



Legislative Assembly
of Ontario

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de l'Ontario

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**Official Report
of Debates
(Hansard)**

**Journal
des débats
(Hansard)**

Wednesday 10 December 2003

Mercredi 10 décembre 2003

Speaker
Honourable Alvin Curling

Clerk
Claude L. DesRosiers

Président
L'honorable Alvin Curling

Greffier
Claude L. DesRosiers

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO

Wednesday 10 December 2003

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO

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*The House met at 1330.
Prayers.*

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

ROBERT BOYER

Mr Norm Miller (Parry Sound-Muskoka): I rise today to recognize Robert James Boyer, a former member of provincial Parliament in this legislature and one of the original sons of Muskoka.

Robert, or Bob as he is known in Muskoka, was born in 1913 in Bracebridge in the family home. His birth in 1913 marked the third generation of writers and newspaper editors in Bracebridge. At age 19, he launched his career as a young newspaper editor at the Herald. Bob completed his senior matriculation while working full time at the Herald. Robert married Patricia Mary Johnson in 1940, and together they raised three children, each of whom has been an accomplished writer in their own right.

During World War II, Bob served with the Canadian Army's Ordnance Corps in Longue-Pointe, Montreal, where in addition to his duties he became the editor of The Longue Pointer.

In June 1955, Bob began his political life when he was elected as the member of provincial Parliament for Muskoka in the Legislative Assembly of Ontario. Despite this, he continued as editor of the newspaper. He represented the people of Muskoka for 16 years.

During his tenure he was instrumental in the establishment of the Pines Home for the Aged, the Ontario Fire College, new buildings for the work of provincial ministries, the Port Carling locks renewal and new control dams on the river, and the reorganization of municipal and educational governments.

In 1971, Bob retired from public life as the elected representative of Muskoka. He has served the people of Muskoka with honour and dignity, and enhanced the community of Muskoka through his words and deeds. I would like to congratulate Bob on celebrating his 90th birthday this weekend, December 14, in Bracebridge at the Pines.

CHRISTKINDL MARKET

Mr John Milloy (Kitchener Centre): Last Thursday, December 4, I had the honour of participating in the

opening of Kitchener's seventh annual Christkindl Market. Christkindl markets are held worldwide and trace their origin back to 14th century Germany, when churchgoing farmers would set up stalls to sell farm produce, figurines, toys, food and clothing prior to Christmas.

Over 1,500 people participated in an opening candle-light procession from Victoria Park to the city hall, where they were greeted by music, speeches and entertainment. The market itself boasted dozens and dozens of vendors selling an impressive array of food, gifts, toys and clothing, much of it with a German theme. Blacksmith demonstrations, puppet shows for the kids, choirs and festive Christmas decorations made this a wonderful family event.

Kitchener's Christkindl Market is Canada's original and attracts over 25,000 visitors every year. In 1999, it was named one of the best new festivals in Ontario and, in 2000 was identified as one the province's top 10 events.

I would like to congratulate Tony Bergmeier, the founder of Kitchener's Christkindl Market, Astrid Braun, his co-chair, and Monica Reid, along with the wonderful team of volunteers who made the special event possible.

Christkindl Market is held annually in Kitchener, extending over the five days ending with the second Sunday of Advent. I invite all members of the Legislature and all Ontarians to attend next year's market and help celebrate Kitchener's proud German heritage.

PROVINCIAL DEFICIT

Mr Joseph N. Tascona (Barrie-Simcoe-Bradford): Everyone in this House has heard the Liberals claim, as if it was a holy mantra, that they have inherited a \$5.6-billion deficit. The Liberals are so adamant about this bogus number that the Premier and his finance minister have been heard repeating it time and time again. It appears that they think the more they repeat the bogus deficit number, the more they will be able to make it stick on the previous government.

Yesterday, John Williamson from the Canadian Taxpayers Federation revealed a more accurate picture for the province of Ontario. Williamson said, "The Liberal government has overplayed its hand." He went on to say on behalf of the Canadian Taxpayers Federation that "the Liberals are making the province's fiscal situation appear worse than it actually is." Can you imagine that, Mr

Speaker? The Liberals are trying to make the financial situation appear worse.

There is more. The Canadian Taxpayers Federation was blunt and direct when they said that any deficit over \$600 million will be a Liberal deficit, caused by Dalton McGuinty and the Liberals. What we have here is a Liberal deficit. It is a bogus deficit. We are on to Dalton, and Ontarians are starting to figure out that Liberals cannot be trusted with our hard-earned money, nor we can trust Liberal math.

YORK RAPID TRANSIT

Mr Tony C. Wong (Markham): York region is adding 40,000 new residents and thousands upon thousands of new jobs each year. This has resulted in some major challenges for our municipalities, such as bumper-to-bumper traffic and unprecedented development. For every 100 cars that travel into downtown Toronto each day, there are 80 cars heading into York region. In my home community of Markham, municipal leaders have recognized the need to plan ahead. Markham Centre has been recognized as a leading national example of sustainable community planning and should be held up as a model for other rapidly growing communities. I believe that the York rapid transit plan will serve as a cornerstone of the centre's growth strategy.

The region is building a bus rapid transit system in three stages, with construction on the first phase beginning next year. By 2005, there will be rapid transit vehicles moving passengers throughout the region and beyond, getting thousands of cars off our roads. The first phase has funding commitments of \$50 million each from the region, the provincial and the federal governments. I think we would all agree that by proceeding with projects like the York rapid transit plan, we can make driving through the GTA a choice and not a necessity. I believe this to be very wonderful opportunity for us to demonstrate our government's commitment to public transit and sustainable development.

HYDRO RATES

Mrs Julia Munro (York North): My constituents are frustrated with the promise breakers and tax hikers in this Liberal government. Not only have they increased business taxes, which will drive jobs and opportunity out of Ontario, they have increased taxes on those who need help the most. Farmers will be particularly hard hit. The Liberal hydro rate increase will cost farmers \$42 million a year, according to the Ontario Federation of Agriculture.

Murray Porteous, of the Ontario Fruit and Vegetable Growers' Association, says of the Liberal hydro rate increases, "This is a huge blow to agriculture."

Allan Gardiner, of the Ontario Federation of Agriculture, has written, "Farmers can't pay more for electricity. Our net incomes are dropping—it just isn't

possible to stay in business when production costs are outstripping the prices farmers get for their produce."

Farmers use most of their power during off-peak hours, when demand is lowest and the power is cheapest. They deserve a price that reflects their use, not one that will put them out of business.

Conservation is not a practical alternative for them. Milk coolers, poultry barns and greenhouses are just a few examples of power they use that can't be cut back.

I call on the Minister of Agriculture to start speaking up for Ontario's farmers. Do not join in the McGuinty government's war on farmers and small business. Do what's right for Ontario's job creators.

1340

JAMES GRECO

Mr David Oraziotti (Sault Ste Marie): It's my privilege to recognize the contributions of an individual who has given so much to the city of Sault Ste Marie. Ontario Court Justice James Greco held court until the day before his 75th birthday this past month, the mandatory age of retirement set by the province. He spent nearly 36 years on the bench and retired as the longest-sitting judge in Ontario.

Judge James Greco was appointed to the provincial court bench by former Attorney General and Sault Ste Marie MPP Arthur Wishart in 1968. He graduated from Osgoode Hall Law School in 1959, and was awarded the Queen Elizabeth medal and the Sault Ste Marie medal of merit for his contributions to the community.

Some of his community involvement included being a member of the board of directors of the Sault Ste Marie General Hospital for 24 years; director of the Algoma Regional School of Nursing for eight years; chair of the Sault Ste Marie Salvation Army; and member of the Algoma University board of governors and senate. He was also a founding member of the advisory board for the establishment of a native diversionary justice system at Garden River First Nation Reserve.

He has taught law for 25 years at Algoma University, authored a text entitled *Bail-Canada*, and written numerous articles, which have appeared in journals such as the *Criminal Law Quarterly*.

I want to thank Justice James Greco for his commitment and service to our provincial court system and for his continued participation and leadership in numerous organizations within our city.

I also want to congratulate Kristine Bignell of Sault Ste. Marie on being selected to replace Judge Greco by our Attorney General, the honourable member from St. Paul's. Ms Bignell, we wish you well in your new position.

TAXATION

Mr Toby Barrett (Haldimand-Norfolk-Brant): Today being the inaugural Taxpayers' Day at Queen's Park, it gives me great pleasure to welcome farmers,

small business people, seniors, parents of children who attend independent schools and others sitting in our public gallery. Many have travelled hundreds of miles to bring this government the message: Keep your promise. Don't raise taxes.

These people are worried in the wake of Bill 2, the largest tax hike in Ontario history. They're worried about the future of their businesses, their farms, their jobs and their children's education as this government takes more from their wallets and erases the very foundation on which the last eight years of prosperity have been built.

They wonder why this is being done, when only a couple of months ago the present Premier told everyone, "I will not cut your taxes, but I won't raise them either," over and over again on television. "I will not cut your taxes, but I won't raise them either."

There are too many here today who feel they've been led down the Liberal garden path leading to tax increases that we were told would not be part of the Liberal agenda. Talk about the Grinch who stole Christmas. Truly, Dalton McGuinty has given new meaning to the terms "tax hiker" and "promise-breaker."

On that note, I welcome people in the gallery: Terry Sannesaël and other farmers are here from Norfolk, Oxford, Brant and, I will mention, Elgin county.

RED HILL EXPRESSWAY

Mr Dominic Agostino (Hamilton East): I rise today to bring to the attention of the House another cynical Tory flip-flop, this time in regard to the Red Hill expressway. While in government, they supported the expressway. While in opposition they went to the chamber of commerce and to the business community in Hamilton and said, "We support the Red Hill expressway."

What did we hear last week? The member for Haldimand-Norfolk-Brant rose in the House to ask the Minister of the Environment for a review of the expressway project in Hamilton. What has changed, except cynical opportunism by a desperate Tory party, by a Tory party that's out of touch with the people of Hamilton? Why all of a sudden?

We all remember former Premier Mike Harris cutting the ribbon for the east-west portion of the expressway. We all remember the local Tory candidates soliciting funds in their fundraising letters, saying to the business community, "We support the Red Hill Expressway in Hamilton."

The Liberal Party has been firm and consistent on it. We support the expressway; we have supported the expressway from day one. There has been a full environmental assessment, and the expressway is in the best interests of the community. I ask the Tories: Why the change of heart? Why the change of mind? Why have you betrayed the people of Hamilton by telling them when you were in government that you supported it and now, as an opposition party, you find a cheap, political, convenient way out and oppose it? It is shameful. It is a

sign of a party that is out of touch with reality, out of touch with the people of Hamilton, and out of power.

POLICE SERVICES

Mr Garfield Dunlop (Simcoe North): I think they're still in government, aren't they?

I rise in the House today in support of the policemen and policewomen who serve us on the front lines every day in communities across Ontario.

The release of a report on racial profiling by the Ontario Human Rights Commission has unfortunately placed police in a position of defending their very existence. The Police Association of Ontario has informed me that the terms of reference for the commission's report excluded police from participating. This is disturbing and discriminatory.

What worries me even more is that Monte Kwinter and the Liberal government were so quick to praise this report and make more promises about acting on its recommendations. I have to ask why.

Minister Kwinter has been in his new portfolio for two months and he's already targeting police. Yesterday, the minister said he will act now on the recommendations to install cameras in police cruisers, yet other emergency services personnel, including ambulance workers and firefighters, have been spared this Big Brother treatment.

The only reasons that video cameras should ever be installed in police cruisers would be for the safety of our police officers and for investigative purposes. Any other reason would show a complete lack of trust and discrimination against the very people who allow Ontarians to live in a safe and civil society.

Furthermore, any attempt by the Liberals to pay for the cameras instead of making due on their promise of 1,000 new police officers would be outrageous.

Our caucus will not allow the minister to make whipping boys and girls out of the fine men and women who serve and protect us. They deserve much better from the minister and from this government.

QUESTION PERIOD

Mr Michael Prue (Beaches-East York): Fergie Jenkins, Eric Gagne, Roy Halladay: these names will go down in history as some of the best hardball pitchers Canada has ever produced. But when it comes to pitching softballs, these guys can't hold a candle to Dalton McGuinty and his trained myrmidon in the Liberal backbenches. They're softball Hall-of-Famers.

Each day, they waste almost half of question period asking questions that cabinet ministers wrote for themselves. Why do they do that? The answer is very obvious: because Dalton McGuinty fears tough questions. If the Liberals stop the softballs, opposition MPPs would ask McGuinty hardball questions like: You promised to keep hydro public, so why don't you rule out selling off Darlington and Pickering? You promised

dignity for our seniors, so when are you going to mandate more care for our seniors and admit that your strategy of tears and volunteers just doesn't cut it? You promised to take human rights violations seriously, so when are you going to stand up for visible minorities, admit racial profiling exists and finally take action?

I say to Dalton McGuinty and his softball Hall-of-Famers: Playing games with public accountability is bad news for good government. Live up to your promise to make government more effective, responsive and accountable to the people. Stop the softball questions and face the hardball questions Ontarians want answered in this Legislature.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): There's a lot of talking in the chamber. I would ask members to keep their voices down.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH AND SAFETY AMENDMENT ACT, 2003

LOI DE 2003 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR LA SANTÉ ET LA SÉCURITÉ AU TRAVAIL

Mr Kormos moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 20, An Act to amend the Occupational Health and Safety Act to increase the penalties for contraventions of the Act and regulations / Projet de loi 20, Loi modifiant la Loi sur la santé et la sécurité au travail en vue d'augmenter les peines en cas d'infraction aux dispositions de la Loi et des règlements.

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

Mr Peter Kormos (Niagara Centre): This bill amends section 66 of the Occupational Health and Safety Act to increase the penalties for individuals and corporations for contraventions of the act and regulations, and to make directors and officers of corporations liable for contraventions of the act and regulations by those corporations.

1350

VISITORS

Mr Jim Flaherty (Whitby-Ajax): Mr Speaker, on a point of order: Members would like to welcome Ms Anne Veres and the grade 5 class from Ormiston Public School in Whitby, Ontario, Canada.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): I'm going to ask all members in the future that when you have a point of order—that was not a point of order, to begin with—we could do that in a much more programmed way.

ONTARIO WATER RESOURCES AMENDMENT ACT (WATER SOURCE PROTECTION), 2003

LOI DE 2003 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR LES RESSOURCES EN EAU DE L'ONTARIO (PROTECTION DES SOURCES D'ALIMENTATION EN EAU)

Ms Churley moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 21, An Act to amend the Ontario Water Resources Act with respect to water source protection / Projet de loi 21, Loi modifiant la Loi sur les ressources en eau de l'Ontario en ce qui concerne la protection des sources d'alimentation en eau.

