they're voting on this bill.

The Deputy Speaker: Further debate?

Mr Gerretsen: For the record, this is not about the Honourable Howard Wetston. I understand the gentleman comes highly recommended and I certainly wish him

well in his job. I would also suggest to all those people who may have an interest in this topic to read the Hansard of the speech Mr Conway gave last night. It was a long speech, but during that speech he gave the history of hydroelectric power in this province over the last 100 years, all of the ramifications that has had and all of the various issues that have arisen over that period of time. It was an excellent speech by a member who, quite frankly, knows a lot more about this situation than I do.

I'm not going to blast the government on the issue of providing greater consumer protection in the energy field. The question that I have, and I indicated it to you a bit earlier, Speaker, is, why wasn't this kind of a bill before us at least two years ago, before the market was opened up and before we had all the chaos and havoc that erupted in the electricity market? That's when we should have dealt with this bill. I'm also not going to deal with whether or not the board that is being created under this bill is better or worse than the existing Ontario Energy Board. I have high respect for Mr Laughren, who ran that board for a certain period of time. I certainly wish this new operation well because the consumers in Ontario need to be protected.

But the principal issue—before dealing with the principal issue, I think it's rather ironic that just on the day when we are discussing this bill, a consumer advisory has been issued by the Ontario Energy Board. You may recall that the member for St Paul's asked the Minister of Energy about this earlier today in question period. I want to take the time, because I do have some time, to read this entire advisory that was issued by the Ontario Energy Board today. It just shows you that the consumer protection that we're talking about in this bill, presumably, or the consumer protection people might think is out there for them when it comes to energy contracts, isn't there at all at this stage. I will read this verbatim, so it's not my propaganda, it's not the government's propaganda; it is the word of the Ontario Energy Board as it exists today. This is an advisory dated June 18. It states as follows:

“The Ontario Energy Board is advising consumers of recent changes to the energy contract renewal process. Under new regulations passed by the Ontario government,” by the cabinet sitting right there, “natural gas and electricity supply contracts can be automatically renewed for one year. Energy marketers are required to send customers a detailed renewal package including the new term and price of the renewed contract. Consumers have 30 days to cancel, in writing, after receiving the renewal notice. Consumers may also cancel within 35 days of being sent their first bill after the renewed contract takes effect.” But here comes the magic word. “If the consumer does not respond to the renewal notice,” in other words, if you don't do anything, “and does not cancel after receiving the first bill, the contract is renewed for one year.

“The new renewal process applies to both natural gas and electricity supply contracts.”

This is a negative option billing situation. I'll go on and read the next paragraph:

“The board wants to remind consumers who sign or renew electricity supply contracts that they will pay the contract price,” in other words, the price that's in the renewal notice, “and will no longer be eligible”—and this is the crucial point—“for the electricity supply price freeze,” in other words, the 4.3 cents per kilowatt hour that everybody has been guaranteed until the year 2006. If you sign one of these contracts, then you're no longer entitled to that. That's what this says.

“Presently, consumers who qualify for the government electricity price freeze pay a rate of 4.3 cents per kilowatt hour. This commodity price is in effect to May 2006. Electricity retailers are required to inform consumers of both the contract rate and the 4.3 cents per kilowatt hour rate an eligible customer would pay without a contract. If a consumer signs a new electricity supply contract or renews an existing contract, the consumer will pay the contract price.” This may be higher; I suppose it may be lower than 4.3 cents a kilowatt hour, but not very likely.

“If a consumer fails to respond to an electricity supply contract renewal notice and does not cancel after receiving the first bill under the renewed contract, the consumer will pay the contract price.”

We have heard so much in this House. Remember when we talked about the cable television rates and how we were just totally surprised and amazed and how we were against the negative billing option that was provided with the cable rates? Apparently the cabinet sees absolutely nothing wrong with it. They are the people who passed this regulation. But if you don't do anything about it, the new rate will apply.

It does go on to say—this is from the Ontario Energy Board—“Consumers are advised to carefully consider all offers for electricity or natural gas supply to ensure they know the terms and conditions of the contract.”

All I'm saying is that you can talk about all the consumer protection legislation in the world, but this cabinet has allowed the dealers as of today to still be involved in negative option billing, as far as the individual consumers of electricity and natural gas out there are concerned. I think that is just contemptible. It really and truly is. On the one hand, we're talking about consumer protection, and on the other hand, the kind of regulation that the cabinet has passed is the classic example of a negative option billing. So, government, don't talk about wanting to protect the consumer. You may couch it in certain terminology, and you may even make good speeches about it, but in actual fact you're doing exactly the opposite in regulations you are passing even as we speak today.

1640

As I indicated before in my couple of minutes of response to the Associate Minister of Municipal Affairs, I truly believe that what we're really dealing with is the question of supply. Where are we going to get the supply for the future electricity needs of this province? As has been indicated before, we will need, in the not-too-distant

future, an extra 10,000 to 15,000 megawatts of electricity in this province, with the expansion that is taking place, with the new people that are coming, with the new businesses they're opening up.

What are we doing to replace and increase that electrical power situation? Are we talking to Manitoba? I had a recent conversation, just by pure coincidence, with the finance minister of Manitoba. He indicated to me that they were very much interested in starting a project on Churchill Falls. I believe this was talked about eight or 10 years ago as well, when we had the NDP government in power in Ontario, and they killed all the talks about getting into an agreement with the province of Manitoba.

There may be problems involved with that. Maybe because the greatest electricity needs we have are here in southwestern and central Ontario, it may be too large a distance to bring the energy from Churchill Falls in Manitoba; I really don't know. But are there any ongoing discussions right now with Manitoba so we could get into agreements with them?

What kind of discussions are taking place with Hydro-Québec? Hydro-Québec is selling to the United States. Why aren't we involved in that? We've seen what's happened just within the last year: the cost to the consumer, the taxpayer of this province, of a minimum of \$600 million in order to basically subsidize the guaranteed price of 4.3 cents a kilowatt hour.

I know that the members opposite in the government will say, "The Liberals voted for this." Yes, we voted for this. It was kind of voting for the lesser of two evils. Not to do anything at that point in time would have allowed the absolute chaos that existed a year or so ago, you may recall, when electricity rates were all over the place and people were paying all sorts of different prices. It was either to allow that to go on or to at least put some sort of stability in existence for the consumer of Ontario.

Is it the solution? It sure isn't the solution as far as I'm concerned and as far as our party is concerned. We've already said to the people of Ontario that if we should be fortunate enough to form the next government, that is one of the very first issues that will have to be addressed.

We cannot go on depending on external sources of energy, sometimes 25% up to 30% of our power needs in the province, buying it offshore from the States or wherever without having firm contracts in place. That's why we need to talk to our Canadian partners, to other provinces, about this situation. And this is just being added to the debt right now.

I happen to be one of those individuals who do not blame the stranded debt of some \$20 billion that has occurred in Ontario entirely on Ontario Hydro. I take the position, as I've stated in this House before, that over the last 100 years—and I guess it's been exactly 100 years since hydro power first came to this province—the price we charge consumers, both large and small, for electricity in the province has been part of the economic development of this province. It was always advantageous to us as Ontarians, as citizens of this province, to charge below the cost of electricity. The reason for that is

that we wanted to build the plants and we wanted to supply the jobs etc that come along with that. All governments of whatever political stripe over the last 100 years have basically used cheap electricity costs as a method of attracting business to this province.

So I don't blame the entire \$20-billion stranded debt that Ontario Hydro incurred over the last 100 years on the mismanagement of Ontario Hydro or to their being fat cats. There may have been some element of that, and quite frankly, I personally don't know about that. But something has to be done about that debt. It is no different than the public debt we have in this province, which now stands at about \$115 billion, whereas eight or nine years ago it was in the neighbourhood of \$90 billion. We're just adding to the public debt. By, in effect, guaranteeing people a rate of 4.3 cents a kilowatt hour, we are going to add, if not to that debt, at least to the stranded debt of Ontario Hydro. In the long run, that is wrong.

What we have always said is that we do not want to sell parts of Ontario Hydro, of either Hydro One or OPG. We will, however, allow private companies to come into Ontario and help the province build the supply that's needed to deal with the future. I don't care whether that additional supply comes from a government source, which I would prefer, or from a private source. But as the member from Renfrew North, Mr Conway, indicated yesterday, I think people have to understand that all the new sources of energy that are out there are going to cost more, with the exception of hydroelectric energy, which can be produced, I understand, at a very reasonable cost once the infrastructure is in place. I understand that wind power is going to come in at something like nine or 10 cents a kilowatt hour. When the consumer is only paying 4.3 cents a kilowatt hour right now for electricity needs in the province, not too many people, in my opinion, except those who are really environmentally conscious, are going to buy into that. Certainly, nuclear costs would be even more than that.