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

Ms Marilyn Churley (Toronto-Danforth): This is a bill I'm reintroducing. I introduced it in the last Legislature. It amends the Ontario Water Resources Act in regard to availability and conservation of Ontario water.

Specifically, the bill requires the director to consider the Ministry of the Environment's statement of environmental values when making any decision under the act. The bill also requires that municipalities and conservation authorities are notified of applications to take water, which, if granted, may affect their water sources or supplies. This was the most important recommendation from the Walkerton inquiry by Justice O'Connor. This bill offers the framework so we can move forward on source protection in this province.

TOMMY DOUGLAS ACT (PATIENTS' BILL OF RIGHTS), 2003

LOI TOMMY DOUGLAS DE 2003 SUR LA DÉCLARATION DES DROITS DES PATIENTS

Ms Martel moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 22, An Act to promote patients' rights / Projet de loi 22, Loi visant à promouvoir les droits des patients.

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

Ms Shelley Martel (Nickel Belt): This is the third time I've introduced this bill, which establishes patients' rights for health care in Ontario. At one point it did pass second reading, but it was blocked by the Conservative majority from further consideration in committee.

If passed, the bill would codify the rights of residents of Ontario to receive health care services. It would provide for the appointment of a health care standards commissioner, who would be an officer of the Legislature, who would participate in the setting of health care standards and the development of a complaint procedure, monitoring health care standards and making recommendations to the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care for changes to legislation and changes to health policy.

The bill established whistle-blower protection for the employees and providers of health care services, and it requires the posting of the patients' bill of rights and the whistle-blower protection provisions.

HOUSE SITTINGS

Mr Gilles Bisson (Timmins-James Bay): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: I ask for unanimous consent, without debate or amendment, that the House not sit tonight, Wednesday, December 10.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Is there unanimous consent?

Interjections.

The Speaker: I can hardly hear you with the heckling over there. That's why it's difficult for me to repeat what you said.

Do we have unanimous consent? Agreed.

Hon Dwight Duncan (Minister of Energy, Government House Leader): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: Given that we want the NDP to have their three questions, and given that we want them to participate in Opposition Day, could we have unanimous consent to move government notice of motion number 5, without debate or amendment.

The Speaker: Do we have unanimous consent? I heard a no.

Mr Bisson: On a point of order, Mr Speaker: I ask unanimous consent that the leader of the third party get two lead questions following the Tories, followed by a third question by a member of the third party.

The Speaker: Do we have unanimous consent? I heard a no.

Hon Michael Bryant (Attorney General, minister responsible for native affairs, minister responsible for democratic renewal): I understand there is unanimous consent for all three parties—

Interjection: Deferred vote.

Hon Mr Bryant: Could I just stand down, Mr Speaker. I understand we have a motion from the government House leader and/or a deferred vote.

The Speaker: Would you stay your request until later on. I'll indicate.

DEFERRED VOTES

THRONE SPEECH DEBATE

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): We have a deferred vote on the motion by Mr Caplan that the speech of His Honour the Lieutenant Governor to this House be taken into consideration as early as the first sessional day following passage of this motion.

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

The division bells rang from 1359 to 1404.

The Speaker: All those in favour, please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Ayes

Agostino, Dominic	Eves, Ernie	Oraziotti, David
Arnott, Ted	Flaherty, Jim	Ouellette, Jerry J.
Arthurs, Wayne	Flynn, Kevin Daniel	Parsons, Ernie
Baird, John R.	Fonseca, Peter	Peters, Steve
Barrett, Toby	Gerretsen, John	Peterson, Tim
Bartolucci, Rick	Gravelle, Michael	Phillips, Gerry
Bentley, Christopher	Hardeman, Ernie	Pupatello, Sandra
Berardinetti, Lorenzo	Hoy, Pat	Qaadri, Shafiq
Bountrogiani, Marie	Hudak, Tim	Ramal, Khalil
Bradley, James J.	Jackson, Cameron	Ramsay, David
Brotten, Laurel C.	Jeffrey, Linda	Rinaldi, Lou
Brown, Michael A.	Kennedy, Gerard	Runciman, Robert W.
Brownell, Jim	Klees, Frank	Ruprecht, Tony
Bryant, Michael	Kwinter, Monte	Sandals, Liz
Cansfield, Donna H.	Lalonde, Jean-Marc	Sergio, Mario
Caplan, David	Leal, Jeff	Smith, Monique
Chambers, Mary Anne V.	Levac, Dave	Smitherman, George
Chudleigh, Ted	Marsales, Judy	Sorbara, Greg
Colle, Mike	Martiniuk, Gerry	Takhar, Harinder S.
Cordiano, Joseph	Mathews, Deborah	Tascona, Joseph N.
Craitor, Kim	Mauro, Bill	Van Bommel, Maria
Crozier, Bruce	McGuinty, Dalton	Watson, Jim
Delaney, Bob	McMeekin, Ted	Wilkinson, John
Dhillon, Vic	McNeely, Phil	Wilson, Jim
Di Cocco, Caroline	Meilleur, Madeleine	Wong, Tony C.
Dombrowsky, Leona	Miller, Norm	Wynne, Kathleen O.
Duguid, Brad	Milloy, John	Yakabuski, John
Duncan, Dwight	Munro, Julia	Zimmer, David
Dunlop, Garfield	O'Toole, John	

The Speaker: All those against, please rise.

Nays

Bisson, Gilles	Kormos, Peter	Martel, Shelley
Churley, Marilyn	Marchese, Rosario	Prue, Michael

Clerk of the House (Mr Claude L. DesRosiers): The ayes are 86; the nays are 6.

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS DAY

Hon Michael Bryant (Attorney General, minister responsible for native affairs, minister responsible for democratic renewal): I understand there is unanimous consent for all three parties to make a statement for up to five minutes each regarding International Human Rights Day.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Are you agreed? Agreed.

Hon Mr Bryant: Each December 10, Ontario marks International Human Rights Day. This is a day to remember that we all have a part to play in ensuring equity and fairness in our society. It's a day to recognize the inherent right of all the world's citizens to a life of dignity, equality, tolerance and non-discrimination. It's a day to remind ourselves how precious these rights are and how they should be never be taken for granted.

Fifty-five years ago today, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was adopted by the United Nations. This was a great Canadian export. A McGill University professor—a Canadian—helped draft the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It was a picture of Canada's social decency and social democracy that became a model for the world. This declaration forms the cornerstone of international human rights to which all people

are entitled, and it's the basis of the Ontario Human Rights Code, which was enacted in 1962.

Over the past four decades, Ontario has built a record of leadership in this important area. We've become one of the most diverse communities in the world, and this government will take action to strengthen our international reputation as a province of tolerance, civility and respect. We champion and safeguard the human rights of our citizens, and we advance these rights and build upon them as times and needs evolve.

When our government took office, we immediately fulfilled our promise to relocate the Ontario Human Rights Commission under the auspices of the Ministry of the Attorney General. We believe that human rights violations must be taken seriously, and I'm committed to treating human rights issues with the gravity they deserve.

We also seek to celebrate and leverage the diversity of our multicultural community. We welcome steps to address any conflicts or tensions that affect our citizens. It is surely the very crux of Canadian civility and equality that we all respect equal protection under the law.

The Ontario Human Rights Commission yesterday issued a report detailing hundreds of personal stories—

Interjections.

The Speaker: I regard this as a very important statement. I'm hearing a lot of talk across the hall. I'd rather the member get an opportunity to finish his statement in that sort of process.

1410

Hon Mr Bryant: Thank you, Mr Speaker. I hope you'll be a little bit liberal with the time since I lost some time as a result. I'll leave that to your discretion.

The Ontario Human Rights Commission yesterday issued a report detailing hundreds of personal stories that powerfully illustrate the human cost of stereotyping and racism. I say in the name of the very quintessential Canadian ideals of civility and equality and social decency that I believe it is important we put behind us this debate about whether or not racial profiling is perception or reality. It is not about picking sides. It is about making progress. The time has come for us to take action and to tackle these challenges in all parts of government and in all parts of our society.

Part of the Ontario Human Rights Commission's mandate is to raise awareness, and this report is going to be a powerful tool to that end. This government will be carefully considering the report and its recommendations. All ministers will be considering the report and its recommendations.

Issues of stereotyping and racism can affect all parts of a government and society. Without vigilance every single day, a government will never be doing enough. We want all our children to grow up and succeed in a climate of equal opportunity. Our commitment to human rights is just one of the many reasons we are very fortunate to live in this country. In other parts of the world, we see the constant struggle to gain the rights that should be available to all.

On International Human Rights Day, let us join together in our hope that the universal commitment to human rights is continually strengthened, that every person in every corner of the globe has the freedom to pursue individual goals and fulfill their potential to the utmost, and that Canada will continue to be a leader in this regard across the world. It is of course our hope that Ontario will play a leadership role within Confederation in this regard. Let us celebrate the towering respect for human rights that lies at the heart of this province.

Mr Joseph N. Tascona (Barrie-Simcoe-Bradford): It's an honour to speak on International Human Rights Day. Fifty-five years ago, the United Nations adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Ontario has a proud record of leadership in protecting human rights. Take, for example, our first Lieutenant Governor, John Graves Simcoe. Mr Simcoe, acting as a leader of our province, took dramatic steps to prevent slavery from making a home in Upper Canada. His actions paved the way for Ontario to become a refuge for many slaves through the Underground Railroad. Unlike the rest of North America, we began recognizing and protecting human rights in this province from almost day one of our inception. For this we can all be proud.

International Human Rights Day is about exposing tyranny, dictatorships and corrupt regimes around the globe, regimes that seek to deny basic freedoms to the people. We should not be politically correct when we speak of these nations. Let us not be blinded by colour or religion when we seek to promote universal human rights. Countries like China, Zimbabwe, Iran, Burma, Saudi Arabia, Haiti, Cuba, and many others rank as some of the worst violators of human rights. In these nations, the people do not enjoy freedom of the press, protection of the rule of law, democratic elections that are open and transparent. They do not enjoy the security of the person from the police or the army who act as henchmen for tyrants.

On this day, let us applaud the actions taken by Canadians to aid in the liberation of Afghanistan and Iraq. Let us applaud our firm position as a nation on Zimbabwe's role in the Commonwealth. In so doing, let us reflect on our core values, which make this province and this country great, and commit to spreading our democratic values and beliefs to those regions of the world whose citizens still live in fear.

Mr Peter Kormos (Niagara Centre): I'm pleased once again to speak on behalf of New Democrats here in this Parliament on this celebration, this recognition, this acknowledgement of International Human Rights Day. It's so easy to speak about this in platitudes and clichés, and to speak in the broad and the general, and to speak about ourselves as somehow so superior to jurisdictions, nations and regimes in other parts of the world.

Let's talk about human rights. Let's talk about the human rights of thousands of children and young people in this province, children with autism who have been denied their right to treatment for that autism for over eight years by the Conservatives, and now by this gov-

ernment too, by this Liberal government in Ontario. My goodness, had the Attorney General wanted to speak meaningfully about human rights, he would have stood up today and stated clearly that the government, which he is the Attorney General of, is going to abandon the litigation that is forcing 29 families to spend in excess of \$1 million litigating to get treatment for their kids with autism here in the province.

Indeed Ms Eberts, counsel amongst others for those 29 people, says that this government's position, the Liberal government's position, is, if anything, more heated up than it was under the Ernie Eves government. Thousands of young people in this province with autism, kids that people in our caucus know well, children of families that New Democrat Party caucus members know well, whether it's the Walsh family in Welland—they were here at Queen's Park with their boy, exposing this province as one that does not recognize the human rights of children like the Walsh boy, like young Conlan McKee, who turned six on November 24. His family has been notified by this government that because of Conlan reaching the age of six, he's going to be cut off his IBI treatment.

Oh, the family has options. The family could invest \$50,000 or \$55,000 a year in private sector treatment. I tell you, there are families, and we know them, who attempt to do that, and they manage to do it for a year or two. They sell off their house, take whatever equity they have in their homes and cash in all their RSPs, but then at some point they simply run out of money. This province and this new government have abandoned them as much as the previous government did for over eight years.

We have a Premier in this province who acknowledges that while there are but 500 children or so in programs receiving IBI treatment, there are another 1,000 kids on waiting lists, and there are a good 2,000 over the age of six who are going to be denied their right to a legitimate, valid treatment regime; the same Premier who before the election, he with his colleagues, some of them now ministers in his own cabinet, promised those same families that their children would be getting IBI treatment. Rather than keeping that promise, this government and this Attorney General, who stands up today and speaks somewhat pompously about human rights in Ontario, have ratcheted up the heat in the litigation that the 29 families of kids with IBI are being compelled to participate in. There are now over a hundred cases before the Ontario Human Rights Commission by families with children with autism, over a hundred cases of families seeking relief before the Ontario Human Rights Commission; families declaring that their children's human rights have been violated by this government.

1420

Does this government respond by supporting those children and acknowledging their right for treatment? No, this government challenges them and turns its back on those kids and their families. Oh, we can point the finger to so many places throughout the world, but we'd better reflect on what this government, these Liberals, are doing to young people here in this province.

VISITORS

Hon Leona Dombrowsky (Minister of the Environment): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: I would ask you to join me to welcome the law and politics students from St Theresa Secondary School in Belleville, and their parents and teachers. Many of these students come from Tweed, which is my home.

ORAL QUESTIONS

ONTARIO ECONOMY

Mr Ernie Eves (Leader of the Opposition): To the Premier: I would like refresh his memory with a picture of himself and John Williamson of the Canadian Taxpayers Federation on September 11 of this year. We need some memory-refreshing, I'm afraid, I say with all due respect, to—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Order. This is just the start of question period.

Mr Eves: This was on September 11 of this year, Mr Premier, some three short months ago. You and your new best friend of the day, John Williamson of the Canadian Taxpayers Federation, signed this pledge together saying that you would protect the taxpayers of the province of Ontario, that you would not raise taxes, that you would live up to your commitment to balance the books of the province. Are you going to live up to that commitment in this fiscal year, Mr Premier?

Hon Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs): We've been very straight from the outset with the people of Ontario. We have, for example, made it very clear that this year's budget under that government would not be balanced. We maintained that throughout the course of a provincial election. I can tell you that we stand by the report of Erik Peters, a man who served this province well for over 10 years as its Provincial Auditor, as a much more credible analyst of the information than, with all due respect, my good friend Mr Williamson.

Mr Eves: Premier, while you were in New York on Monday of this week, trying to ring the bell at the New York Stock Exchange, John Williamson was busy here ringing your bell with a reality check. You were embracing the Canadian Taxpayers Federation literally and figuratively on September 11 of this year and on September 23 of this year. Why would you not accept their interpretation of public accounts today, recognize that Mr Peters's opinion was just that, an opinion at that point in time, and recognize that the Ontario economy, as you told the people in New York on Monday, is performing very well and you will be able to balance the books of the province this year?

Hon Mr McGuinty: Again I say to the Leader of the Opposition that there's nothing wrong with the Ontario

economy. People of Ontario are working hard and are very entrepreneurial. The problem is the financial situation you've left in their government.

Again I say to the Leader of the Opposition that we stand by the report of Erik Peters. I understand that the Canadian Taxpayers Federation has its own particular view on these matters, but its analysis lacks credibility because it has made a number of fundamental errors. I'll be pleased to describe those. The federation relies on unrealistic revenue projections. It includes transfers from the federal government that are unlikely to be realized this year.

We're not going to be playing accounting tricks. If we receive money next year, we're going to include it in next year's receipts.

Mr Eves: Mr Williamson is quoted as saying, "The Liberal government has overplayed its hand. The Liberals are making the province's fiscal situation appear worse than it actually is."

The reality is that there is going to be, by the end of this fiscal year, an additional \$3 billion in revenue that Mr Peters did not account for. There is going to be—

Hon Greg Sorbara (Minister of Finance): He was wrong, Ernie; he was just wrong.

Interjections.

Hon Mr Sorbara: I was just trying to help out.

The Speaker: You're not helping me at all. You're not helping the House. I would like to hear the leader of the official opposition and his final supplementary.

Mr Eves: There is going to be an additional \$771 million made available to you by your good friend Mr Manley in this fiscal year. Even Mr Manley himself has indicated that under the PSAB system of accounting—which every single government in this country adopts, except for yours, apparently—you have to bring that money in—not "may," but "have to"—in this fiscal year. You can balance the books if you want to, so will you roll up your sleeves and, instead of washing your hands of responsibility, actually go to work and balance the books for the taxpayers in this province?

Hon Mr McGuinty: I want to assure the Leader of the Opposition—

Interjections.

The Speaker: Maybe we should suspend question period. No one wants to listen; no one wants to give questions.

Hon Mr McGuinty: I want to tell the Leader of the Opposition, but more important, I want to reassure the people of Ontario that we will not be playing tricks with the government's accounting. We will record the money upon its receipt, and not before then.

I also want to remind the Leader of the Opposition that we have been doing much to clean up the mess they left the people of Ontario. We have rolled back the latest portion of the tax giveaway to large corporations. We have eliminated the seniors' education property tax credit. We have eliminated the tax giveaway to private schools. We're beginning to raise the tobacco tax to the national average. We are getting to work, we are rolling

up our sleeves and we are doing everything we can in a responsible way to clean up the mess left to us by the Leader of the Opposition.

TAXATION

Mr Ernie Eves (Leader of the Opposition): Mr Premier, today in the members' gallery we have senior citizens of this province, we have parents and students who belong to independent schools, we have tobacco farmers, we have taxpayers. They are concerned that your government has embarked down a road of retroactively raising taxes, taking away somebody's legally entitled-to rights, and you're doing it retroactively. Would you not agree that this is bad public policy and one that this government or any other government should not be following?

Hon Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs): I appreciate the opportunity to speak to this issue. I can tell you that we on this side of the House have an abiding confidence in the wisdom of the people of Ontario.

Moments after the Leader of the Opposition, as part of the previous government, introduced a budget some two years ago that contained this provision, which this party had never ran on, moments after that provision was introduced, I stood up and said no. We've been clear for over two years in our party that we do not support that measure. We brought that to the people of Ontario in the election, and they said no to that provision.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): I'm going to start naming members who have been warned about interrupting question period. I'm sure the supplementary coming from the official opposition leader will be something they would like to hear and all of you would like to hear.

Mr Eves: My supplementary is to the Premier again. On September 11 of this year, you made quite a little photo op of Dalton McGuinty keeping taxes down, balancing your budget for a bright future. Very simply—
1430

The Speaker: This is about the second time the Leader of the Official Opposition has shown these posters. I'm going to warn him that the next time I may have to name him. Would you finish, please.

Mr Eves: Thank you, Mr Speaker. I can assure you I have no more photos to introduce into evidence.

Mr Premier, you signed this pledge. You said that you would not raise taxes on working families in the province of Ontario. You have a finance minister who doesn't seem to think that cancelling a legally entitled-to, by law, tax credit that is raising someone's taxes. Can you explain to these people in the gallery today, to Frank and Olive Russell, who now will have to pay the property taxes that they were legally entitled to a credit for; to fathers and mothers of young people who go to independent schools who had counted on and budgeted on an

equity in education tax credit this year; to tobacco farmers in the province of Ontario, can you explain to them how making them pay more is not raising their taxes?

Hon Mr McGuinty: Again I say, we ran on this. We made a very clear choice. We have ambitious plans for public education in the province of Ontario and we will not apologize for that. We have too many children going to school in crowded classrooms. We have schools that are crumbling around their feet. We have teachers who don't have the morale that they really should have in order to get the job done. We have great plans for public education. That is our priority. We ran on that in the last election. The people of Ontario said yes to public education. We continue to pursue our commitments in that regard and we continue to say to the Leader of the Opposition, who at one point in time called his own plan ludicrous, that we do not adopt or support that plan.

TOBACCO INDUSTRY

Mr Toby Barrett (Haldimand-Norfolk-Brant): Today being Taxpayers' Day, there are many people in the galleries today to express their disappointment at the series of Liberal tax hikes we find in Bill 2. Many tobacco farmers are here today, and are coming to a mass meeting Friday evening in Tillsonburg. They are concerned about your tobacco tax hikes that will put them out of business. I joined tobacco farmers from my riding in the galleries here today in looking forward to a delivery of the promise of compensation that was made by your party during the election. These farmers were promised reparations to help buffer the impact of your tobacco tax hike, the impact it will have on them as families. These farmers will be expecting that at least this promise will be upheld. Premier, you announced tobacco tax hikes. Will you now announce farmer compensation?

Hon Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs): I refer the matter to the Minister of Agriculture.

Hon Steve Peters (Minister of Agriculture and Food): I'm very happy to address this issue, and with the tobacco farmers that are here as well. I look forward to meeting with you on Friday night, and I hope the honourable member is there Friday night too. I hope the honourable member is going to do the honourable thing and stand behind the tobacco board. By going outside the tobacco board, and undermining the board, you're not helping the interests of these individuals over here. We need to do everything we can. We need to come to the federal round table. The federal round table is extremely important. That's going to be our opportunity. This is an industry that's at a crossroad right now. Our transition fund that we campaigned on is going to be part of what we bring to the round table, because we need to ensure that we have one plan for the tobacco industry. I hope that you're going to support that round table that meets on December 15 and 16, and stand behind the tobacco board and not undermine the tobacco industry.

EDUCATION TAX CREDIT

Mr John R. Baird (Nepean-Carleton): My question is to the Premier. During the election campaign, you promised to bring real and meaningful public input into bills. Yesterday, the standing committee on finance heard from the Canadian Jewish Congress; we heard from the B'Nai Brith; we heard from the Muslim community; we heard from representatives of Christian schools in Ontario and thousands of families and children that all of these groups represent. They were unanimous. They didn't just disagree with your government's decision to scrap the equity in education tax credit; what they felt was that the decision to make that retroactive was wrong.

Premier, will you listen to the groups that came forward and provided input at the committee? Will you listen to the hundreds and thousands of families and children they affect? Will you do the right thing and end the retroactive nature of this tax grab?

Hon Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs): Again, I don't want to diminish the importance of the issue, but we had a very important consultation process that took part by way of the election. We listened to the people of Ontario. They were very, very clear in regard to this matter, and I know my friend opposite understands this. We've been forthright about this issue from the get-go. We made it perfectly clear that we are choosing public education. The member opposite talks about a provision that was described by his leader as "ludicrous," a provision that would send over \$3 million to Upper Canada College. We choose instead to invest in public education.

Mr Baird: Premier, I don't think anyone campaigned in the last election campaign on making this tax grab retroactive. What do I tell a family in Metcalfe, Ontario, with two kids at the Christian school in Metcalfe, this family with an income of less than \$50,000 who made financial decisions based on what the statute books of the province said?

Premier, some people are calling this decision unprecedented; others are calling it mean-spirited and vindictive. Premier, you're retroactively raising corporate taxes; you're retroactively raising income taxes. Will you stand in your place and do the right thing and listen to the hundreds of families this decision is going to affect, whether they be Muslims, whether they be Jews or whether they be Christians or others who send their children to independent schools, and end once and for all the retroactive nature of this tax grab?

Hon Mr McGuinty: For us, this is an important matter of principle. We support public education in Ontario. It's not particularly complicated. We think that public education at its very best—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Order. I would ask the member from Whitby-Ajax to control himself in a way that we can have question period. Thank you.

Hon Mr McGuinty: We believe that public education at its very best can and should be the foundation for

social cohesion. We want a magnificent public education system. We want it to be attractive to all our parents, to all our children, and we will continue to allow that ideal to inspire our efforts and inform our thinking. Again I say, we choose public education over funding for private schools.

PETERBOROUGH
REGIONAL HEALTH CENTRE

Mr Jeff Leal (Peterborough): My question is for the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care, and let me congratulate the minister on his appointment.

During the recent election campaign, it was suggested that a vote for Liberals would cancel the funding for the new Peterborough Regional Health Centre. Can the minister assure the people of Peterborough riding that funding will flow for the construction of this new hospital?

Hon George Smitherman (Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): I'd like to thank the member from Peterborough for his question and for the good work he's doing on behalf of his community. In fact, his community has done a good job on their own, raising the necessary funds to support a long overdue hospital in that community. I'm happy to say today to the member from Peterborough and to all members of this House, and especially to the people from Peterborough, that Peterborough Regional Health Centre will proceed as planned.
1440

Mr Leal: We thank the minister for his assurances. The people within my riding are anxiously awaiting the construction of the new Peterborough Regional Health Centre. Now that we've been assured that the hospital will go ahead, can the honourable Minister of Health and Long-Term Care tell us if the hospital will be completed in 2007?

Hon Mr Smitherman: I can confirm that the hospital will be built on time, as planned, in 2007. I'd urge the honourable member to play the important role in his local community of helping to make sure that costs are contained so the project is completed on budget as well. But in 2007 the residents of Peterborough will have the benefit of a new hospital facility, a new public hospital in the province of Ontario to meet their future health care needs.

PREMIER'S VISIT TO NEW YORK CITY

Mr Tim Hudak (Erie-Lincoln): I have a question to the Premier. In an article entitled, "McGuinty says NYSE Snubbed Him for China," you told the Ontario media the following: "I had been lined up to give the honour of ringing the bell, but I was displaced when the Premier of China showed up with a 18-car cortège and pre-empted me." Premier, were you telling the truth?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Order. Would you withdraw the comment.

Mr Hudak: I withdraw and ask the Premier if his comments were fully accurate.

Hon Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs): I was honoured to visit New York City on behalf of the people of Ontario and to express to the financial community there the strength of our economy, some of the challenges that we face as a government, how we are going to be tackling those head-on, how we have already introduced legislation which addresses some of the revenue side, how we intend to consult the people of Ontario with respect to the difficult steps we're going to be taking early on in the new year that will form the basis for our first budget.

Let me just say to the member opposite—and I know that the Leader of the Opposition has some familiarity with this—yesterday, quite frankly, I attempted to use a little bit of self-deprecating humour within the confines of a scrum and it was blown out of proportion.

Let me just confirm this, if I might.

Interjections.

The Speaker: Order.

Mr Ernie Eves (Leader of the Opposition): I know exactly how you feel.

Hon Mr McGuinty: You know how I feel, eh?

I was treated with the utmost respect, accorded warm and gracious hospitality by the folks at the New York Stock Exchange and everybody else I encountered. I look forward to returning, whether or not I get to ring the damn bell.

The Speaker: Supplementary.

Mr Hudak: I appreciate the Premier's answer and claim that he was misunderstood. I want to give him the opportunity to do the right thing. Later in that article it said, "A McGuinty aide later conceded Mr McGuinty knew ahead of time he would not be the one to yank the exchange bell."

Premier, I would think a good way to develop a strong trading relationship with the Americans is to develop that relationship on honesty and truth-telling. I understand that the Consul General—

Interjections.

The Speaker: Order. Let me hear the member for Erie-Lincoln. I think he was coming to a very—

Interjections.

The Speaker: Order. The member from Erie-Lincoln.

Mr Hudak: I think members know the importance of the trading relationship that goes throughout the province, including the representation from the people of Niagara. We contacted the New York Stock Exchange, who informed us that the Canadian Consul General has sent an e-mail apologizing for the embarrassment that this has caused.

Mr Premier, will you do the right thing and apologize to the NYSE, and make it clear that your comments were not meant the way they were construed in the media?

Hon Mr McGuinty: I can understand why the members opposite don't want to talk about the Epp report, why they don't want to talk about the \$5.6-billion deficit, why they don't want to talk about the recent auditor's

reports. But let me just say once again how proud I was to visit New York City, on behalf of the people of Ontario, to reassure our American cousins that we have a strong and abiding economic relationship, that we look forward to building ever stronger economic ties, that we've got a government here that is rolling up its sleeves and getting down to work.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Ms Laurel C. Broten (Etobicoke-Lakeshore): My question is for the Minister of Economic Development and Trade. During the recent election campaign, our party acknowledged the importance of building a more innovative economy. Cluster development has been identified as a way to spur economic growth. This was recently acknowledged by the Roger Martin Task Force on Competitiveness, Productivity and Economic Progress. One of the many important clusters in the province is certainly the automotive sector. Minister, can you provide us with an update on the auto sector and initiatives being undertaken in your ministry to promote the development of this cluster?

Hon Joseph Cordiano (Minister of Economic Development and Trade): It's an important question, because the Roger Martin task force did single out clusters in our economy as being an important element. In fact, what he pointed to was the strength of these clusters and how many we actually have in Ontario, which would lead to greater economic growth in the future. Innovation is the key. In fact, our government is taking initiatives to help companies innovate by focusing on research and development. By focusing on strategic skills development, we can make certain that these clusters lead the way in terms of economic growth.

The auto sector—

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Supplementary.

Hon Mr Cordiano: I would just add, with respect to the other part of the member's question regarding the auto sector, that the auto sector is in fact one of the most important clusters in Ontario.

The Speaker: Any supplementary? Thank you.

Hon Mr Cordiano: Our government has taken initiatives with respect to the auto sector. The Canadian Automotive Partnership Council was an important forum which I attended—

The Speaker: Order. Supplementary.