What are some of the other costs that have been incurred? The point I'm simply trying to make is that wherever the new electric power comes from, whether it's privately or publicly generated, there should be the ultimate control of government over that. There is no question in my mind that the electricity utility we all need, as has been pointed out by every member in this House, has to be publicly controlled. As far as I am concerned, I prefer it to be owned by the public as well. But there's going to be a cost involved in that. Whether or not we make a deal with Quebec or Manitoba, or whether or not private entrepreneurs are going to produce this power through wind or various other sources, it's going to cost more than what we are paying right now.

That's why I think energy conservation programs are so important. I still think we can do a lot in that. It always bothered me that when I was on the utilities commission in Kingston back in the 1980s, we wanted people to conserve at the same time as we were selling electric power to the larger consumers at a much cheaper rate

than the average homeowner was paying. You may recall that, generally speaking, the policy in the 1970s and 1980s, and perhaps before that as well, seemed to be that the more electricity you used, the cheaper it got. If you keep doing that, people aren't going to conserve.

If there's one thing that is absolutely clear about the energy policy of this government, it's that it has been totally and absolutely mishandled. I could not believe that the province of Ontario, through one of its hydro companies or whatever, has now been placed in a position where we have to rent in effect—what do you call it?—generators to make sure that we don't have brown-outs this summer, and that these generators are placed in some of our municipalities to make sure that if something happens, we can—to me it almost sounded like something out of the Third World, the lack of planning and the lack of foresight.

1650

Perhaps the blame shouldn't go to only this government, because there's enough to go around to governments over the last 10, 15, 20 years. I don't care where the blame lies, quite frankly, but the fact that we've got to—oh, and the member's pointing to us here. Well, if it makes you feel better, point to us. We were only in power for five years, by the way. The Liberals under Peterson get blamed for so many things, but unfortunately for that particular government they were only around for five years.

It always reminds me of the total debt of this province. The government members love to say that the debt of this province was incurred by the Peterson Liberals. Well, if you look at the records during that period of time, the public debt of this province went up by only about \$8 billion. During the NDP years, it went up at a rate of about \$10 billion per year for five years. So that's \$58 billion. The other \$60 billion was all incurred on your watch.

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker: Order. The members for Bramalea, Ottawa, Kitchener and Oxford, I'll not warn you again.

The Chair recognizes the member for Kingston and the Islands.

Mr Gerretsen: Thank you very much, Speaker. Unfortunately, what happens at moments like that of course is that you sometimes lose your train of thought, but I haven't quite lost it yet. I know that by far most of the public debt that is incurred by this province, whether it's in stranded debt of Ontario Hydro or whether it's public debt, has been incurred on your watch, and substantially on the NDP's watch as well, because unfortunately we weren't in power long enough, I suppose, to add substantially to that debt.

We have got a major problem here, and consumer protection is important. But what is even more important is that the issue of supply is dealt with by whoever forms the next government as its top, number one priority.

The Deputy Speaker: Comments and questions?

Mr Bisson: I think the priority of the next government is going to be trying to put the genie back in the bottle. What we've got here is a government that basically went in with zeal to try to change Ontario Hydro to their way of seeing things, which was to deregulate, open the market and try to privatize it. Clearly it hasn't worked. Hydro rates, as I said earlier today—a 75% increase in the hydro rates in Dubreuilville, one of the key issues in why that company is laying off 285 workers. You take a look at companies like Falconbridge, down for three months in the city of Timmins this year. Why? Because last year, under market opening, they were constantly being called by Ontario Hydro, who was saying, "You're paying a through price on power." The through price on power? Once hydro supply went down because of additional usage in the summer, the hydro rates went through the roof. As a result, now we've got Falconbridge in Timmins laying off workers there in part of their operations for a period of three months, and they've just announced 85 permanent layoffs at Falconbridge. They are saying one of the key reasons for that is hydro.

So I think one of the key things the government is going to have to do in the next Parliament is, quite frankly—and it's going to be a tough job—to put the genie back in the bottle.

As a New Democrat, I disagree with where the government is going, but I also disagree with what the Liberals are saying, because they're trying to play it both ways. They're trying to say, "We believe in public power, but we believe there's a role for the private sector in the generation of electricity." That can be a whole other debate. I don't buy that argument. If you're going to be able to control prices for electricity, you have to have a system that is totally publicly owned and run. Why does it work? We can get into a whole debate about that, but the end result is this. If you look at Manitoba and Quebec, they are the two jurisdictions with the lowest price of power across North America. They're both public. It's not a hybrid system, it's not a mixture of private and public; it's a public system. That's what we need to do.

Hon John R. Baird (Minister of Energy, Minister responsible for francophone affairs, Government House Leader): I'd say to my friend from the New Democratic Party, remember with Quebec and Manitoba that they're also almost entirely hydro generation. In the province of Ontario we don't have ready access to a Churchill Falls. We don't have ready access, at this stage, to northern Manitoba. We do have about 30% of our power from hydro, but 70% of it's not from hydro. So he'd want to remember that.

I listened with great interest to the speech by my colleague from Kingston and the Islands. I want to be clear about something to set the facts straight. I know this member does his homework and he's probably listened to one of his colleagues, but I'll ensure that he gets the facts. We provided the stability of a 4.3-cent fixed rate. I appreciated the member opposite and the member from Prescott-Russell voting for that bill in the House. The

contract renewals, which is the issue he raised, are for residents. Nothing in the change on the regulatory side will lose them the 4.3-cent cap. They would have to be sent a renewal notice to which they would respond. There are no renewal notices going out because the retailers of course aren't in the residential business of providing contracts for electricity. Because the 4.3-cent—

Interjection.

Hon Mr Baird: If the member opposite can show me a renewal notice, someone this has actually happened to—because it ain't happening and I can guarantee that it won't happen. That's very important, and I wanted to straighten that record before any misconceptions go out there.

We do want to provide a default option. There has to be something that happens. The customer would have to be cut off natural gas and, later, electricity. They would either be thrown back on the volatile price market or they would have to have the opportunity to stay on the fixed rate. All we were simply saying is that someone who had chosen to leave the volatile spot market would have the opportunity to go on a fixed rate with double the time renewal period. No renewal notices are being sent out. I know that will be good news to the people in the city of Kingston.

The Deputy Speaker: I just want to remind you, I have no problem with the conversation going on out to my left. It's the volume. Turn the volume down or goodbye.

Mr Jean-Marc Lalonde (Glengarry-Prescott-Russell): I commend the member for Kingston and the Islands. He referred to the concerns that have occurred ever since we went with deregulation. This bill will not address those concerns.

At the present time, he really touched on the seniors. Those renewal contracts, it is there at the present time on any of those contracts that were signed. It is in the fine print. In Ontario at the present time, we have over one and a half million seniors, of 65s and over. A good majority of them will receive those renewal contracts and do not have the facilities to answer those letters that they'll be getting to renew contracts. It should be done automatically: "If you have not answered within 30 days, your contract is cancelled. You could reapply again."

Mind you, the night of November 11, people were still knocking on doors selling contracts at 6.7 cents a kilowatt hour. They happened to be at my place. You can rest assured, they got quite an answer because somebody had forged my signature in the past. The minister told me just lately that anybody who wants to sign a new contract at 7.1 cents per kilowatt hour—and this is offered and available from Direct Energy. If you don't give them a call or send a letter that you are cancelling your contract, automatically you'll be stuck with this new rate, which could vary. At the present time, if it is 7.1 cents, people will be paying 7.1 cents per kilowatt hour, and this is unfair.

I hope that somebody will appeal immediately. Floyd Laughren is not there any more, but I hope the people will observe that.

Mr Martin: The member for Kingston and the Islands certainly put out a very clear position on the challenge that's confronting the province on some of what needs to be done and where his party stands. I suggest to you that the government is trying to coat over a very difficult hornet's nest that they've whacked in the last couple of years. First they scapegoated Ontario Hydro and Eleanor Clitheroe and threw them overboard. Then they scapegoated the Ontario Energy Board and Floyd Laughren and threw them overboard. Now they're bringing in this bill that they would have us believe is going to resolve everything.