Ms Broten: In my riding, Etobicoke-Lakeshore, the Lakeshore community partnership, formerly named the South Etobicoke regeneration project, has undertaken a significant amount of leading-edge work to identify cluster development opportunities in our community. They have identified major emerging clusters in the media, automotive and food service industries, and these represent important growth and economic development opportunities for Etobicoke-Lakeshore. How will your ministry support the development of clusters in communities such as the one I represent?

Hon Mr Cordiano: Let me tell you how important the auto sector is to Ontario's economy. One out of six jobs is dependent on the auto sector, and it would be important for members to pay attention to this. In fact, with respect to the other clusters, we are taking initiatives to support those clusters: key investments in strategic skills development; working with our post-secondary institutions to fund research projects like MaRS, like the biotech industry. We are doing all of those things because we will build a technology corridor in Ontario which I think can lead the world.

Innovation is the key to economic growth. We will do the right things in this government by investing in those key sectors and investing in innovation, making our economy grow in the future.

1450

SEVERANCE PAYMENTS

Mr Jim Wilson (Simcoe-Grey): My question is again for the Premier. I'm going to give the Premier an opportunity to reflect on the response he gave me yesterday, when he refused to even suggest to his member from Pickering-Ajax-Uxbridge or to his Minister of Finance that they repay the \$135,000 worth of severance that the former mayor of Pickering got from the taxpayers of Ontario and that Mr Sorbara, now the Minister of Finance, received from the taxpayers of Ontario.

You were so clear a year ago, in May 2002. Your now-Minister of Health spoke on behalf of the Liberal Party at that time. He even went so far, for many days, as to accuse Mr Eves of a lot of nasty things. He said Mr Eves was in a trough, that he was never in, and feeding at that trough; that what was good for the goose was good for the gander; and that the rule you would uphold is that severances had to be repaid when you got another government job after leaving a government job.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Question?

Mr Wilson: Mr Eves did the honourable thing and repaid \$78,000 worth of severance. Why won't you bring some integrity to your government and require your—

The Speaker: Premier?

Hon Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs): I can appreciate the member opposite's usual vigour and enthusiasm which he brings to his responsibilities there. He can ask the question as many times as he likes, but I'm not going to change my answer. I support the Minister of Finance; I support the other member to whom he makes reference—

Hon James J. Bradley (Minister of Tourism and Recreation): Morley Kells.

Hon Mr McGuinty: —and who happens to have done something along the lines of a former member on the other side, Mr Kells.

There's an important distinction, as I said yesterday, to be drawn between these cases and the case of the Leader of the Opposition. He returned to public office very shortly after leaving. Mr Sorbara returned some six years

later. That's an important distinction. The Leader of the Opposition was in breach of the broader public service rules; Mr Sorbara was not. And therein lies the difference.

Mr Wilson: Part of your refusal to do the right thing, I gather, is, as you said yesterday, "My members have followed the rules."

Jamie Wallace of Osprey News pointed out on December 8, and I think he speaks volumes for how the people of Ontario feel about this: "When the Liberals damned Eves, even though he was entitled to compensation under the Legislature's rules, they changed the rules themselves."

Secondly, I think Christina Blizzard, in one of her excellent columns in the Toronto Sun on November 9—

Interjections.

Mr Wilson: —they're always excellent except when she's rating me—pointed out: "After all a severance package is something you give to an employee who faces unemployment. Surely if you choose to move to another level of government and you are successful in that bid, you shouldn't qualify for the severance."

Those statements speak volumes about how the taxpayers feel. They speak about integrity, which you could acquire if you gave the right answer to this question for your government. You're retroactively raising taxes; you're fleecing the taxpayers; you're taking money away from senior citizens. This is an opportunity to do the right thing, once and for all. Get up and do the right thing.

Hon Mr McGuinty: I lack the audacity to question the writings of Ms Blizzard or Mr Wallace, but I can question the member opposite. Again, I simply do not agree with him. I am convinced that if the people of Ontario were to have this matter brought to their general attention, they would agree that there's an important distinction to be drawn between the situations on this side of the House and those on that side of the House.

At the end of the day, the Leader of the Opposition recognized that what he did was inappropriate. He did the right thing, I say to him. The members here, under consideration, are doing the right thing at present. There is not need for them to do anything else.

AUTISM SERVICES

Ms Shelley Martel (Nickel Belt): I have a question to the Premier. The former government discriminated against autistic children by cutting them off IBI treatment when they turned six. During the election you wrote to Nancy Morrison, whose son Sean is autistic, and you said, "I believe that the lack of government-funded IBI treatment for autistic children over age six is unfair and discriminatory." The election is over, and now your government is in court defending ongoing discrimination against autistic children. You're now fighting 29 Ontario families more aggressively than ever before.

Premier, you made a specific promise to families with autistic children, so why are you continuing to fight these

families and children in court, defending a policy which is unfair and discriminatory?

Hon Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs): I want to thank the member opposite for her question. I know she has a genuine, long-standing and very sincere commitment to that issue, and I congratulate her for that.

Let me just say that we do have a responsibility to help families into which are born children afflicted by autism. We are going to be working with those families to address some of the issues they have to grapple with day in and day out. We're going to have to look for some innovative solutions.

With respect to the matter before the courts, there is something broader here at stake. The fact of the matter is that what the parents are asking the courts to do is to force the government to make certain kinds of expenditures. This has far-reaching effects beyond this particular issue.

Again, I say to the member, we understand the difficulties faced by these families, we look forward to sitting down with these families, we look forward to tackling the greater issue of human resources as well, because there's a shortage of skilled people. We're going to do everything we can to help these families.

Ms Martel: I say to the Premier, there's no need to sit down and chat with these families. You need to keep your election promise; that's what you need to do.

You see, Premier, in that same letter to Nancy Morrison you also said, "The Ontario Liberals support extending autism treatment beyond the age of six." It's time for you to keep your word, because autistic children who need medically necessary IBI treatment shouldn't have to go to court to get it, they shouldn't languish on waiting lists, hoping to receive it, and their families shouldn't face financial ruin trying to pay for it when you refuse to fund it. Premier, drop the court case now. Fund IBI for every autistic child who needs it. Will you keep your word today?

Hon Mr McGuinty: I know the member knows that there's also a waiting list for those children who are under the age of six years. What we've got to do is take the time to properly address this issue, including to better manage our human resources. The member opposite knows that we simply don't have enough people right now with the skills to help those children under six, let alone those over the age of six.

I do not want this member to underestimate our commitment to help out those families into which are born children suffering from autism. I'm simply asking her to give us a bit of time.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): New question.

Mr Frank Klees (Oak Ridges): Speaker, my question is also to the Premier.

The Speaker: It is with the government now.

Mr Peter Kormos (Niagara Centre): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: With respect, it is not for the Chair to tell people when their turn is in question period. The

Chair's job is to recognize people who stand, and if somebody fails to stand, it's too bad, so sad.

The Speaker: That's not a point of order. As a matter of fact, it is a rotation. I turned this way and I saw—

Interjections.

The Speaker: Order. If I caused any confusion for the member for Oak Ridges, I'm sorry, but the question is now with the member for Sarnia.

1500

PROPERTY TAXATION

Ms Caroline Di Cocco (Sarnia-Lambton): My question is to the Minister of Finance. Minister, in 1999 a new property assessment system was set up. I have had hundreds of letters, e-mails and phone calls regarding continual increases in residential property assessment, some as high as 70%. These increases are out of whack with the real estate market in my riding of Sarnia-Lambton. Thanks to the Tory legacy, staffing in our local assessment office has gone from 35 to three in recent years, and now that office has little ability to respond to the concerns of the citizens. The horror stories of this reality abound. What is our government going to do to address the problem we are seeing in property assessment, which is unfairly impacting thousands of homeowners in this province?

Interjections.

Hon Greg Sorbara (Minister of Finance): Some of my colleagues on this side of the House are saying "good question." I agree with that because each of them, each of us and everyone in this House has heard, I think, from hundreds of constituents, now that property assessment notices are coming out from MPAC, the Municipal Property Assessment Corporation. I share her concern. In fact, there are some very serious problems in her riding of Sarnia-Lambton where, as it appears from the correspondence that I get, assessments do not seem to be consistent with actual valuations by way of resales. All I can tell her at this point is that we are taking a very serious look. The Premier described this system once as a spare tire with 11 patches on it. I can assure my friend that there is some work to do here on the property tax assessment system.

Ms Di Cocco: It's reassuring that we're going to look at it. I have to say that from evidence, both from my constituents and front-line workers, it appears that there's a systemic problem with the way MPAC is handling assessments. Increases in assessments are often questionable, and we are seeing record numbers of requests for reconsiderations across the province. As you know, Minister, many individuals are struggling with the tax implications of this assessment process that's now perceived as dysfunctional by many of my constituents. How are we going to deal with this growing problem of property assessment in Ontario?

Hon Mr Sorbara: I wish I had a comprehensive plan for her today. I can tell you that we consider this a very serious problem. I don't want to go back into the history

of the seven bills and dozens of amendments that led to the current patchwork of our property tax system. What I can say to my friends in the House and to the member from Sarnia is that her clarion call for some attention here is not going to be unheard.

I do, however, want to assure property taxpayers that a rise in the assessment value that they are receiving now does not necessarily mean a property tax increase. I don't want to explain the complexities of the system, but just simply assure her and property taxpayers that we are looking after this matter.

CONSIDERATION OF LEGISLATION

Mr Frank Klees (Oak Ridges): My question is to the Premier. I'm going to follow up on the same theme as the member for Nickel Belt: the theme of broken promises—although I must say, Premier, that you haven't broken this one yet. You and your Minister of Energy are on the brink.

On page 7 of your election platform, you stated very clearly, "We will give more independence and power to legislative committees." Those committees have now started their work. The committee on justice and social policy is hearing from representatives of stakeholders on Bill 4. They have made a number of recommendations for amendments to that bill. We were told this morning in committee that your Minister of Finance charged the parliamentary assistant not to bring forward one amendment to that legislation.

Will you take the shackles off the members of that committee and direct them to be empowered, listen to stakeholders, and take on those very straightforward and helpful amendments to improve this legislation?

Hon Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs): I believe the Minister of Energy wants to speak to this.

Hon Dwight Duncan (Minister of Energy, Government House Leader): Earlier in question period the member for Nepean-Carleton talked about all the groups that came to committee to give their views against government policy. Coming from that side, talking about committees, a government that routinely sent budget bills without committee, passed them with time allocation without an opportunity to place amendments at all, it's just a little bit passing strange. Let me say this: Number one, the first three major bills of this government are getting committee hearings; number two, there are delegations being heard, which didn't happen very often under your government; number three, there's clause-by-clause on these bills. This never happened in an amount of time that was agreed to by the opposition, with rules that were agreed to by the opposition, rules that you, sir, voted in favour of, going into these committees.

Mr Klees: With all respect—three hours of hearings, six representations from stakeholders—the minister has not answered the question. Your election promise, which you're on the brink of breaking now, this afternoon—the Premier will once again be accused of breaking one more

promise—has to do with empowering legislative committees. You, Minister, have directed your parliamentary assistant not to bring forward one amendment and, I venture to say, and we'll see this afternoon, to vote down every amendment we put forward. We will see at the end of the afternoon whether or not you will have broken one more promise to the people of this province. If you do—

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Question.

Mr Klees: —it will not be to the benefit of this House or to the integrity of your government.

Hon Mr Duncan: We turned down your amendments because you basically wanted to reinstate your policy, which was a grotesque failure and has cost the people of this province \$800 million. That's number one. Number two, I note you didn't note the groups that came in support of the government's bill and said to pass the bill as it is, because unlike the members opposite—

Interjection.

The Speaker: One second. Member for Nepean-Carleton, you've done enough damage already for the day. You've broken a mike and you are breaking the sequence of question period. Could I hear the House leader?

Hon Mr Duncan: To summarize, you neglected to talk about the groups that came to committee and said, "Listen, pass this bill." The policy of the previous government was a bad policy. It cost the public \$800 million. It was a policy that couldn't possibly have worked. It didn't encourage conservation. It didn't encourage future growth of energy supply in this province. My parliamentary assistant has done an excellent job in piloting through government legislation at committee and deserves credit for taking the lead in ensuring that we do away with a policy brought about by your government that could have destroyed energy in this province for years to come.

Mr Cameron Jackson (Burlington): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: in accordance with the standing rules of this House, the House is empowered to conduct business through standing committees. The minister opposite just said that he has rejected the amendments of a committee meeting that has not yet met. I want to stress that this matter should be examined. The minister has suggested that he and his government and his committee members have rejected amendments that have yet to be placed before the committee. I would like the Speaker to examine this issue. What is the purpose of having standing committees and what is the purpose of having public hearings if in fact we are not allowed to even table our amendments?

The Speaker: I did not hear the member state that.

Mr Jackson: Well, he said it.

The Speaker: Order. I did not hear the member state that. If, on checking, that is the case, I'll let you know.

Where was I now? New question, the member for Etobicoke Centre.

Before that, let me just take this point of order from the member from Oak Ridges.

Mr Klees: On a point of order, Mr Speaker: it is on the same point of order my colleague raised earlier. What I'm concerned about is this is a very serious issue. It's being laughed off, and I want a commitment that, in fact, after you do check Hansard, this matter will be looked into with seriousness. There are implications—

The Speaker: Order. I hope that I made myself clear. I said I will look into the matter and then I'll get back to you on this.

1510

PALLIATIVE CARE

Mrs Donna H. Cansfield (Etobicoke Centre): I thought I may have a preamble to my question, which will be to the Minister of Health. I'd like to state first of all to my colleagues, yes, I scripted the question. Secondly, it's not softball. Thirdly, it's of utter importance to me personally and to my community. I am currently a palliative care worker and formerly a director of the Dorothy Ley Hospice, which is a palliative care centre for terminally ill people in Etobicoke.

The Minister of Health and Long-Term Care has indicated, and it's much appreciated, his revolution of the issue of long-term care. Hospice palliative care is of equal importance, and my question to him is, how will he address this for not only my community but other communities in Ontario?

Hon George Smitherman (Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): I think we all learn lessons all the time about the challenges of making sure people have the opportunity to live out their lives in complete dignity. Palliative care is a very essential piece of that, whether it's delivered in a hospital environment, in a long-term-care setting or in our homes.

We look for opportunities to expand palliative care, and I would be happy to report to members that yesterday we had the opportunity to fulfill the promise of the health accord of the national health council, and soon, with resources that are coming in part from the federal government, we'll have the opportunity to expand home care and particularly home care that addresses the member's concern. We look forward, in the term of our government, to be able to expand home care for individuals and to expand palliative home care as well, so that people can live out their final days with all of the dignity that our society can provide.

Mrs Cansfield: As the minister indicated, palliative care occurs at end of life. It's an important, critical part for families in terms of respite as well as end-of-life care.

Interjection.

Mrs Cansfield: It is, you know. Sorry, it's important to me, Mr Kormos.

One of the things that is happening currently is that when people go to hospitals they are charged a surcharge to die if they are in palliative care and it doesn't have a palliative care bed. That's wrong. We need to expedite palliative care in hospices across this province. I'd like

your assurance, Mr Minister, that that will occur as soon as possible.

Hon Mr Smitherman: I wish that in my answer I could offer the member a date when we'd be able to remove that kind of injustice. What I can commit to her today and to all members of this House is that we take the issue of palliative care seriously. To be able to expand our capacities in palliative care is an important objective of our ministry and our government, and we will undertake to establish, through the term of our government, a much stronger capacity in our province to offer palliative care in whatever setting, in a way that reaffirms our commitment to give people living out their final days a greater dignity at that stage of their lives.

VIDEO CAMERAS IN POLICE VEHICLES

Mr Garfield Dunlop (Simcoe North): My question today is for the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services. Minister, yesterday you announced that you will act to install video cameras in police cruisers as recommended in the racial profiling report by the Ontario Human Rights Commission. Please inform the House how much this program will cost the taxpayers, both as a pilot in this fiscal year and upon full implementation. How will it impact the so-called election promise to hire 1,000 new police officers across our province?

Hon Monte Kwinter (Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services): I thank the member for the question. I find it strange that you're asking me that question. You should be addressing that question to the former minister, because this was an initiative of your government. This is something that you initiated. I should tell you that, at the present time, this pilot project will provide cameras in OPP vehicles, 12 of them up in Kenora, 22 in the Toronto area and two for research and development. This has nothing to do with the commitment we have made to put 1,000 new police officers into the police services across Ontario during this mandate.

You should know that today Brian Adkin, the president of the OPPA, issued a press release saying that he supports this. He thinks this is great. You should also know that the RCMP have 400 video cameras, and they've had them for eight years. The military police in Canada have had them for three years. Peel, Durham, the Quebec Provincial Police are all looking at putting in video cameras.

Mr Dunlop: Minister, our caucus believes that the only reasons video cameras should ever be installed in police cruisers would be for the safety of police officers and for investigative purposes—we do agree with Mr Runciman on that—not as a Big Brother tactic for spying on our officers. Any other reason would show a complete lack of trust and discrimination against the very people who allow Ontarians to live in a safe, civil and secure society.

Minister, your announcement immediately following the recommendations of the commission clearly shows

that you want video cameras installed in police cruisers for discriminatory and spy tactic reasons. Do you trust the police officers of Ontario to do their jobs, or do you not trust the police officers to do their jobs?

Hon Mr Kwinter: I totally reject the assumptions you have made. I should quote from OPPA Brian Adkin's press release, in which he says, "OPPA supports cameras in police cruises to allow for monitoring the interaction between police and the public." That is the purpose. That was an initiative that we had in the works. The only reason why it came to light yesterday is because there was a recommendation in Commissioner Norton's report saying we should do it. All I was confirming is that we are doing it. There is no motivation other than that. This is an initiative that, as I said before, began in your administration. We are carrying it forward. It is a good police tool, and I can assure you that it will serve the people of Ontario well.

ONTARIO MUNICIPAL BOARD

Ms Kathleen O. Wynne (Don Valley West): This question comes from the constituents of Don Valley West, through my office, and it's for the Minister of Municipal Affairs. It's about the Ontario Municipal Board.

Among the issues of greatest concern during the election and since I was elected has been the quality of neighbourhoods in Don Valley West in light of proposed developments. Over the past two months I have received many concerned inquiries about at least four different proposed real estate developments. Each of the situations is different, but there are commonalities. The commonality is that in each case area residents are concerned that the quality and character of their neighbourhoods will be injured by these developments. In each case, they worry that the body that is supposed to review developments like these, the OMB, is little more than a rubber stamp for developers that won't take their situations into account. Mr Minister, how will the government's forthcoming OMB reforms provide for more democratic and community involvement?

Hon John Gerretsen (Minister of Municipal Affairs, minister responsible for seniors): I'd like to thank the member very much for her question. Our commitment to the people of Ontario in our platform document was to give them a real and meaningful voice in the decision-making and planning process. As you well know, the Ontario Municipal Board reform basically has two aspects to it: the Planning Act reforms and the reforms within the OMB itself.

1520

Before the end of this session, we hope to introduce legislation that in effect will deal with the Planning Act reforms: (1) We want to protect the public interest by preventing developers from forcing developments upon urban expansions. We do not want to see that happen. (2) We want to give the members of the public a much stronger voice in the planning decisions that affect their

communities by extending the time frames that are available for them to deal with development and to react to developments. Finally—

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Supplementary?

Ms Wynne: I'm working with the councillors in my area, Cliff Jenkins and Jane Pitfield. It's really important that the councillors and the mayors across the province understand the changes that we're making. Can you tell me what the response is from the municipal elected officials across the province?

Hon Mr Gerretsen: I can tell you that the AMO, which speaks on behalf of the municipalities of Ontario, is greatly in support of this. As a matter of fact, Ken Boshkoff, who until recently was the president of the association, said, "Giving councils the due credit to make decisions for their communities is an important step in recognizing municipalities as a responsible and an accountable order of government, elected by their constituents to look after their municipality."

We want to ensure that the provincial planning policies are being adhered to. One way to do that is to change the terminology in the act so that decisions that are made are consistent with, rather than simply having regard to, the provincial policies. That will make a big difference to the people of Ontario and will greatly improve our planning process and the ability of the individuals to be involved in that.

VISITOR

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): It's the end of question period.

In the government members' gallery is a former member, René Fontaine, also former minister from Cochrane North and former Minister of Northern Development. Welcome.

PETITIONS

EDUCATION TAX CREDIT

Mr Tim Hudak (Erie-Lincoln): I'm proud to read a petition that says, "Ontarians Deserve Choice in Education." It reads as follows:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the Mike Harris and Ernie Eves government respected the right of parents to send their children to independent schools; and

"Whereas the Mike Harris and Ernie Eves government passed a law providing parents with a tax credit of up to 50% of tuition to a maximum of \$3,500 once fully implemented; and

"Whereas the Dalton McGuinty government has now introduced a bill that will cancel this important credit that provides working-class parents with the ability to send their children to a school of their choice;

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

"To protect the equity in education tax credit and stop the Liberal tax hike bill from becoming law."

I sign my signature in support

TUITION

Mr Tony Ruprecht (Davenport): Increases in tuition fees cause a real hardship for students at all levels. That's why the Canadian Federation of Students is continuing to send petitions to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario. I have this petition that reads as follows:

"Whereas average tuition fees in Ontario are the second-highest in Canada; and

"Whereas average undergraduate tuition fees in Ontario have more than doubled in the past 10 years; and

"Whereas tuition fees for deregulated programs have, in certain cases, doubled and even tripled; and

"Whereas Statistics Canada has documented a link between increasing tuition fees and diminishing access to post-secondary education; and

"Whereas four other provincial governments have taken a leadership role by freezing and reducing tuition fees;

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

"Freeze tuition fees for all programs at their current levels; and

"Take steps to reduce the tuition fees of all graduate programs, post-diploma programs and professional programs for which tuition fees have been deregulated since 1998."

Since I'm in real favour of this petition, I'm delighted to put my signature to it.

TOBACCO TAX

Mr John O'Toole (Durham): It's my distinct pleasure to read a petition on behalf of the member for Haldimand-Norfolk-Brant. It reads as follows:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas Dalton McGuinty has stated that he will increase tobacco taxes by \$10 a carton, forcing store owners to hide cigarette and tobacco displays behind a curtain, and make a smoke-free Ontario; and

"Whereas history has proven that increases in tobacco taxes cause increases in the smuggling trade for illegal black-market tobacco whose contents are neither regulated nor inspected; and

"Whereas forcing store owners to hide their tobacco displays unduly punishes both store owners and consumers for the purchase and marketing of what remains a legal product;

"We, the undersigned, respectfully petition the Parliament of Ontario as follows:

"That the government of Ontario reject the increase in tobacco taxes and the ban on the display of tobacco products, and protect the rights of consumers to purchase a legal, regulated product—tobacco."

I'm pleased to present this on behalf of the member from Haldimand-Norfolk-Brant, Mr Toby Barrett.

ADOPTION DISCLOSURE

Ms Marilyn Churley (Toronto-Danforth): I'm presenting this petition on behalf of thousands of people from the adoption community in Ontario. It reads:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas Bill 14, regarding the Adoption Disclosure Statute Law Amendment Act, has been introduced between 1998 and 2003; and

"Whereas one of the aforementioned bills received committee hearings in November 2001; and

"Whereas Bill 14 addresses privacy concerns for those who wish to avoid or delay contact; and

"Whereas adoptees are dying from genetic diseases in the absence of their family medical history; and

"Whereas birth mothers were never promised confidentiality;

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

"Immediately call Bill 14, the Adoption Disclosure Statute Law Amendment Act, for second reading, third reading and final vote."

I will affix my signature to this petition.

EDUCATION TAX CREDIT

Mr Gerry Martiniuk (Cambridge): I have a petition to the Parliament of Ontario:

"Whereas many Ontario families choose to send their children to alternative schools; and

"Whereas the United Nations has condemned Ontario for funding Catholic schools and not alternative schools of other denominations and religions as discriminatory; and

"Whereas many Ontario families have made their children's educational plans on the basis of the educational tax credit that is a legal and existing law in Ontario and its retroactive abolishment by the Liberal government will result in considerable hardship;

"We, the undersigned, hereby petition the Parliament of Ontario as follows:

"That the Liberal government of Ontario support Ontario working families by maintaining the Ontario educational tax credit for alternative schools and rejecting any proposal to reverse this tax relief."

TUITION

Mr Michael A. Brown (Algoma-Manitoulin): I have a petition:

"Whereas average tuition fees in Ontario are the second-highest in Canada; and

"Whereas average undergraduate tuition fees in Ontario have more than doubled in the past 10 years; and"—

Mr Tony Ruprecht (Davenport): Doubled?

Mr Brown: Doubled.

"Whereas tuition fees for deregulated programs have, in certain cases, doubled and even tripled; and

"Whereas Statistics Canada has documented a link between increasing tuition fees and diminishing access to post-secondary education; and

"Whereas four other provincial governments have taken a leadership role by freezing and reducing tuition fees;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to:

"(1) Freeze tuition fees for all programs at their current levels; and

"(2) Take steps to reduce the tuition fees of all graduate programs, post-diploma programs and professional programs for which tuition fees have been deregulated since 1998."

I agree with this petition and affix my signature.

LIBERAL CAMPAIGN PROMISES

Mr Garfield Dunlop (Simcoe North): My petition is to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas this government promised to help needy students with tuition waivers; and

"Whereas your government promised to create a rapid re-employment and training project; and

"Whereas your government promised to create an employee training tax credit;

"We, the undersigned, call upon the provincial government to stop playing politics and campaigning for the next election and start working for the taxpayers of this great province. Please keep at least some of your promises to the people of Ontario."

I'll sign that as well.

MUNICIPAL RESTRUCTURING

Mr Ted McMeekin (Ancaster-Dundas-Flamborough-Aldershot): As I promised to my constituents, I stand in my place today to represent the good citizens of the former town of Dundas, some of whom are here today, who are petitioning the Legislative Assembly as follows:

"Whereas in a democratic society, governments are elected to represent the wishes of their electors; and

"Whereas more than 95% of the citizens of the town of Dundas who cast ballots in the citizens' referendum of February 8, 1997, expressly opposed amalgamation with the city of Hamilton; and

"Whereas the council of town of Dundas voted in opposition to amalgamation within this city of Hamilton, and the council of the region of Hamilton-Wentworth voted to eliminate regional government and return its responsibilities to local municipal councils; and

"Whereas the corporation of the town of Dundas received its municipal charter in 1847 and served its citizens well throughout its proud history; and

“Whereas the corporation of the town of Dundas was being run efficiently, effectively and in a fiscally responsible manner; and

“Whereas the province, through the City Of Hamilton Act, 1999, revoked the charter of the town of Dundas and forced its amalgamation with the municipalities of Ancaster, Flamborough, Glanbrook, Hamilton and Stoney Creek; and

“Whereas the promised improvements in the provision of services, increases in government accessibility and accountability, and lowering of overall costs and taxes have not materialized under the new amalgamated municipal structure;

“We, the undersigned, hereby petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to take the most appropriate and expedient action necessary to cause to be held a binding referendum, allowing the citizens of the former town of Dundas, currently ward 13 of the city of Hamilton, to vote on de-amalgamating from the city of Hamilton.”

I have 2,600 signatures from the people of Dundas, representing about 16% of the voters there to join the other petitions from Flamborough and the great town of Ancaster.

1530

SENIORS' PROPERTY TAX CREDIT

Mr Gerry Martiniuk (Cambridge): “To the Parliament of Ontario:

“Whereas many Ontario seniors, both homeowners and tenants, are counting on their rebate pursuant to the Ontario Home Property Tax Relief for Seniors Act; and

“Whereas the Liberal government’s plan to scrap the tax credit will cause a hardship on many of Ontario’s most vulnerable senior citizens; and

“Whereas this tax relief would help Ontario seniors remain in their own apartments and homes and assist them in meeting rising costs;

“We, the undersigned, hereby petition the Parliament of Ontario as follows:

“That the Liberal government of Ontario support Ontario seniors and help them remain in their own homes by maintaining the Ontario Home Property Tax Relief for Seniors Act and rejecting any proposal to reverse this tax relief.”

SCHOOL CLOSURES

Mr Tony Ruprecht (Davenport): I do have another petition concerning the city of Toronto school board.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the Hughes Public School at 17 Innes Avenue in the city of Toronto closed down, and its premises have been declared surplus by the Toronto District School Board;

“Whereas the city of Toronto has issued a building permit to the Toronto District School Board permitting the reconstruction of Hughes Public School for an entity

called Beatrice House, for the purpose of a private academic school;

“Whereas the Beatrice House is not a private school registered with the Ministry of Education, nor a mident has been issued to that organization;

“Whereas within the context of the zoning bylaw (438-86), the subject lands have been designated as R2 Z0.6 and permit a ‘private academic, philanthropic or religious school’;

“Whereas the TDSB has chosen not to lease the subject premises to a computer training company for \$1.25 million annually. Instead, the board has chosen to lease it to the Beatrice House for a fraction of the current market value;

“Whereas a lease has not been signed between the TDSB and Beatrice House, while renovations to the building are underway;

“Whereas local taxpayers’ concerns have been ignored by the TDSB;

“Whereas other locations, such as the Brother Edmund Rice School at 55 Pelham Park, or the Earls Court Public School at 29 Ascot, which are being closed down, have been offered to Beatrice House to no avail;

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

“That the Honourable Minister of Education investigate the leasing arrangement between the Toronto District School Board and Beatrice House inasmuch as:

“(1) Boards are to seek fair market value when selling, leasing or otherwise disposing of schools except that the price for the property not to exceed the value of the ministry’s grant for the new pupil places when the purchaser is a coterminus board, a provincial school, or a publicly funded care and treatment facility offering programs leading to a diploma.