1700

I would suggest to you that if it's the electricity market and the delivery of electricity—the supply of electricity and a reliable, cost-effective source of electricity—you're talking about, then you don't have to go much further than the platform that we as a party are putting forward come this election. Howard Hampton and the NDP's practical solution for affordable, reliable hydro is very simple:

"Keep hydro in public hands; immediately end hydro privatization and deregulation. Create Efficiency Ontario to take the lead on money-saving, environmentally friendly, energy efficiency measures so that people can save money through using less hydro, less gas and less heating oil. Guarantee by law that by the year 2010 at least 10% and by the year 2020 at least 20% of our electricity would be produced from renewable environmentally friendly sources. Ensure public accountability in our public power system through our new Public Utilities Commission. Place a moratorium on new nuclear power stations, clean our air by closing or converting Ontario's coal-fired generating stations by 2007 and invest in clean and renewable energy generation to ensure reliable electricity at cost for Ontario consumers."

What would the Liberals do? We're not quite sure. One day they say they would privatize; the next day they say they won't. We've yet to know that.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you. The member for Kingston and the Islands has two minutes to reply.

Mr Gerretsen: I'd like to thank all the members for their comments. As the minister indicated to me in an aside while the comments were going on, apparently this consumer advisory doesn't apply to electricity supply contracts. All I can say is that this Ontario Energy Board notice clearly states that it does. It is a negative billing option and it shouldn't exist. If it doesn't apply, please send out a notice that it doesn't apply so that a whole bunch of people out there who may be watching this or who may have somehow got a copy of this notice are not going to be affected by it, because that's what it's really all about.

You know, electricity is not about parties; it's not about governments and oppositions. It's about the consumers out there. That's what it's all about, and that's

what the legislation should be all about: protecting the consumers. The best way to protect the consumers out there is to make sure there's an adequate supply of electricity out there. Right now, that isn't happening.

If you talk about mismanagement of a file by the government, then certainly this is it. What's happened at Pickering? Pickering so far is \$1.2 billion over budget—\$1.2 billion. The cost was originally supposed to be \$800 million for the upgrades. I understand that it's getting close to \$2.5 billion and rising. Some 4,600 megawatts were taken out of commission in 1997 and were supposed to be reinstalled by 2000. What's happening in 2003? It's still not on-line. You know, we can make all sorts of political comments about it, but those are the facts. As a result, the consumer in Ontario is going to be paying more. They can either be paying more now or they can be paying more later on, when it's added on to the debt of Ontario Hydro.

Right now, this government is certainly not looking after the consumer as far as the electricity rates and the availability of electricity in this province are concerned.

The Deputy Speaker: We've consumed seven hours of debate. We'll now convert to 10-minute debate times. In rotation, I'm looking to my right to the PC caucus.

Mr Gill: I do appreciate you looking to your right, because on the right you will find the right party, the right platform—The Road Ahead—and everything about the progress needed in the province of Ontario.

Hon Mr Baird: Is that it?

Mr Gill: Yes, that is The Road Ahead. Of course my esteemed member from Ottawa is now browsing through. He has mastered it all, I'm sure, and he will be discussing that with his constituents.

This afternoon, I think those at home should know that we are discussing the Ontario Energy Board Consumer Protection and Governance Act. This bill, Bill 23, is what we are discussing. Considerable debate has gone on; as you mentioned just a few minutes ago, seven hours of it. I am pleased to speak on this issue, because it is an issue of importance to Ontarians. Electricity is widely needed as we grow; as the economy grows, so much more electricity is needed.

I'm very pleased that the company out of Oswego, New York, called Sithe Energy is planning to build, I believe, an 800-megawatt power generation plant using clean natural gas in my great riding of Bramalea-Gore-Malton-Springdale at an investment—I wouldn't use the word "cost"—of \$1 billion. It's quite an investment for Ontario and for the people of Bramalea-Gore-Malton-Springdale. When it is completed, it guarantees as well as ensures that the electricity is available for the growing marketplace.

When I speak for the next few minutes, I believe I speak also for all members of the assembly when I say that energy is among the top concerns of our constituents, along with, of course, health care, education, an education tax credit for seniors, mortgage interest deductibility, no teachers' strikes. There are issues to be dealt with, and I do want to assure the people listening at home that this

is a government that has the fortitude and the willingness to make the tough decisions to bring forward the continued growth that this province not only needs but deserves.

Whether it be through my riding office, your riding office or conversations we've had with people as we meet people across the province, it is clear that energy prices, energy supply and energy regulation are on the minds of the people of Ontario, along with the other issues I have mentioned. That is why this legislation, Bill 23, the proposed Ontario Energy Board Consumer Protection and Governance Act, 2003, is so important. The people of this province need to know that there's a place they can turn to that will help them make informed energy choices. They need to know there's an agency that is watching out for their interests. They need to know there's a place they can turn to that will act on their behalf if they have a problem they can't solve on their own.

The Ontario Energy Board is that place, and this legislation, if passed, will greatly enhance the board's ability to protect consumers. I know the member from Kingston and the Islands said just a few minutes ago, "It is about consumers." I agree: it is about consumers. That's why this bill, if passed, will make sure that the consumers are protected and are informed to make the right decisions, the right choices.

The OEB was established more than 40 years ago. It is run by talented, dedicated people. But last year it became clear that changes were needed, changes had to be made. The Reliable Energy and Consumer Protection Act, 2002, went a long way to making some of the needed changes. That legislation enhanced the protection of consumers by including reforms to strengthen the OEB's powers to take action against unfair marketing and retailing practices. The act also increased the OEB's enforcement powers and strengthened the surveillance powers of the Independent Electricity Market Operator's Market Surveillance Panel.

But through this last summer and fall, it became clear that more had to be done. You do hopefully remember last summer. We Canadians have short memories. I hope we all remember what a great summer we had, but it was record temperatures. That's what summers are supposed to be about. I'm looking forward to another good summer, but it will put challenges, it will put constraints, on electricity supply, and we have to be watchful. We have to consume electricity. I think in Canada we have sometimes become not only users of electricity but users of other consumer goods in terms of abundance, and sometimes we tend to overdo it.

1710

In one way, I'm not pleased that the electricity prices went up, but this has certainly opened people's minds about conserving electricity. I was as much to blame as anybody, because when I came home I talked to the kids, talked to my spouse for whatever little time I had, and said, "How come the lights are not on? Put all the lights on. The house should be lived in. People should know

people are living here.” Now, I’m converted. I’ve changed. When I come home the first thing I say is, “How come all the lights are on? Put the lights off. Put the TV down,” as if it’s going to save any energy. I don’t know. But I said, “Put the sound down.”

We need to conserve more. If we all conserved just 5% or 10% of what we’re using now, I’m sure we will have all the electricity we need for the next little while.

My colleague the Minister of Energy, the honourable minister from Ottawa, has proposed legislation which is the result of a lot of hard work. The minister works extremely hard.

It included an impressive consultation process. We are the government that does consult. We’ve seen that in examples like STO. I must explain STO: seizing tomorrow’s opportunities. We went out and talked to people all across Ontario at different venues, asking people what sort of Ontario they would like to see in the next five, 10, 15 years.

Those are the sort of consultations that went into the platform, the next agenda that we’re proposing, which includes, as I said earlier, mortgage interest deductibility, a seniors’ tax credit, an education equity tax credit, more doctors and nurses, and no teachers’ strikes, or at least no teachers’ strikes during the school year. That’s fair. During the school year, it doesn’t affect the kids. They can still do the strike, but I suppose they’ll have to do it in their spare time in the summer. Also, we consulted on the budget and we consulted on the platform, The Road Ahead, as I said earlier.

This consultation was very important. It meant that this was not change for the sake of change. The consultation process meant that the people, associations and companies who use the OEB had a key role in the changes outlined in this bill. This proposed legislation gives the OEB new purpose and will make it a much stronger organization. Bill 23, if passed, creates a strong, independent and well-resourced Ontario Energy Board, an OEB that can make the decisions that ensure that the people of this province are treated fairly.

It’s all about fairness. It’s all about consumers. I’m hoping that by the end of the day today this House will pass this bill.

The Deputy Speaker: The Chair recognizes the member for Don Valley East on a point of order.

Interjection.

The Deputy Speaker: Oh, I’m sorry. If you’re standing up and talking, I think I should be giving you the floor on the subject.

Mr David Caplan (Don Valley East): I’m just setting up my rotation.

The Deputy Speaker: I’d ask you to do it in a different manner so it doesn’t confuse me.

Comments and questions? Are you on a point of order or do you want your rotation—

Mr Bisson: I didn’t know if anybody is up yet.

The Deputy Speaker: I’m going to put you into your own turn in two minutes.

The Chair recognizes the member for Glengarry-Prescott-Russell.

Mr Lalonde: The member for Bramalea-Gore-Malton-Springdale remarked in his speech that this bill will protect the consumers. Let me tell you that if we really want to protect the consumers, I just hope that this new board would listen to the city of Ottawa or Ottawa Hydro. At the present time, Ottawa Hydro is ready to service the rural area. There are over 37,000 customers serviced by Hydro One. Hydro One at the present time, even though the minister was saying that Ottawa Hydro had a surcharge, let me tell you that the residential normal density is 37,000 rural people serviced by Hydro One. If those people were with the city of Ottawa, the fixed charge would have been \$6.69. With Hydro One, it is costing them \$23.70, nearly \$17 difference per month. This represents over \$10 million a year within the Cumberland area, which amounts to a little over 37,000 customers.

So I just hope that this new board is willing to listen to the people in Ottawa. They are ready to pay the reasonable price to take over. I was saying last night that Embrun Co-op Hydro finally won their case. It’s too bad that we have a new board, and I just hope that this new board will take the time and listen to Ottawa Hydro so everybody will benefit from the same cost for hydro services.

Mr Bisson: I enjoyed the comments of my friend from Bramalea-Gore-Malton—I think I got that right.

Interjection.

Mr Bisson: OK. I enjoyed his comments, and I especially enjoyed his little comment at the beginning of his discourse, where you said, “I will recognize the party on my right,” and he responded by saying, “You’re responding to the right party with the right choice and the right plan.” I’ve got to refute that. We know you guys are on the political right. That we understand. I think that’s the only thing—

Interjection.

Mr Bisson: Well, the Liberals do—sometimes mostly to the right. But I would argue you’re actually on the wrong side of this particular issue, not on the right side of hydro.

So I’m just going to put it simply again. As I said, there are communities across northern Ontario, as we’re starting to see with communities in the south, that are starting to be affected by what’s happening in the economy. One of the key factors in the layoffs that we’re seeing up north and the temporary plant closures is basically around the issue of energy. I just ask you to contemplate what has changed over the last 12 or 14 months when it comes to energy in the province of Ontario, which causes companies like River Gold Mines, Falconbridge, Tembec in Smooth Rock Falls, in Cochrane and in Kirkland Lake, Buchanan in White River—

Interjection: It’s Domtar in White River.

Mr Bisson: —it’s Domtar in White River, sorry—and others to close down. When we sit down and talk to

them, they say that one of the key factors is energy. Where they used to pay a certain price for power last year, they're paying up to 75% more for electricity this year. Talk to the people at Dubreuilville. The manager there will tell you directly. They've said, "One of the reasons we're shutting down—key point; point final—is that a 75% increase in electricity has made us uncompetitive. Yes, we have countervailing duty problems and yes, we have an American dollar problem, but what has really put us over the hump is the electricity issue."

So I would argue that you may be politically to the right and you may be to the right side of the Speaker, but you're wrong when it comes to your policies on hydro.

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The Deputy Speaker: Comments and questions? The Chair recognizes the Minister of Energy and House leader.

Hon Mr Baird: And minister of francophone affairs.

C'est bien sûr un plaisir pour moi de parler dans ce discours et de remercier mon cher collègue le député de Bramalea-Gore-Malton-Springdale.

J'ai commencé de bien connaître le député dans ses premiers quatre ans dans l'Assemblée législative. Je suis sûr, comme l'on a vu pendant sa présentation, qu'il a fait beaucoup de travail dans le domaine de l'énergie. Mon premier jour comme ministre de l'Énergie, M. Gill m'a parlé de quelque chose qui était près de son cœur, qui était la construction d'une nouvelle station de génération dans sa région, parce qu'il savait que le gouvernement a pris la décision de fermer la station de génération de Lakeview. Le député de Bramalea-Gore-Malton-Springdale a travaillé très fort pour être sûr qu'il y aurait un nouveau projet dans son comté. Il continue de me parler chaque jour sur cette politique très importante.

I did enjoy the member's speech. He, like me, believes we have to provide balanced regulation to provide a fair mix between the legitimate need of a consumer for protection and a fair return for investment, whether that be a pension fund or an investor. I thought the member opposite made an excellent speech, and I'm sure the people of his constituency know how lucky they are to have such a hard-working member for them in this place.

Mr Dave Levac (Brant): I appreciate the opportunity to talk about Bill 23, the Ontario Energy Board Consumer Protection and Governance Act, 2003. The member who gave the speech we're giving our two minutes on, the member from Bramalea-Gore-Malton-Springdale—I wanted to make sure I didn't say Springfield—made reference to a few things I just have to respond to that were actually outside of Bill 23, basically outlining their platform.

I want him maybe to address in his last two minutes why 115,000 senior citizens were taken off home care and maybe why this government decided to pop a 15% increase on long-term-care facility copayments for our senior citizens. Then, when the outcry came really loud, they said, "We'll do you a favour; we'll spread it over three years." And when the outcry continued, "You're still being unfair to our senior citizens," they sat back and

said, "Maybe we'll steal an idea from Dalton that it should be just the cost of living, like the three to four per cent everybody else has to pay. Maybe we should consider that." Maybe he'd like to address that and simply say, "Yes, we do have an answer. We'll stop doing this senior citizen hokey-pokey across the province and pretend we really care about them, and yet when it comes time for the election we'll show them how much we love them."

Tell us why 115,000 senior citizens were kicked off home care. Please tell us why. Please tell us why you charge them a 15% increase on their copayments in long-term-care facilities. Tell us why, and we'll be able to understand that nice and clear.

Let's talk about the bill—I only have about 15 seconds. Let me put it this way: Dalton McGuinty and the Ontario Liberals forced this legislation. They needed to reform it, but the reforms came after exposing our consumers to unscrupulous huskers; they should have been addressed before. We know that.

The Deputy Speaker: The member from Bramalea-Gore-Malton-Springdale has two minutes to reply.

Mr Gill: First of all, I want to thank all the honourable members who spoke on what I spoke about: the member from Glengarry-Prescott-Russell, the member from Timmins-James Bay, the minister from Nepean-Carleton and the member from Brant. I especially liked the two-minute hit from the minister from Nepean-Carleton, because he was so right. As soon as the minister took charge of the energy portfolio, I was the first one knocking on his door.

Hon Mr Baird: You barged in.

Mr Gill: I barged in because that's my style. I come from the private sector. I believe in picking up the phone and talking to the minister directly. I want to thank you, because I found the door open; anyone can come and talk to the young, energetic and hard-working minister. I do appreciate it and want to thank him.

I do take the invitation from the member from Timmins-James Bay to come to his riding. He's going to give me a ride in his plane and look at all these communities that are widespread in his riding. Maybe he can also explain to me about companies that were shutting down when they were in power; I'm not sure what the reason was. I know what the reason was, but I don't think they're willing to admit it.

Yes, we'll talk about seniors; we'll talk about the seniors' education tax credit. I was so thankful to the Premier that he came to my great riding of Bramalea-Gore-Malton-Springdale and unveiled that at Mrs Olive Russell's house that day.

Interjection.

The Deputy Speaker: Would the member for Brant come to order.

Mr Gill: We believe that seniors who have paid so much to this province should keep more of their own money, because they know best how to use it.

The Deputy Speaker: Further debate?

Mr Brown: It is indeed a pleasure to be speaking to Bill 23 this afternoon. First, I want to say that this bill does address some of the issues surrounding consumer protection that needed very much to be addressed.

Last spring, a year ago, Speaker, you would know that in private members' hour, I brought before this House a resolution asking that constituents of mine, as a matter of fact the whole province, should be protected from the door-to-door sales antics of electricity retailers. By a very narrow margin, we managed to have that resolution adopted, but it had absolutely no effect in the short term as the government chose to ignore the wishes of the House. My actual resolution asked that door-to-door sales of electricity contracts be stopped. The government chose not to do that. I still believe that to be a mistake. We still get many inquiries from people who signed retail agreements with electricity retailers that have cost them a great deal of money. People were very upset with the misrepresentations they were receiving at the door.

Nonetheless, we're here with a bill that purports to protect consumers. It will, in at least some ways, address the situation we had with natural gas. Last year, my colleagues and I spent much time trying to convince the government to do something about the practice of gas companies retroactively charging people for gas they had already consumed at a price they'd already agreed to. It was absolutely impossible to believe that was going on in this province. We have to say to the government that in addressing that situation, albeit a year late, it is something we can support.

But it is very difficult to stand here and try to reward the arsonists for trying to put out the fire, and that is exactly what's going on here. The government chose to open the market last May 1, knowing full well what every member in this House should have known, because on a daily basis members on this side of the House told the government there was not adequate supply. Without adequate supply, there could be no possibility that we would have reasonable prices in the province. You could not open a market. They ignored that.