“(2) Boards are to offer the property to coterminus boards and other public agencies operating in the area in accordance with the priority order currently specified in regulation 444/98.

“(3) The Toronto District School Board has not dealt in good faith with our neighbourhood residents.

“Therefore, we respectfully ask” the Minister of Education “to consider our plea for justice. The Toronto District School Board has ignored our concerns and due diligence. We as a community tried everything within our power to fight the glaring and obvious wrong done to us, to no avail.”

This is the petition and I am willing and happy to present it to you.

EDUCATION TAX CREDIT

Mr Jim Flaherty (Whitby-Ajax): I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the equity in education tax credit seeks to restore equity and parental choice to Ontario’s education system;

“Whereas the equity in education tax credit allows those from lower-income homes to have the same opportunities as other students;

“Whereas families who choose to send their children to independent schools have to pay twice for their children’s education;

“Whereas the majority of families who benefit from the tax credit come from lower or middle-class homes;

“Whereas the United Nations has called on the government of Ontario to remedy the inequity in the education system;

“Whereas Premier Dalton McGuinty has been inconsistent on his stance on the equity in education tax credit;

“Whereas Dalton McGuinty promised the people of Ontario that he would not raise our taxes;

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

“To allow the equity in education tax credit to continue to be the law of the land in Ontario, and allow lower- and middle-income parents the privilege to send their children to independent schools if they so choose, and to vote against Bill 2, which would repeal the equity in education tax credit.”

I affix my name.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Hon Dwight Duncan (Minister of Energy, Government House Leader): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: I just wish to advise the House of the business for tomorrow.

In the afternoon there will be debate on the throne speech. It begins with speeches from the mover and seconder.

In the evening we will be debating third reading of Bill 4.

OPPOSITION DAY

TAXATION IMPOSITION

Hon Dwight Duncan (Minister of Energy, Government House Leader): On another point of order, Mr Speaker: I ask unanimous consent for the NDP members to be provided with up to 15% of the debating time to participate in the opposition day, notwithstanding standing order 42(f).

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Do we have unanimous consent? Agreed. So be it.

Ms Marilyn Churley (Toronto-Danforth): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: I just want to record that I am supporting this unanimous consent today, but New Democrats don’t support, once we reach an agreement, just getting 15% of the debate time. I just want to make sure that’s on the record, that we think the New

Democratic caucus has a unique position on some of these issues and needs more time to debate them.

The Speaker: Do you agree with the unanimous consent to have 15%? OK.

Mr Ernie Eves (Leader of the Opposition): I move that the Legislative Assembly call upon the government,

To recognize that the government has imposed retroactive tax increases on the people of Ontario which is bad public policy and to recognize that the government is increasing the tax burden on low- and middle-income earners while at the same time breaking several of the more than 230 promises made during the 2003 general election campaign,

To honour their promise to the people of Ontario from page 13 of the Liberal platform document, Government That Works For You: The Liberal Plan for a More Democratic Ontario, and “comply with the Taxpayer Protection Act and balanced budget legislation (and) not bend the law at whim,” and

That the Liberal government not pass Bill 2 until it has obtained the express permission of the people of Ontario by way of a referendum as required by the Taxpayer Protection Act, 1999, and in accordance with the taxpayer protection pledge from the Canadian Taxpayers Federation signed by Mr. McGuinty, Premier of Ontario.

1540

Mr Eves: The motion before the House asks the government to do two very simple things. First, it asks the government to keep its own promises to the people of the province of Ontario. Second, it asks the government to do what the government expects Ontario citizens to do every day, and that is simply to obey the law of the province. I would expect this motion would then enjoy the full support of all members of this House, including Liberal members, who I know will want to keep their promises and obey the law of the province.

Let me explain to my colleagues, especially my Liberal colleagues, why they should be anxious to support this resolution. In the first instance, the Liberal Party promised the people of Ontario that they would not raise taxes, and that if elected they would comply with the Taxpayer Protection Act, 1999, and balanced budget legislation, not some amended or watered down version of the act. That specific act was the pledge Dalton McGuinty, their leader, signed.

As I’m sure you will recall, Mr Speaker, it was on September 11 of this year that the current Premier, with great fanfare and flourish, signed a pledge to abide by and respect the current taxpayer protection legislation and balanced budget law. I’m also sure you will recall, Mr Speaker, that the Premier’s signature was witnessed by none other than John Williamson of the Canadian Taxpayers Federation. In that pledge to the Canadian Taxpayers Federation and to the people of Ontario, the Premier stated he would not raise taxes or impose any new taxes without the express consent of Ontario voters. He also committed to balanced budgets and to abide by the Taxpayer Protection Act as it exists today.

Our Liberal friends were positively giddy with delight when Mr Williamson and the Canadian Taxpayers Federation extolled their leader's conversion to taxpayer protection and the virtues of their fiscal and financial plan. They were so delighted by the Canadian Taxpayers Federation pronouncements that they issued a press release on September 23, summarizing the Canadian Taxpayers Federation's greatest clips and quotes. One quote made specific reference to the fact that the major reason the Canadian Taxpayers Federation was feeling comfortable with the Liberal Party was Dalton McGuinty's promise that he would "abide by the Taxpayer Protection Act, 1999."

Abiding by the Taxpayer Protection Act, 1999, requires that the government hold a referendum to obtain the consent of the people of Ontario before it raises taxes. I know the members opposite cling to the fiction that the election itself was a referendum on their tax plan. However, those informed in this matter would recognize that notice given to the Chief Election Officer was deficient in a number of respects. For example, the addendum to the notice did not come from the leader himself as is required by the law. The addendum was filed outside the disclosure time frame as set out by the act. Moreover, neither notice to the Clerk contained reference to the seniors' tax credit or the equity in education tax credit legislation.

I know the members opposite, led by the Premier and the finance minister, insist that the scrapping of tax credits does not constitute a tax hike. We had many people in the gallery today. We had senior citizens, we had parents and children who are supporters of independent schools, we had tobacco farmers, we had people from the agricultural community, and we had modest-income, hard-working, taxpaying Ontarians.

Let me quote the Liberal leader's former best friend, Mr John Williamson, on this matter. They may want to pay attention to this since it is quite instructive. On the issue of scrapping tax credits, Mr Williamson says tax credits "lower the tax bite, and if the finance minister turns around and takes away some of those credits, that means they pay more. If they pay more, that's a tax hike."

It is indeed so simple that, with all due respect, even a Liberal should be able to understand it. Very simply put, if you make people pay more money, if you change an act so that it requires them to pay more in taxes and you take away something from them, you are indeed raising their taxes. It is pretty simple stuff and a definition of a tax hike consistent with the provisions of the Taxpayer Protection Act, 1999. I keep reminding the Premier and those members on the government side of the House that it is that pledge, that act, that he committed himself to, not some former or future watered-down version of that act that's going to suit their own purposes. In fact, he expressly stated that he would not do that. He promised and pledged that he would not amend or water down or bend the act in any way.

There's no question everyone is going to pay more taxes or have less under this government. The list of victims to date includes senior citizens, who have worked so hard and have built this province. They have fought for this province in wartime; they have built this province in peacetime. They have paid more than their share of taxes for many decades. If we can assist them to stay in their own homes a little bit longer, whether they own or rent, surely we should do that, out of respect for them.

Independent school supporters, some of whom were in the gallery today, are individuals of modest means. They are not rich individuals, as the government would lead you to believe. They are parents who have made a choice for the education of their children, those young people. Surely, particularly today, when the Attorney General stood in his place and wanted to talk about an international day when everybody's rights are to be respected, isn't it rather ironic that this is the government that wants to discriminate against parents and young people who choose an independent education of whatever faith?

Tobacco farmers—we've heard from some of my colleagues today and we've heard from the tobacco farmers, indeed, themselves. We have the Minister of Agriculture and Food standing in his place today in the Legislature, virtually lecturing tobacco farmers, "Don't you dare disagree with me or this government or you will pay the price." I mean, if you did that out there, it would be called a threat. "This is a government that advocates open and transparent democracy as long as you agree with everything we stand for, and if you dare disagree, we are going to punish you, we are going to penalize you. You will pay the price."

Every single person who uses electricity in the province of Ontario is going to pay more. This is another pledge this government has already broken in its first few days of office. It's a government that insists it has to impose these tax hikes, and likely run a deficit this year, because of, they claim, a huge "inherited" Tory deficit, to quote their throne speech document. The size of that deficit tends to vary almost by the minute or the hour, let alone the day. It's a bit like they are playing deficit du jour over there at the Frost Building these days, wondering what number they should use today.

First the finance minister told us there was no doubt whatsoever that the deficit was \$5.6 billion. He knew it was \$5.6 billion, he said, because he asked the former Provincial Auditor, Mr Peters, to do a comprehensive review of the province's finances, and that was the exact, very definite number. Well, that would be fine if it were true, but the reality is that Mr Peters said that he was conducting a review; this was not a definite number. This was his opinion that, if the economy of the province of Ontario only grew at a 1.8% increase in GDP growth for the entire fiscal year that started last April 1 and runs through to next March 31, then the number could be as high as \$5.6 billion if the government did nothing to reduce spending, if they did nothing to save. And they said during their election campaign they had \$2 billion worth of savings identified, plus a \$1-billion surplus;

there's \$3 billion right there in 10 seconds. And yet we have the finance minister also commenting a few weeks ago that last year's numbers would indeed be in deficit. Then he had to hurriedly retract those remarks about 10 days later when he found out that the Provincial Auditor had indeed, in public accounts, found that there was a surplus last year, that the books were balanced and there was a positive side of the ledger.

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How can you believe anything the Minister of Finance says, because he changes the numbers and changes his mind literally every minute, if not every hour, of every day.

A few weeks later the gnome's finances were back in the press again. This time, with much hand-wringing and moaning, they were speculating that the deficit could be as high as \$8 billion this year and maybe even more. What could possibly account for such a large jump in the projected deficit of the province in a very short period of time? How could the esteemed former auditor, Erik Peters, have missed such a huge amount? How could he make such a gross error in his calculations? This was the same Erik Peters that they were lauding a few days before, of course.

Well, we do not yet know the full answer, and I presume that will come from the Minister of Finance when he does his economic update next week, which, I might point out, is only about a month late, as to when the normal update is done by the finance minister of the province. We do not know the full answer, but it seems the government has decided that it might be appropriate to add the operating deficits of all publicly funded institutions to the province's books and to the province's bottom line. You might want to ask the Minister of Finance if he's going to assume the responsibility for your Visa bill or your mortgage, because that might be appropriate to add to the bottom line of the province as well.

I can't believe that anybody who's been in this place as long as the Minister of Finance has was not aware that out of the hundreds of hospitals in this province, there are many that have operated at deficits for decades, going back to the 1970s, perhaps even before that. It's a known fact; it is not a "secret," as was quoted in a headline of the Toronto Star. It's only a secret for people that have been sleeping under a rock for the last 40 years, I suppose, that there indeed have always been hospitals operating deficits in this province. There are debentures that municipalities take out. Many of the members opposite pride themselves in their career in municipal politics. They didn't know that their community had a deficit; that they had a mortgage; that they had to debenture; that they owed money? Now what the finance minister is proposing is that anybody that owes anything should flow into this year's fiscal deficit for the province. How absolutely ridiculous. It's the most ridiculous thing I've ever heard of, and you can only assume—the Minister of Finance is not that out of touch with reality.

He's not that dumb. He just wants to play politics with this issue.

The people of this province are fair-minded, but they are not naive and they are not stupid, and they will not fall for this. At the end of the day, this government will pay the price of lacking in credibility, responsibility and fairness to the people of Ontario.

It has become abundantly clear that the size of this deficit has very little to do with the financial position of the province, but it has very much to do with the political agenda, in a large-P political sense, of this government. The deficit number is being driven by the government's need for political cover as it covers up for (a) the proposed spending spree, and (b) it wants to demonize the former government and its record. It wants to avoid making the difficult decisions that are necessary to keep its promise to balance the budget. It is driven by the need to use the deficit as an excuse for shelving or delaying entirely a slew of campaign commitments and promises it always knew it could never deliver.

Alas for the government, this flim-flam has been exposed by none other than its good friends at the Canadian Taxpayers Federation. Yesterday, Mr McGuinty's—

Mr John Yakabuski (Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke): Former.

Mr Eves:—former best friend, Mr Williamson, said that the Ontario deficit is absolutely nowhere near \$5.6 billion, never mind \$8 billion. It's their estimate. It could be about \$600 million if you spread Mr Manley's payment of \$771 million for health care over the next three years. If you don't, and if you adopt the PSAB accounting rules which every jurisdiction in this country abides by, and up until now the province of Ontario has abided by—then the books of the province would be balanced this year. But this government doesn't want to balance the books of the province, and they have set out on a political agenda to do exactly what they are doing, and that is trying to flim-flam the people of the province.

They said they had a plan to manage a \$2-billion deficit, so \$600 million should be a walk in the park. However, they don't want to accept any good news that detracts from the real agenda. They should admit and come clean with the people of Ontario that indeed we do live in the best province in the best country in the world. We are the heart of the economy of this great country of Canada, and one of the primary reasons why the Canadian economy is performing so well is right here in this province. The economy is performing well. They know it, and they should take it into account instead of posturing for political purposes.

There is no need for this government to rush to strip people, in some cases retroactively, of tax credits that they had literally been banking on. There is no need to push Bill 2 through this House. There is no fiscal emergency that justifies ignoring the Taxpayer Protection Act, 1999. The government, which purports to be committed to revitalizing democracy in Ontario, should actually take the time to consult with the people of Ontario.

I say in all seriousness to the members opposite that if they are planning to keep any of the 230 campaign promises they made to the people of this great province, the two they should keep are to not increase taxes and to balance the books.

This government does not have a lot of experience in keeping promises. In its very short life we have seen some very interesting reversals indeed. One is, "Not one single home will be built on the Oak Ridges moraine." Well, not one single one is being built; 5,700 new homes are going to be built on the Oak Ridges moraine.