What did that mean to my constituents? It meant that we had the only dry cleaner, for example, on Manitoulin Island, Leyal Cleaners at West Bay, out of business. That's what that meant. It meant many of my smaller resorts, hotels, restaurants, variety stores and grocery stores were under severe pressure because electricity prices were forcing them to the brink. Even as we speak, I have had in my office at least three small businesses, that employ a fair number of people, calling just this week to ask us if we could intervene with Hydro One to have their electricity bill payment schedule expanded or have something done with it to keep them from going bankrupt before they got to the tourist season, when they hoped they could make some money to pay the bills.

Absolutely extraordinary. But most extraordinary of all is that, as all members would know, 15% of the electricity in this province has always been private, has never been public, had nothing to do with public, Ontario Hydro, whatever, other than that it was regulated by the

Ontario Energy Board. That was their only relationship. The Great Lakes Power area, an area that for about a century had been supplied with power by Great Lakes Power, now a Brascan company, had, if not the lowest electricity prices in Ontario, very close to the lowest. It is a vast geographical area, but the company was quite profitable. It owned generation, distribution and transmission, and for many years—as I said, almost a century—supplied electricity to that part of the world at extraordinarily competitive prices.

1730

Came the government, believing in the private market, if you can believe that. What did they do? What was the effect of the government's policy on electricity? The effect was to almost double the rates paid by many customers in the Great Lakes area. I and the members for St Paul's and Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke and many others on this side of the House have alluded to the situation in communities like Dubreuilville, where the forest company saw rates increase by 80%, which made operation of the company totally unviable. We are looking at a large number of people today in Dubreuilville who are unemployed, in large part because of the electricity policy of this government.

In my efforts to find a solution to this problem in the Great Lakes Power area, I managed to get a meeting together with Great Lakes Power, Dubreuil Forest Products, people from the Ministry of Northern Development and Mines and people from the Ministry of Energy. One of the solutions that became apparent, after they talked amongst themselves, was that rural rate assistance within the Great Lakes Power area would be of huge assistance in providing a reasonable electricity distribution and transmission cost, which would reduce the power rates to something at least competitive with the Hydro One area.

I have been reading petitions constantly since the Legislature came back. The Minister of Energy has now recognized that rural rate assistance is a policy that would not only be fair but is mandatory in the Great Lakes Power area and would make residential and small business customers competitive again. He also recognizes, as I do, that this is only part of the solution. Larger customers and the large industrial customers like Dubreuil Forest Products need to have a real rethink of the regulation.

The problem from my constituency's point of view is that my constituents have been taken prisoner by an ideology that just doesn't work in the Great Lakes area. It doesn't even work in the Hydro One area. I've had complaints from Chapleau and Espanola, which operate their own PUCs, that they're having their share of fun trying to make this policy work for their consumers also.

A large number of my constituents, and constituents across northern Ontario, are unemployed because of the electricity policy of this particular government. We have a large number of people on fixed incomes who are unable to pay their electricity bills and will soon be out of their homes. We have countless businesses either on the brink of bankruptcy or already gone out of business

because of the electricity policy of this government. It is time that the government not only comes in with increased consumer protection, which Bill 23 talks about, but moves on the issues of rural and northern electricity distribution and transmission costs in a way that makes us again competitive in Ontario and in the world.

Thank you very much for this opportunity, Mr Speaker. I await the inevitable questions and comments.

The Deputy Speaker: Comments and questions?

Mr Martin: I want to say I appreciate the chance to speak following the speech by the member for Algoma-Manitoulin. He very rightly points out that much of what this government is doing where hydro is concerned is affecting probably most directly and most clearly some of his very own constituents. I suggest that this bill that we're debating here today, and have been debating for a number of days, is not going to do anything to relieve them of both the immediate and the long-term challenge that they face where hydroelectricity is concerned.

In the Great Lakes Power area that the member for Algoma-Manitoulin speaks of, it used to be that hydroelectricity was seen as a competitive advantage because it was cheaper, and we used it that way to keep the economy going, to attract new investment and to help those industries.

Mr Brown: But it was private.

Mr Martin: It was private, but it was regulated, and the regulation is what kept the price of electricity in our area, because I represent the city of Sault Ste Marie, in a very competitive capacity. That's what we want. That's why we're calling for a return to regulated hydro and publicly owned hydro, because in our instance, even though we had a private corporation delivering, they were very much under the control of Ontario Hydro and the regulating regime that existed then. As I said, it gave us a very competitive advantage. Now that competitive advantage has become a disadvantage, because the hydro prices that communities like Dubreuilville, White River and Wawa are having to pay put them in a very disadvantageous position.

Hon Mr Baird: I enjoyed the remarks by my friend from Algoma-Manitoulin. He is one of the members in this House who speaks up regularly on energy issues, one of the more rational members of the opposition.

I particularly agreed with him when he spoke about the fact that a big chunk of our electricity system in Ontario was already private. One of the things he and I have talked about is how the NDP privatized electricity when they brought in the non-utility generator agreement. That's where they paid the private sector big amounts of money to build power plants and then guaranteed them a rate for years. Instead of having it be government-owned and government-operated, they're run by the private sector.

Interjection.

The Deputy Speaker: Order.

Hon Mr Baird: The non-utility generators were done by the NDP.

Interjection.

Hon Mr Baird: They were done by the NDP.

The Deputy Speaker: I will not warn the member from Timmins-James Bay again.

Hon Mr Baird: So that was private power under Bob Rae, but that was then and this is now. It's sort of like public auto insurance. They promised it, got into government and then didn't do anything about it and said they wouldn't do anything about it. They said that private auto insurance discriminates against people, and the economy was in rough shape then, so the discrimination would go on until the economy got better. That's an interesting argument.

But I did also notice the member opposite talk about the situation in Wawa. He and I have met about 10 times about that issue. Instead of lighting himself on fire, he does come and speak to me about these issues. I think it's important to resolve the issue in Wawa. The Premier of Ontario, Ernie Eves, said he felt it was important to solve the issue, as did the Minister of Northern Development, and we look forward to seeing a quick and speedy resolution to the Wawa issue.

Interjection.

The Deputy Speaker: Order. And I'll not warn the member for Sault Ste Marie again.

Mr Levac: I appreciate deeply what the member for Algoma-Manitoulin, Mr Brown, talks about in terms of small business. He brought us right down to face the reality that some of the policies that have taken place over the last eight years have resulted in business loss as well, the small mom-and-pop operations, because this energy problem has caused very great consternation in his riding, and I would suggest that it has happened in my riding as well. You would not believe the number of phone calls, e-mails and letters I have received from constituents who have small businesses that just couldn't do it. They just couldn't do it any more. He explained to us that a small little drycleaner had to close up simply because they couldn't afford double, triple, quadruple, 10 times, 20 times their regular bills. It's unbelievable to think that we would allow this to happen in Ontario.

1740

The question I have that I think really needs resolution is, what do we do for them? It's already happened. What are we going to do for them? Are we now saying, "Sorry about your luck. Too bad, so sad. Go start another business somewhere"? I would guess that this business Mr Brown is talking about probably was in town for 30 or 40 years. We're talking generational. They're saying to us, and I know they're saying it in my riding, "We're not coming back. We don't want to go through this again. We've had it. We're gone."

So I would ask this serious question of the minister, and say to him in very serious terms, are we going to do something for those people who have for 30 years run these businesses and because of a hydro bill had to close shop? Are we going to go back to them and say, "Here's some type of compensation. Sorry about that"? Are we going to give them a certificate and say, "Thanks for

giving us 30 years of your life, and goodbye"? We need some response.

Interjection.

The Deputy Speaker: I'm naming the member for Timmins-James Bay, Mr Bisson.

Mr Bisson was escorted from the chamber.

Mr Levac: On a point of order, Mr Speaker: Given the caucus is down to one, I would seek unanimous consent for the two minutes to be provided to the member who is present.

The Deputy Speaker: Is there consent? I heard a no.

Comments and questions? The Chair recognizes the member for Algoma-Manitoulin for two minutes' reply.

Mr Brown: Thank you, Mr Speaker, but there was a member on the government bench wishing to question or comment.

Well, I appreciate the comments from my friend from Brant and my friend from Sault Ste Marie and the minister. It does not, however, help many of the constituents I have in the Hydro One and Great Lakes Power areas. We get calls daily about electricity bills that cannot be paid. That means people are going to have to make some choices about whether they buy food, whether they pay the rent, whether they pay the mortgage or whether they pay the electricity bill. It means they're going to have to decide whether they can stay in business, whether they have to lay off staff or whether they're just going to have to go, in some cases, on to some kind of government assistance.