"We will leave the cap on hydro rates at 4.3 cents in place until 2006." How long did it take them to break that? Their argument for that is that it affects the deficit of the province, which it does not. One has absolutely nothing to do with the other. I would urge the members opposite to stop and think about what has gone on in this province with respect to Ontario Power Generation and its predecessor, Ontario Hydro. For decades the people of this province have not paid the true cost of producing power. That has gone on for decade after decade after decade, and they know it. Any deficit or debt incurred by Ontario Hydro is not on the books of the province of Ontario, nor should it be put on the books, this year or any other year, with all due respect. This is a shell game, and it's a shell game that is fraught, I think, with political consequences for this government down the road in four years' time—if, of course, they live up to that promise to have an election every four years.

They were going to have a public inquiry into meat inspection. What has happened to that? They were going to have a hard cap on class sizes of 20 students. What has happened to that? They were going to eliminate every coal-burning plant in province of Ontario by 2007. What has happened to that? You can't keep track of all the promises they break. There's almost a promise a day that goes by the wayside.

The very competitiveness of not just the Ontario but the Canadian economy relies upon the sustainability of public services and sound tax and financial policies provided by this government, the government of Ontario. The Premier wasn't shy about going to New York and talking to the Canadian Chamber of Commerce there on Monday about what a great province he lived in, how great the economy was going, how it made the difference to this great country of Canada, how we were great neighbours, how we both benefited from trade and everything is tickety-boo. That's what he said in New York on Monday. He comes back on Tuesday and, "Woe is me. I've got this huge mess, the province is in a mess, we're in the worst province in the country, not the best."

Does he believe that we have the best public education anywhere in the world right here in the province of Ontario—yes or no? Does he believe that we have the best health care system anywhere in the world right here in the province of Ontario—yes or no?

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Denigrating people who work in those two sectors doesn't do any of us any good, especially when it's done

for partisan and political purposes. There's nothing to say they can't be improved, but I'm standing here to tell you, as I've always said in my 23 years in this place, that we live in the best province in the best country in the world—not to say it can't be made better.

One of the reasons why this economy and why the Canadian economy is being so successful is because of the policies that our government put in place to allow people to keep more of their own money.

You can disagree with that policy. That's fair; it's a fair debate to have in a democratic society. But one thing I would urge the government members not to do, as a matter of public policy, is to retroactively institute a tax increase.

In all my years in this place, I cannot remember a time when any government of any political stripe in the province of Ontario has stooped to introduce a retroactive tax increase. I introduced several retroactive tax decreases, but I can't believe that a government, as a matter of public policy, would take away something that legally belongs to the people of the province of Ontario, to take away their money and do it retroactively.

We have modest-income families, who were in the gallery today, who have planned this. They've budgeted for this. They are not wealthy, as was pointed out by some of my colleagues today. Their household income is less than \$50,000 a year, and they have planned for their children to go to the independent Christian school of their choice. It'd be very mean-spirited of this government or any other to now retroactively come along after the fact and take that money away from those families. Where are they going to find this money?

And if they're going to raise taxation levels on tobacco tax that in effect puts tobacco farmers out of business, surely they owe it to those same people in the agricultural community to provide compensation for them so they can make ends meet and they can get on with their lives and perhaps some other form of agricultural endeavour.

There's a lot of planning that needs to go into a lot of the stuff that the government is trying to hurriedly put through in Bill 2, and I would really urge the members on all sides of this House to think twice before they do some of the things that they're purporting to do in this significant piece of legislation.

Mr Ernie Parsons (Prince Edward-Hastings): Quite frankly, I was surprised, given all the issues that the opposition party's identified, that they went with one that was obviously so related to the media.

As I was growing up, I've always heard the expression, "More nerve than a canal horse." I never knew what it meant, but I'm pretty sure that applies to this situation. We've got a demand, under the opposition motion today, for a referendum. Let's think about the history—

Mr Ted Chudleigh (Halton): On a point of order, Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Bruce Crozier): Yes, I've noticed it, thank you: the clock. The clerk is—are we set? Is it OK? The member for Prince Edward-Hastings.

Mr Parsons: If we think about the opposition party's stance over the last eight years toward democracy and toward taxes and toward the public, I can recall when the previous government rammed through legislation to amalgamate municipalities. If I remember right, the city of Toronto actually held a referendum. There was a referendum held that people voted on. Money was spent in the name of democracy to see whether the people in this community wanted to be amalgamated into one large area.

The answer was a resounding no, and the Premier at that time said, "Referendums don't count. Referendums don't matter. The people didn't understand what they were voting on and we have no intention of being influenced by the referendum." A legitimately held referendum by a municipal government was discounted by this. Indeed, I would suggest to you one of the challenges, if you wanted to do a referendum, was the underfunding by this previous government of Elections Ontario, resulting in an electors' list that was a joke in October—the number of people who had to be sworn in, the number of people who had to come forward and do the extra work to get on the voters' list, because it wasn't worth it on the part of that government to spend money to make sure democracy functioned.

That government believed taxation was so important that there should be a referendum on the issue. Let's look at the number of issues they rammed through without wanting a referendum on it and without disposing of it prior to an election.

They wanted to sell Ontario Hydro, not just without a referendum but actually without any legislation that would make it possible. Nowhere during their election campaigns did they run on a platform of, "We're going to close hospitals." Nowhere did they say, "We're going to lease out the 407 for 99 years." They sold water power generating plants. In the name of democracy, they took over school boards from duly elected trustees, trustees who had been given a mandate by the public, and this government rode roughshod over them and eliminated them and sent in people who—as it turned out, the problem wasn't the trustees who were publicly elected; the problem was the underfunding and the cutbacks by this government. We have seen a massive number of user fees implemented in this province, and folks, they're taxes. Do you remember, "No user fees, but we're going to have a co-payment fee for seniors on the drug plan"? You own that. That was your creation, and folks, that's a tax increase.

On the other hand, the plans by this government were laid out very clearly two years ago. If you examine the Taxpayer Protection Act—which, by the way, your party broke, admitted they broke, had to go back and do corrections on it, but admitted they broke—we duly indicated, made public—I can recall when the previous government brought forward a bill that was going to give

the education tax reduction to senior citizens. We voted against it and you laughed. You laughed at us because you knew the public would never support us because of your mantra of tax cuts. What the seniors of this province said was, "We want to stay in our homes, but the tax cut on education won't do it. What we need is home care. What we need is medical care." This is a party that stood for services to keep seniors in their homes and not a cheap vote-buying ploy of, "We're going to rebate your education taxes." The seniors in this province didn't buy it.

That government intended, if they were re-elected, to sell \$2.1 billion worth of provincially purchased assets, assets bought by the people of Ontario. In every debate I witnessed and took part in across Ontario, when the question went to the Progressive Conservative candidate, "What are you going to sell?" the response was, "Wait. Maybe something. We're not going to say what it is."

So the flim-flam that took place during the election was in trying to conceal what were going to be tax increases, because if you sell provincial assets, you can sell them only once. That's a dilemma. You can sell them only once.

I say, this motion has absolutely no credibility. We made very clear each and every thing we would do, prior to the election. The people of Ontario said, "We want services. We don't want cheap tax-cutting ploys that put our education at risk, that put our health care at risk." Dalton McGuinty owes no apology to anyone for the bills that have been introduced in this House. There was a referendum called the provincial election. At that time, the people said, "Give us services, give us value for our dollar, but don't give us any more cheap tricks."

Mr Jim Flaherty (Whitby-Ajax): It's an honour to be able to speak in support of this motion that stands in the name of Mr Eves, our leader. People are accustomed, I think, to new governments blaming previous governments, or the previous government, for this issue or that issue. This new Liberal government certainly has been doing a lot of that. But there's something greater here with respect to the new government, and that is their unwillingness to assume the responsibility, to assume the mantle of government. They break promises. They fail the trust test with the people of Ontario—nothing more dramatic than the pledge signed by Mr McGuinty, who is now the Premier, with the Canadian Taxpayers Federation, indicating that he would not raise taxes and his separate statements that he would hold the line on taxes.

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People in Ontario, I think, are not surprised that the new government would blame the government before. But they are surprised that a government would give a very long list of promises—231 of them—and then get elected on the basis of those promises and immediately start breaking them.

One of the largest promises was number two, which is to cancel tax breaks for—and here's what the Liberals called them—"exclusive private schools." "Exclusive private schools": that conjures up images of the small

number of very expensive private schools in the province of Ontario. They don't tell the people of Ontario this—in fact, they want the people of Ontario not to believe this—but they know that two thirds of the independent schools in the province of Ontario are religious or culturally based, that they are Jewish schools, that they are Muslim schools, that they are Christian schools, Montessori schools and other schools, that the parents who choose to send their children to those schools are of modest means.

Mr McGuinty used to talk a lot about working families. He used to profess caring about working families. Those are the families in Ontario that choose to send their children to independent schools. Mr McGuinty doesn't talk any more, you'll notice, about working families.

Is there a financial reason, a fiscal reason, to retroactively abolish the equity in education tax credit? No, there isn't. In fact, the savings would be much less than the Minister of Education spent last week, which was \$112 million, most of which went to the Toronto school boards—\$60 million. Coincidentally, \$46 million went to the Toronto District School Board to get rid of their deficit. He called it something else. A remarkable coincidence: a debt of between \$43 million and \$48 million, according to the business supervisor of the Toronto District School Board, and the first thing the Minister of Education does, after pleading poverty and talking about deficits, is to take \$46 million of Ontario taxpayers' money and give it to a board where the trustees broke the law by voting in favour of a deficit in their budgeting, contrary to the provisions of the Education Act.

Retroactive taxation is abhorrent, and for good reason. Mr McGuinty knows—he'll remember, I hope, from his law school days—the principle against retroactive legislation and, in particular, retroactive tax legislation. As Mr Eves has pointed out, these working families, all across the province of Ontario—in 2002 and in 2003, for two school years now—have planned their budgets based on this tax credit, and well they should. The whole principle is that people are entitled to rely on the law as it is when they make their plans.

But the Liberals don't do that. First of all, they talk about “exclusive private schools,” which of course is nonsense. Tell the people from the Christian schools here today and the Muslim schools and the Jewish schools about their exclusive private schools. What a way to mislead the people of the province of Ontario. What a way to turn on working families in the province of Ontario.

Mr Dave Levac (Brant): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: I normally don't like to interrupt in a middle of a discussion, but the word “mislead” is not appropriate in this place.

The Acting Speaker (Mr Ernie Parsons): Would you withdraw?

Mr Flaherty: I withdraw.

How inaccurate to say that to the people of Ontario. You Liberals did that. You did it right here. You said, “exclusive private schools.” What nonsense; you know

it's not true. You know in your own ridings it's not true. But you went ahead and you did it and you said that. You wanted people in Ontario to believe that something was so that was not so. Shame, I say to you. Shame for saying that it has anything to do with fiscal reality in the province of Ontario when you go ahead within the first few weeks in government and spend \$112 million to bail out your union friends at the Toronto District School Board. You'll sacrifice the parents, the working families, the working Christian school families, the working Jewish families, the working Muslim families—you'll do all that for the public sector unions at the Toronto District School Board. I hope you're proud of yourselves. And you'll do it retroactively, contrary to fundamental legal principles and public policy.

I say to the Liberal government, the people of Ontario expect you to do several things. At least do these things: Keep some of your promises. It is a matter of trust. First, try to keep some of the 231 promises so that young people in Ontario can have some faith in the political process. You're doing tremendous damage to that faith. We already have low voter turnouts, and you've done tremendous harm by putting forth this whole list of promises, getting into office and not even trying to keep your promises. In fact, you immediately started to break promises.

So try to keep some promises, but secondly, stop whining. You're elected. You're the government of the day, so at least show up at work, start acting like the government and stop whining. Get to work and do the best you can, because we all care about this province; we all care about this country. Do the best you can, as poor a performance as that no doubt will be. But do the best you can, be the government, stand up for your promises or at least some of them, and then the people of Ontario will decide, as they see the evolution of your government, whether you are worthy of any trust. So far, you are not.

Mr Shafiq Qaadri (Etobicoke North): I think there are a number of things to be said, particularly re the foregoing remarks from the MPP from Whitby-Ajax, Mr Flaherty. Before I engage in some destructive notation on that, I would for a moment, with your permission, Speaker, just like to set the record straight for the people of Ontario on what the philosophy of the previous, outgoing Tory regime actually is.

Once upon a time, they used to say, “We're not actually the government; we've come here to fix the government.” I would like to say, with respect, that they were actually there to sell the government. They were actually there to offload the government or download the government to every other board or every other level of government that they could find. In particular, for example, the MPP from Whitby-Ajax, Mr Flaherty, spent considerable energy talking about how, once a government assumes power, it blames the previous government. I would submit to the people of Ontario that the previous PC Tory regime made an industry out of blaming the federal Liberal government for years upon years. I would say, with respect, that it's only the Dalton McGuinty gov-

ernment in Ontario, which has just taken office, approximately eight weeks ago, that is attempting to remedy those ills.

In particular, I was very surprised that Mr Flaherty, the MPP from Whitby-Ajax, would actually begrudge the Minister of Education and those people in Ontario who will benefit from the \$112-million commitment to English as a second language. I would say, with respect, sir, that that is a fundamental attack on a number of individuals, new Canadians, Canadianizing individuals who have perhaps come from other parts of the world and whose language skills may not be up to speed. I would say, with respect, sir, that is in particular one reason why I am proud, as the son of immigrants, to be part of this government that has made, in difficult circumstances, in a time of financial constraint, a deep commitment to those individuals who may benefit with English-as-a-second-language commitments to reintegrate into society.

I'd also like to say to the people of Ontario that the individuals opposite who formed the previous government—really their philosophy was one of selling out Ontario, whether they were dealing with Ontario Hydro, the 407, the idea of inspecting water, inspecting meat. As you know, Speaker, they just recently, just before we took office, actually OK'd the inspection of nuclear facilities in Ontario. That's the Tory regime, the Tory way: to privatize the very enterprises that government should have responsibility for.

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I would also like to say, with respect, that it's the Tory regime that actually has left us with not only the financial deficit—

Interjection.

The Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr Qaadri: —that has been well documented and well researched—

Interjection.

The Deputy Speaker: Member from Oshawa, will you take your seat. I called order; I didn't ask you start debating with me. I just called order.

Mr Qaadri: Thank you for intervening, Speaker. I think it is important to be able to speak in Parliament without hindrance, and for the people of Ontario to hear the truth. Thank you for intervening with the member, Mr O'Toole.

I would like to say, Speaker, through you to the people of Ontario—

Mr John O'Toole (Durham): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: He's not to name members by name, but by riding only.

I believe that in terms of what this new member is saying, some of what he is putting on the record is absolutely incorrect.

The Deputy Speaker: That's not a point of order.

Mr O'Toole: I think the member should stand up—

The Deputy Speaker: Member from Oshawa, take your seat, please.

The member is reminded that he is not to use names; use ridings in here, please.