I don't want to overstate it, but the situation in some parts of the Great Lakes Power area is critical, and I think that after over a year of doing everything possible from a community's point of view, the government needs to understand that the urgency was yesterday, not tomorrow.

Hon Mr Baird: Today.

Mr Brown: The minister is saying it's today, so we're looking for an answer quickly today.

It doesn't seem that long ago, but when the member for St Paul's and I went to Wawa to ask the minister to talk to those folks last November, we thought part of the solution was to roll out the rebate, to get that 4.3-cent cap out there so at least they got some relief. The government moved, so now the government can move to fix the distribution and transmission costs that are crippling that area of the province.

The Deputy Speaker: Further debate?

Mr Martin: The comments by the minister just a few minutes ago remind me of the saying, "Rome burned while Nero fiddled." Wawa's been waiting a long time for some response, some relief from this minister and this government, and it's not coming. Even when they say it's coming, we don't know what to believe any more because it wasn't that long ago that Great Lakes Power announced, after the Premier was in Sault Ste Marie, that they were in fact going to get a reduction in the generation piece of their bill. It hasn't happened.

Mr Brown: Distribution.

Mr Martin: The distribution piece of the bill. They were actually quite relieved that they were going to get at least a little bit—I emphasize "a little bit"—of relief on the distribution portion of the bill, but it hasn't happened.

I was in Wawa on Monday, this week, and I was talking to the folks there about this announcement that was made very publicly by Great Lakes Power right after the Premier was in town. He was forced to say, "Yes, we're going to take a look at Wawa. Wawa's a problem. We need to deal with the issue of Wawa and the high hydro rates, and we're going to do that. I'm going to be talking to my minister about that." There was this announcement that said Great Lakes Power was going to give some relief on the distribution side of the bill. As of Monday, that hasn't happened. When Great Lakes Power is approached as to why it hasn't happened, they say, "The ministry has to fix the regulation," so that they can do that.

I have to tell you that the people of Wawa are wondering why the minister can't find time in his busy schedule to actually do that, to fix that regulation such that Great Lakes Power can deliver on that promise and perhaps even consider making it retroactive, why he won't call them back when they call, why he won't meet with them so that he can explain why he cannot give Great Lakes Power the green light to go ahead and give them that relief that was promised, why a private sector company like Great Lakes Power can't just go ahead and give that relief anyway and why they have to go to government for permission to do that.

Those are the questions the people of Wawa were asking Gilles Bisson, the member for Timmins-James Bay, and myself on Monday when we went up to talk to them about some of the challenges they're facing economically in that very important part of this province that's struggling and hurting with every day that goes by. Every day that Nero fiddles, every day that John Baird sits on this issue and doesn't do anything, another business leaves Wawa, never to return, another investment by a family of their life savings in work they do well, a commitment to that community and to that part of northern Ontario, goes down the river, disappears forever and will not return.

What do you say to them? What do you say to those people as you wait? What are you going to say in a week, two weeks, a month, six months, or after the next election perhaps, to those folks who have lost their investment, who have lost their business, who perhaps have left town? Senior citizens, retired on fixed incomes who couldn't pay their hydro bills any more: what do you say to them? What do we say to them as a government? How do we explain that Mr Baird just didn't have time? He was too busy. He's now become the House leader so he'll be even busier, I guess, down here. How will the people of Wawa be satisfied by this government that something is being done?

I asked the question of the minister yesterday in the House, explaining to him the very dire circumstances that the people of Wawa are living under with each day that goes by, and that the people of Dubreuilville are living

under as their plant now goes down to a bare-bones operation because of the cost of doing business and the effect of the economy that's out there that this government seems to be taking a hands-off approach to. What do we say to them? I asked the Premier yesterday what he had to say, and he said some nice things. He was very understanding, very sympathetic. He understood the situation, offered the people of Wawa and Dubreuilville some salve, I guess, to rub on their wounds. Perhaps one other small business decided that today they won't throw in the towel, that they'll wait one more day or maybe a week until they can determine what the Premier meant when he said, "Yes, we have to do something about Wawa," and, "Yes, we are looking at what we might do."

If it's anything like the announcement that was made by Great Lakes Power only a couple of weeks ago and the result of that, which is that nothing has happened, then I would say to those people, it won't surprise me if you don't put much faith in the promise or the commitment that the Premier has made. But at least the Premier, when you ask him a question, will respond in a way that gives you to understand that he actually understands and is willing to perhaps challenge the Minister of Energy to in fact do something. Maybe the government will do, in this instance, what they did with the Oak Ridges moraine and the Minister of Natural Resources, who couldn't move, who seemed to be paralyzed or influenced by other interests where that park is concerned, and take it out of his hands altogether and in fact do something. Maybe the Premier will come in here one day and table a bill that will deal with the problem of the people of Wawa and the people of Dubreuilville and take it away altogether from the Minister of Energy, who doesn't seem to have any interest or political will or backbone where this very troubling and disturbing and damaging piece of public business is concerned.

1750

So here we are this afternoon, talking about a bill that's supposed to resolve all of the difficult circumstances that we find ourselves in because this government is ideologically driven to the privatization and the deregulation of the power system that we have so long counted on and relied on in this province to deliver affordable, reliable energy, some of the most essential services that industry and business in this province are dependent on if they're going to be competitive out there in the marketplace. The very damaging effects of that became so obvious out there that the government, in their attempt to manage the damage, first of all looked to Ontario Hydro and Eleanor Clitheroe as a scapegoat and threw them overboard. Then they looked to the Ontario Energy Board and Floyd Laughren, and they blamed him and they blamed that board for their problems. They weren't being tough enough on industry, as if this government knew what it meant to be tough with anybody except welfare people, unions or teachers.

They decided then, after they'd done all of that and the fire hadn't gone out and the concern hadn't gone away and people hadn't just said, "OK, that's fine; you've

solved it"—people demanded, clamoured for more action by this government. In fact our leader, Howard Hampton, leading the charge from the very beginning on this issue, has the people of Ontario out there informed and knowledgeable enough now to know that the only answer to this problem is to go back to regulation and the public ownership of that very essential service in this province. As a matter of fact, he has put out a very important book recently on public power that people, given an opportunity, should get hold of and read. It gives you a very excellent history of public power, from the time of Adam Beck to now, and some suggestions as to how it is we might get from where we are now into the future with a new source of reliable, environmentally friendly energy at an affordable cost.

If you're interested at all in an alternative to what this government is providing, then I think all you have to do is take a look at the program that our government is putting forward by way of solutions, practical solutions, to the challenge of hydro in this province. We're talking about it everywhere we go. It is—

The Deputy Speaker: The member for Sault Ste Marie, you're using a prop.

Mr Martin: I'm reading a document. I didn't think it was against the rules to read a document in this place as long as you didn't go at it for too long. But anyway, those out there who are knowledgeable and in the know will know that we have a platform out in front of the people of Ontario that we will take into the next election called Public Power. If you're interested in reading that document, go to the Web site, publicpower.ca, and you'll see in there that there is a very detailed bunch of practical solutions for how we respond to and deal with the issue, and the challenge, of power in this province. If you want more detail, pick up the book that Howard Hampton has written, called Public Power, and have a read of that, and you will be pleasantly surprised that there are alternatives; that there are alternatives to the program that this government is rolling out and to the maybe-today-not-tomorrow program of the Liberals that we see.

I appreciate the time I've had this afternoon and look forward to other people's comments.

The Deputy Speaker: Comments and questions?

Mr Dwight Duncan (Windsor-St Clair): I'm pleased to respond to the member from Sault Ste Marie. I did want to address an issue that has been near and dear to my heart, which of course the minister failed to address in a meaningful way, and that's the retroactive Union Gas increase that came about last fall.

The minister brought in this legislation to protect consumers, but he still allowed that increase to go ahead. In our opinion, and in my opinion, the minister could have forced a review under existing acts, under two sections. Now the government says that one section is a policy section; it doesn't deal specifically. But the other section—there has been a request from a number of groups to cabinet that that retroactive increase not be allowed. That retroactive increase affected tens of thousands of consumers across the province. This bill,

while it purports to take certain steps to protect consumers, in fact doesn't go far enough on a number of key issues.

But most importantly, the minister did not address the increase that Union Gas got last year. I remind the minister that I presented thousands of petitions; we had over 9,000 e-mails brought into this House from Union Gas consumers across the province. In our view, the minister could have acted under the existing legislation. By not going far enough in this legislation, he may be able to prevent future retroactive increases, but the fact remains that the one that caused this is still there. Those consumers have to pay a retroactive increase. That increase applies unfairly to many individuals, many businesses. At this last moment in the debate, I urge the minister, with his existing legislation: don't let that retroactive gouging of consumers go ahead. Under two sections of the existing legislation, in our view and in the view of many consumer advocates, you can force an end to that retroactive increase. I urge the minister: please do that.

Hon Mr Baird: I always think it's unfortunate when a member stands in the House and suggests that one of his or her 102 colleagues doesn't care; that they don't care about the plight of working families in this province or that they don't care about the plight of family businesses where people have put their life savings on the line to create jobs and provide for themselves or their families. We can all disagree about the root—people want to get to a destination—but I think it's regrettable, and I think it's unfortunate and disappointing, when people make the debate personal.

Mr Brown: I want to comment on my colleague the member for Sault Ste Marie's comments. I was interested in his comments regarding Wawa, which I believe was his hometown for many years. He obviously cares about that part of the world a lot.

He also spent some time in Elliot Lake. When we discuss hydro issues and Ontario Hydro issues, it's hard for the member for Algoma-Manitoulin not to think back to the history of Elliot Lake and the promises that were made to the people of Elliot Lake by the member's own party.

Back in 1990, there was a very clear promise by the New Democratic Party of Ontario to buy 100% of the uranium needs for Ontario's nuclear reactors from Ontario. What that meant was that 100% of the uranium in the province of Ontario would be purchased from the mines in Elliot Lake. That was the commitment of the NDP. They made it over and over again at every opportunity on every stump.

As the member from Algoma-Manitoulin in those days, I thought that was a magnificent promise that seemed to be wonderful for the people of Elliot Lake, and I applauded them at every opportunity. But, lo and behold, not even one year into the mandate of the NDP government, I saw two NDP ministers appear in my constituency to announce the layoff of 2,400 workers in Elliot Lake—2,400 workers—in direct opposition to the

sacred promise they had made to the voters in Algoma-Manitoulin and across the province. That was the end of the mines in Elliot Lake. It was the end of that part of our economy.

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker: I'll ask the members to recall those lessons that they heard on decorum and try to remember them, so that I don't have to remind them.

1800

Mr Michael Prue (Beaches-East York): I don't have a long historical memory of this place and who said what or did what, so I have to talk about what I remember.

A little under two years ago in the by-election in Beaches-East York, I remember very clearly one night, at an all-candidates meeting, a question was asked from the audience: "What about hydroelectricity? Are you in favour of privatizing hydroelectricity?"

I have to tell you, as a municipal politician at that time, I had never really given this much thought. But my first gut reaction was, why would anyone want to privatize hydroelectricity? It had been absolutely, totally successful in our province. It always went on when you flicked the switch. It was low-cost. It was reliable. It was affordable. It was simply there. It was something we all as Ontarians had come to expect and know. Who would want another model other than what we had? I was very surprised after I said that that all of the other candidates sitting on the podium with me stood up one after the other to laud privatization.

First, as no surprise, was the Conservative candidate, Mr Penny, who stood up and talked about how important it was to privatize this key resource. That surprised me a little, but what surprised me more was that the Liberal candidate, Mr Hunter, stood up and said that privatization of hydroelectricity was a thing whose time had come and that it was going to be good for the environment, and gave a whole convoluted statement. Even Mr Elgie from the Green Party said that this was something that was in their platform.

I was very surprised that night. After the election I came here, and we've spent about two years arguing and talking about this issue almost every day. I will tell you, I am no more convinced of the argument today than I was that night in that all-candidates meeting in Beaches-East York. The arguments being made for privatization are really quite specious.

The Deputy Speaker: The member for Sault Ste Marie has two minutes to reply.

Mr Martin: I will initially deal very quickly with the revisionist history just presented here in this House by the member from Algoma-Manitoulin. I won't deal with it in any detail, but I dare say that the member from Nickel Belt will want to in the very near future because she and a number of her cabinet colleagues came to Elliot Lake, yes, but after the company announced that they were shutting down and moving on. Since when do ministers announce layoffs by private companies? I've never seen it. It didn't happen then, and I suggest to you

that the people of Elliot Lake know that it didn't happen in that instance.

In fact, what our government did was respond very quickly and generously to a community that was on the ropes, something that this government doesn't seem to know much about—responding quickly and generously to communities that are on the ropes. Communities like Wawa, Dubreuilville, White River, Cochrane, Smooth Rock Falls and Timmins are being hammered by the huge increases in the cost of hydro to do their business. The forestry industry, the second-largest in Ontario, is on the ropes, primarily because of the high cost of hydro. They are very energy-intensive industries in northern Ontario, and this bill that we're discussing here today isn't going to go anywhere near resolving that problem.

We have the minister over there—Nero fiddling while Rome is burning. We have communities, industries, businesses, families and individuals in northern Ontario losing their investments, their homes and their livelihoods each day that this is allowed to continue. The government and this minister do nothing. He won't even return phone calls; won't agree to a meeting. As a matter of fact, when a meeting is held—yes, organized by the member from Algoma-Manitoulin in his own precinct—he's down the hall in his office and doesn't come in and sit in on the meeting to hear from the people of Wawa and Dubreuilville as they explain to him the dire circumstances that they have to live under.

Mr Steve Gilchrist (Scarborough East): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: I'll take just a second of the House's time to indicate that a good friend of Minister Galt's and mine and many another member of the party has joined us in the gallery here today: the past president of the PC Party, Miss Kay Wetherall.

The Deputy Speaker: Welcome.

It being past 6 pm, this concludes the sessional day's debate on Bill 23. By agreement of the House earlier today, the House may now consider orders G43 and/or G53.

ONTARIO HOME PROPERTY
TAX RELIEF FOR SENIORS ACT, 2003

LOI DE 2003 SUR L'ALLÈGEMENT
DE L'IMPÔT FONCIER RÉSIDENTIEL
POUR LES PERSONNES ÂGÉES
DE L'ONTARIO

Resuming the debate adjourned on June 9, 2003, on the motion for second reading of Bill 43, An Act to

provide Ontario home property tax relief for seniors /
Projet de loi 43, Loi prévoyant un allègement de l'impôt foncier résidentiel pour les personnes âgées de l'Ontario.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Bert Johnson): Pursuant to the order of the House dated June 11, 2003, I am now required to put the question. On June 2, 2003, Mrs Ecker moved second reading of Bill 43.

Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour, say "aye."

All those opposed, say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

Call in the members. This will be a five-minute bell.

I have a note that says, "Pursuant to standing order 28(h), I would like to request that the vote on Bill 43, An Act to provide Ontario home property tax relief for seniors, be deferred until June 19, 2003. Signed, Honourable Doug Galt, chief government whip." So be it.

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 16, 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 Deputy Speaker (Mr Bert Johnson): Pursuant to the order of the House dated June 17, 2003, I am now required to put the question. On June 10, 2003, Mr Runciman moved second reading of Bill 53.

Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour, say "aye."

All those opposed, say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

Call in the members. This will be a five-minute bell.

I have a note: "Pursuant to standing order 28(h), I would like to request that the vote on Bill 53, An Act respecting the equity in education tax credit, be deferred until June 19, 2003. Signed, Honourable Dr Doug Galt, chief government whip." So be it.

It being whatever time it is right now, this House stands adjourned until 10 am tomorrow morning.

The House adjourned at 1808.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO
ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Lieutenant Governor / Lieutenant-gouverneur: Hon / L'hon James K. Bartleman

Speaker / Président: Hon / L'hon Gary Carr

Clerk / Greffier: Claude L. DesRosiers

Deputy Clerk / Sous-greffière: Deborah Deller

Clerks at the Table / Greffiers parlementaires: Todd Decker, Lisa Freedman

Sergeant-at-Arms / Sergent d'armes: Dennis Clark

Constituency Circonscription	Member/Party Député(e) / Parti	Constituency Circonscription	Member/Party Député(e) / Parti
Algoma-Manitoulin	Brown, Michael A. (L)	Hamilton East / -Est	Agostino, Dominic (L)
Ancaster-Dundas- Flamborough-Aldershot	McMeekin, Ted (L)	Hamilton Mountain	Bountrogianni, Marie (L)
Barrie-Simcoe-Bradford	Tascona, Joseph N. (PC)	Hamilton West / -Ouest	Christopherson, David (ND)
Beaches-East York	Prue, Michael (ND)	Hastings-Frontenac- Lennox and Addington	Dombrowsky, Leona (L)
Bramalea-Gore-Malton- Springdale	Gill, Raminder (PC)	Huron-Bruce	Johns, Hon / L'hon Helen (PC) Minister of Agriculture and Food / ministre de l'Agriculture et de l'Alimentation
Brampton Centre / -Centre	Spina, Joseph (PC)	Kenora-Rainy River	Hampton, Howard (ND) Leader of the New Democratic Party / chef du Nouveau Parti démocratique
Brampton West-Mississauga / Brampton-Ouest-Mississauga	Clement, Hon / L'hon Tony (PC) Minister of Health and Long-Term Care / ministre de la Santé et des Soins de longue durée	Kingston and the Islands / Kingston et les îles	Gerretsen, John (L)
Brant	Levac, Dave (L)	Kitchener Centre / -Centre	Wettlaufer, Wayne (PC)
Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound	Murdoch, Bill (PC)	Kitchener-Waterloo	Witmer, Hon / L'hon Elizabeth (PC) Deputy Premier, Minister of Education / vice-première ministre, ministre de l'Éducation
Burlington	Jackson, Cameron (PC)	Lambton-Kent-Middlesex	Beaubien, Marcel (PC)
Cambridge	Martiniuk, Gerry (PC)	Lanark-Carleton	Sterling, Hon / L'hon Norman W. (PC) Attorney General, minister responsible for native affairs / procureur général, ministre délégué aux Affaires autochtones
Chatham-Kent Essex	Hoy, Pat (L)	Leeds-Grenville	Runciman, Hon / L'hon Robert W. (PC) Minister of Public Safety and Security / ministre de la Sécurité et de la Sécurité publique
Davenport	Ruprecht, Tony (L)	London North Centre / London-Centre-Nord	Cunningham, Hon / L'hon Dianne (PC) Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities, minister responsible for women's issues / ministre de la Formation et des Collèges et Universités, ministre délégué à la Condition féminine
Don Valley East / -Est	Caplan, David (L)	London West / -Ouest	Wood, Bob (PC)
Don Valley West / -Ouest	Turnbull, Hon / L'hon David (PC) Associate Minister of Enterprise, Opportunity and Innovation / ministre associé de l'Entreprise, des Débouchés et de l'Innovation	London-Fanshawe	Mazzilli, Frank (PC)
Dufferin-Peel- Wellington-Grey	Eves, Hon / L'hon Ernie (PC) Premier and President of the Executive Council, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs / premier ministre et président du Conseil exécutif, ministre des Affaires intergouvernementales	Markham	Tsubouchi, Hon / L'hon David H. (PC) Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet, Minister of Culture / président du Conseil de gestion du gouvernement, ministre de la Culture
Durham	O'Toole, John R. (PC)	Mississauga Centre / -Centre	Sampson, Rob (PC)
Eglington-Lawrence	Colle, Mike (L)	Mississauga East / -Est	DeFaria, Hon / L'hon Carl (PC) Minister of Citizenship, minister responsible for seniors / ministre des Affaires civiques, ministre délégué aux Affaires des personnes âgées
Elgin-Middlesex-London	Peters, Steve (L)	Mississauga South / -Sud	Marland, Margaret (PC)
Erie-Lincoln	Hudak, Hon / L'hon Tim (PC) Minister of Consumer and Business Services / ministre des Services aux consommateurs et aux entreprises		
Essex	Crozier, Bruce (L)		
Etobicoke Centre / -Centre	Stockwell, Chris (PC)		
Etobicoke North / -Nord	Hastings, John (PC)		
Etobicoke-Lakeshore	Kells, Morley (PC)		
Glengarry-Prescott-Russell	Lalonde, Jean-Marc (L)		
Guelph-Wellington	Elliott, Hon / L'hon Brenda (PC) Minister of Community, Family and Children's Services / ministre des Services à la collectivité, à la famille et à l'enfance		
Haldimand-Norfolk-Brant	Barrett, Toby (PC)		
Haliburton-Victoria-Brock	Hodgson, Chris (PC)		
Halton	Chudleigh, Ted (PC)		

Constituency Circonscription	Member/Party Député(e) / Parti	Constituency Circonscription	Member/Party Député(e) / Parti
Nepean-Carleton	Baird, Hon / L'hon John R. (PC) Minister of Energy, Minister responsible for francophone affairs, government House leader / ministre de l'Énergie, ministre délégué aux Affaires francophones, parlementaire du gouvernement	Scarborough Southwest / -Sud-Ouest	Newman, Hon / L'hon Dan (PC) Associate Minister of Health and Long-Term Care / ministre associé de la Santé et des Soins de longue durée
Niagara Centre / -Centre	Kormos, Peter (ND)	Scarborough-Agincourt	Phillips, Gerry (L)
Niagara Falls	Maves, Bart (PC)	Scarborough-Rouge River	Curling, Alvin (L)
Nickel Belt	Martel, Shelley (ND)	Simcoe North / -Nord	Dunlop, Garfield (PC)
Nipissing	McDonald, AL (PC)	Simcoe-Grey	Wilson, Hon / L'hon Jim (PC) Minister of Northern Development and Mines, Minister of the Environment / ministre du Développement du Nord et des Mines, ministre de l'Environnement
Northumberland	Galt, Hon / L'hon Doug (PC) Minister without Portfolio, chief government whip / ministre sans portefeuille, whip en chef du gouvernement	St Catharines	Bradley, James J. (L)
Oak Ridges	Klees, Hon / L'hon Frank (PC) Minister of Transportation / ministre des Transports	St Paul's	Bryant, Michael (L)
Oakville	Carr, Hon / L'hon Gary (PC) Speaker / Président	Stoney Creek	Clark, Hon / L'hon Brad (PC) Minister of Labour / ministre du Travail
Oshawa	Ouellette, Hon / L'hon Jerry J. (PC) Minister of Natural Resources / ministre des Richesses naturelles	Stormont-Dundas-Charlottenburgh	Cleary, John C. (L)
Ottawa Centre / -Centre	Patten, Richard (L)	Sudbury	Bartolucci, Rick (L)
Ottawa-Orléans	Coburn, Hon / L'hon Brian (PC) Minister of Tourism and Recreation / ministre du Tourisme et des Loisirs	Thornhill	Molinari, Hon / L'hon Tina R. (PC) Associate Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing / ministre associée des Affaires municipales et du Logement
Ottawa South / -Sud	McGuinty, Dalton (L) Leader of the Opposition / chef de l'opposition	Thunder Bay-Atikokan	McLeod, Lyn (L)
Ottawa West-Nepean / Ottawa-Ouest-Nepean	Guzzo, Garry J. (PC)	Thunder Bay-Superior North / -Nord	Gravelle, Michael (L)
Ottawa-Vanier	Boyer, Claudette (Ind)	Timiskaming-Cochrane	Ramsay, David (L)
Oxford	Hardeman, Hon / L'hon Ernie (PC) Associate Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing / ministre associé des Affaires municipales et du Logement	Timmins-James Bay / Timmins-Baie James	Bisson, Gilles (ND)
Parkdale-High Park	Kennedy, Gerard (L)	Toronto Centre-Rosedale / Toronto-Centre-Rosedale	Smitherman, George (L)
Parry Sound-Muskoka	Miller, Norm (PC)	Toronto-Danforth	Churley, Marilyn (ND)
Perth-Middlesex	Johnson, Bert (PC)	Trinity-Spadina	Marchese, Rosario (ND)
Peterborough	Stewart, R. Gary (PC)	Vaughan-King-Aurora	Sorbara, Greg (L)
Pickering-Ajax-Uxbridge	Ecker, Hon / L'hon Janet (PC) Minister of Finance / ministre des Finances	Waterloo-Wellington	Arnott, Ted (PC)
Prince Edward-Hastings	Parsons, Ernie (L)	Whitby-Ajax	Flaherty, Hon / L'hon Jim (PC) Minister of Enterprise, Opportunity and Innovation / ministre de l'Entreprise, des Débouchés et de l'Innovation
Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke	Conway, Sean G. (L)	Willowdale	Young, Hon / L'hon David (PC) Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing / ministre des Affaires municipales et du Logement
Sarnia-Lambton	Di Cocco, Caroline (L)	Windsor West / -Ouest	Pupatello, Sandra (L)
Sault Ste Marie	Martin, Tony (ND)	Windsor-St Clair	Duncan, Dwight (L)
Scarborough Centre / -Centre	Mushinski, Marilyn (PC)	York Centre / -Centre	Kwinter, Monte (L)
Scarborough East / -Est	Gilchrist, Steve (PC)	York North / -Nord	Munro, Julia (PC)
		York South-Weston / York-Sud-Weston	Cordiano, Joseph (L)
		York West / -Ouest	Sergio, Mario (L)
		Mississauga West / -Ouest	Vacant

A list arranged by members' surnames and including all responsibilities of each member appears in the first and last issues of each session and on the first Monday of each month.

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

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