Mr Qaadri: Thank you, Speaker, and thank you to the Member for Durham for the kerfuffle.

Mr Flaherty: On a point of order, Mr Speaker: The previous point of order was made by the member for Durham, not Oshawa.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you.

Mr Qaadri: It seems the kerfuffle was added to by all members of the Tory party.

I would like to say that the new McGuinty government inherited not only the very well documented financial deficit, but also, it seems, a deficit in several sectors, whether it's the social sector, the energy sector and beyond. It's really our responsibility to make good on a number of our commitments, in particular the reckless corporate tax giveaways that have been instituted by the previous regime.

I would also like to say very quickly that I think one of the members opposite, in speaking about the removal of a tax credit being equivalent to a tax hike—I would like to illustrate with a very quick example. If the very well tailored suits that a number of the MPPs from the Tory party happen to be wearing cost, let's say for argument's sake, \$1,000 and I were to offer them a discount coupon for \$100 and then remove it as we assumed office, is that a tax increase, is that a price increase, or do we return to the status quo? I leave it to your own logic, Speaker, and to the logic of the people of Ontario.

Mr O'Toole: I'll just be allocating a couple of minutes to this, because other members want to get in on it.

The member from Etobicoke North made a number of assumptions, many of them incorrect. I think I should tell you that I've just come from one of the most undemocratic processes, with the discussion of Bill 2. You time-allocated an omnibus bill that really encompassed about five principal areas of very important policy.

Our member for this caucus, Mr Baird, was speaking very passionately and quite directly to the issue of retroactivity, the clause in the bill that to me will stand up over time as one of your nemeses. That section is referred to in the explanatory notes. I'll read it to you: "An amendment to section 8 of the act repeals the equity in education tax credit as of January 1, 2003."

That was a slippery slope that I believe all presenters—and I'm going to name the presenters, starting with Jack Mintz, who is a professor at the University of Toronto. He said, "Retroactivity in taxation is a slippery slope." Others went on to say it was mean-spirited. In many respects, I want to put them on record: B'Nai Brith Canada, the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, the Canadian Jewish Congress of Ontario, Children First: School Choice Trust, the Islamic Society of North America, the Ontario Alliance of Christian Schools and the Ontario Association of Jewish Day Schools and others all, without exception, went on the record as pleading.

I would have supported this particular section of the bill, because they did run on cancelling the equity in education tax credit. What they didn't run on was retroactively affecting those hard-working families who

were expecting for their children in independent schools a credit that would amount to some \$400, which means a lot after tax to hard-working families who take that determination.

I want to put on the retroactivity debate here that even today Mr Barrett, my partner on that committee, the standing committee on finance and economic affairs, was a small bit late in attending. It was the assumption that the committee was going to start at 4; well, they started, as he understood, early, and finished before he even got there. He wanted to bring some very important input to that debate. They time-allocated it.

We're going into Bill 5 starting Monday. Bill 5 is dealing with auto insurance and their failed promise on auto insurance. They have time-allocated this bill. By 4 o'clock tomorrow, everyone who wants to have input, the stakeholders in this bill, will have to have their input in to the clerk. This committee will then decide when they actually speak to the bill by 4 o'clock tomorrow afternoon, and the meetings start at 10. I am appalled by the lack of democracy, the lack of access to government on the very important issue that auto insurance is.

With that, I'll relinquish the time to the other speakers who wish to address many of the frailties in this particular debate today.

Mr Bob Delaney (Mississauga West): I address my remarks to the member for Dufferin-Peel-Wellington-Grey. I note he was very skilfully defended by the member for Whitby-Ajax.

I sincerely hope that this measure has been introduced by the member for Dufferin-Peel-Wellington-Grey with tongue in cheek. It introduces a measure demanding that this new government simply ignore the landscape of waste, neglect and damage facing this government that was left by their own government less than 12 weeks ago. I hope the member for Dufferin-Peel-Wellington-Grey will not take it personally if I and other members of this House decline to support this motion.

Permit me to offer a few points of constructive criticism and helpful suggestions in a spirit of bipartisan co-operation that I hope will assist the member for Dufferin-Peel-Wellington-Grey, perhaps with an amended version or maybe a redraft of this motion.

The member opposite asserts that we should have a referendum on rolling back the uncoded, hastily constructed and unfocused tax plan that has already been the subject of a referendum, that being the October 2 election. Just as a reminder to the members opposite, the people of Ontario took a full month of intensive debate, neighbourhood by neighbourhood. They thought about it. Ontarians debated it at their kitchen tables and over their water coolers, and on October 2, Ontario told the party headed by the member opposite, "Thanks, but we'll pass on this proposal."

As a result of that referendum of October 2, the member from Ottawa South moved to the Speaker's right, along with his party, and the member from Dufferin-Peel-Wellington-Grey moved to the Speaker's left, along with the durable and vocal survivors of his

party. Should we, therefore, have a referendum on this measure? Been there; done that.

The Taxpayer Protection Act that was brought to this Legislature by the government headed by the member from Dufferin-Peel-Wellington-Grey states that a referendum is unnecessary when financial plans are clearly stated to the chief electoral officer prior to the election by the party that forms the next government.

The party that now forms the government of Ontario could not have been more clear. It seems that the member from Dufferin-Peel-Wellington-Grey wishes not merely that this government implement his own party's failed agenda but also finance it through continued gutting of Ontario's health care, education and social services systems. The member from Dufferin-Peel-Wellington-Grey may wish to reinvest some of his party's research resources in order that his facts be more thoroughly checked prior to making such assertions, especially in a motion.

1630

An interesting analysis of the motion made by the member for Dufferin-Peel-Wellington-Grey would be to lay the member opposite's party promises side by side with the Taxpayer Protection Act on which the member's motion so piously stands.

The member's party, in its letter to the chief election officer of Ontario, promised to raise taxes on average people: higher gas taxes, higher hotel taxes and higher parking fees. I quote verbatim from a letter to Elections Ontario signed by the member for Dufferin-Peel-Wellington-Grey on September 17, 2003:

"It would allow municipalities to propose new tax ideas to raise money for a specific program or project. These taxes could be placed on only three activities within the municipality: sales of gasoline, rental of hotel/motel rooms and use of parking spaces." Sounds like a tax hike to me.

It makes Ontarians shudder to think where we might be if the October 2 election and referendum had gone the other way. On top of the \$5.6-billion deficit we now face, this House would be trying to sell Ontarians' assets at fire sale prices to pay for, among others, a \$4.3-billion corporate tax giveaway and other measures. Ontarians would have stood helpless while the province's current-year deficit plummeted past \$10 billion, and all of this on top of the \$21 billion in extra debt piled up by the former government. As the member for Etobicoke North has said, these are the people who campaigned saying they were not the government; they came to fix the government. Well, they fixed the government, much in the same way one would fix their cat.

If indeed the member for Dufferin-Peel-Wellington-Grey stood on his record for any purpose save and except to protect it from public scrutiny, he would have abided by the Taxpayer Protection Act himself. Consider the facts: The member for Dufferin-Peel-Wellington-Grey delayed \$1.518 billion in tax cuts, contrary to the provisions of the act, in his 2000 budget. This is the Taxpayer Protection Act that the member's own party introduced.

Specific reductions in taxes that the member for Dufferin-Peel-Wellington-Grey promised but did not implement in his 2000 budget included reductions in personal income tax, private school tax credits, residential education property taxes and corporate taxes. Yet the member for Dufferin-Peel-Wellington-Grey chose not to go to Ontarians in a referendum when he broke the provisions of the Taxpayer Protection Act himself. Shame. Oh, well, one standard while in government and another while in opposition, Ontarians must assume.

There is so much in the motion from the member for Dufferin-Peel-Wellington-Grey on which one could offer other constructive and helpful amendments and other suggestions that I would like to yield the floor to another member to help also. Should the motion either be withdrawn or fail to pass, I look forward to another opportunity to examine it or its successor in the context of the full and open debate that the government of which I am proud to be a part has brought back to Ontario.

The Deputy Speaker: Further debate?

Mr Robert W. Runciman (Leeds-Grenville): Thank you very much, Mr Speaker. I think I did have the opportunity to congratulate you on your election to that prestigious chair, and I'll do it once more.

Ms Churley: Appointment. He wasn't elected.

Mr Runciman: Well, I'll look at it as an election. In any event, he's sitting there, and I'm sure he will do a good job for all of us in the House over the next four years.

I appreciate the opportunity to speak to the motion. It certainly draws the attention of the public to the very apparent weaknesses of this government after only six or seven weeks in office. I think there has certainly been a lot of focus with respect to broken promises. This isn't something new. I guess it's new and quite a revelation to the press gallery and to many in the media to see a government come into office and, within a few short weeks, break a significant series of platform promises that helped to get them elected.

When you go back to earlier governments, this was common practice, making promises—figments of the drafters' imaginations that might have some impact in attracting votes in certain segments and regions of the province—and then for a variety of justifications and reasons, the government of the day would fail to meet those commitments. We certainly saw it in the Red Book at the federal level of the Liberal government; we certainly saw it in the NDP's promises during the 1990 election, when they ignored virtually all of their campaign promises; and we saw it during the Peterson era as well.

I think it's relevant to look back on those days because what changed, of course, was the election of the Harris government and the Common Sense Revolution. One of the major reasons that our government was re-elected in 1999 was the fact that we were branded and identified—whether you agreed or disagreed with the government and Premier Harris, we were identified as a first in Canadian politics in many respects, but certainly in terms of keeping promises. That was a badge of honour

certainly for someone like myself and, I know, others who served in the government during those days.

Again, I think it's relevant to look back at the 1985-90 era with the David Peterson government. Some would say, "This is a new day; this is a new era; this is a different Liberal government." But I tend to believe that a Liberal is Liberal is a Liberal. We're seeing that in terms of the initial rash of broken promises. It's also clearly indicated by the initiatives that they have undertaken, by bringing in the largest single tax increase in the history of the province within their first few weeks in office. I think that, again, is reflective of the practices of the former Liberal government, when they increased taxes in this province something like 32 or 33 times. In parallel, they also increased spending, almost doubling the budget in the province, and had a very negative impact on the investment climate and the job creation climate in the province. They increased welfare rates so that we were well above the norm across the country. As a result, we were attracting an influx of people to go on to the welfare rolls, people who simply had very little, if any, incentive to remove themselves from the rolls.

Some of you will remember the infamous tire tax, the gas guzzler tax, tobacco, booze taxes, the commercial concentration levy in the GTA, and personal income taxes. You name it: The Liberal government of 1985-90 ran rampant when it came to taxes, and certainly was a failure to show any degree of fiscal responsibility whatsoever. I think we're seeing the signs of a similar approach to governing by the new Liberal government.

We've heard comments with respect to what we have described as a bogus deficit, in an effort to try and demonize the former government. That's understandable in political terms. Our brand, of course, after coming into a very desperate situation in 1995 of spending \$1.1 million an hour more than we were taking in and being able to turn that around, make very difficult decisions, eliminate an \$11-billion-plus deficit and have four consecutive balanced budgets is a brand we're very proud of. We would have had a fifth balanced budget this fiscal year if we'd had the confidence of the electors. We've shown how that could be done.

We've now had confirmation from a number of objective observers, including, just recently, the Canadian Taxpayers Federation, indicating that if there's a deficit in excess of \$600 million, that will be purely a Liberal deficit. Hopefully, taxpayers and other Ontarians are going to pay attention to that.

There's a statement being made by the Minister of Finance next week. We're anxiously awaiting it and being very suspicious. I hate to be cynical, but given the words and actions of this government over the past few weeks, I think we have justification to be cynical. I think we're going to hear the Minister of Finance suggest that the deficit is even higher than \$5.6 billion, and is going to indicate that it may be \$6 billion or \$7 billion. In reality, what's happening is that there is no meaningful effort being undertaken to try and rein in any possible deficit in terms of government restraint. In fact, what this govern-

ment plans to do is to continue to attempt to demonize the former government and spend into that projection, if you will, to ensure that at the end of this fiscal year they will have a deficit. Whatever the Minister of Finance says next week, they'll spend right into that.

1640

I think that's truly regrettable for the taxpayers of this province, but it is simply a sign of things to come. We ran a campaign which was very roundly criticized, in terms of being negative. I think we could have broadened it and said the Liberal Party is not up to the job. I say that because—what are we going to base it on? We're going to base it on past history, on their first seven weeks in office and on the long laundry list of promises they made, many of which are truly unrealistic, many of which are clearly unaffordable, many of which will break the bank and once again put us into an uncompetitive position, chasing investment and jobs out of this province. That may take two or three years to show up, but ultimately it is going to happen with this government in office. Again ultimately, the voters of Ontario will turn to the Conservative Party to bring realism and practicality back to government and continued—

Mr Chudleigh: Honesty.

Mr Runciman: Honest government as well. My colleague suggests I should include that as an adjective, and I think it's quite accurate to say honest government that will continue to put this House back on the road it should be on, leading North America in terms of jobs, investment and quality of life on this continent. Thank you for this opportunity.

L'hon Madeleine Meilleur (ministre de la Culture; ministre déléguée aux Affaires francophones): Cela me fait plaisir aujourd'hui d'adresser cette Assemblée au nom des gens d'Ottawa-Vanier.

Alors, on sait qu'aujourd'hui la question est, est-ce qu'on doit avoir un référendum pour renverser les réductions d'impôts des sociétés pour annuler les crédits d'impôts bénéfiques des écoles privées et puis, pour maintenir les impôts particuliers au plus bas niveau?

Je pense que le référendum, on l'a eu le 2 octobre. Le 2 octobre, les gens de l'Ontario, les Ontariens et les Ontariennes, ont élu un gouvernement libéral parce qu'ils étaient inquiets et ils veulent remettre la province et donner les services aux citoyens comme ils étaient habitués.

Pendant ma campagne électorale, j'ai fait beaucoup de porte-à-porte, et les choses que j'entendais, c'est que les gens étaient inquiets à propos des soins de santé. On voulait premièrement qu'on améliore les soins de santé. On voulait que l'on améliore l'éducation en Ontario et la sécurité publique.

Ce que les gens nous disaient, c'est que les Conservateurs ont donné à la province un déficit, bien sûr, un déficit financier, mais ce n'est pas seulement un déficit financier mais un déficit selon aussi la sécurité publique.

J'ai visité certaines personnes qui m'ont demandé même d'entrer dans leur demeure parce qu'ils voulaient que je voie de visu ce que les coupures du gouvernement précédent ont fait. Je voudrais vous illustrer un endroit où

on m'a invitée à entrer. Alors, on avait dans le salon de cette maison-là comme une salle de soins intensifs. On avait une dame qui était sur un respirateur, on avait un enfant aussi qui était sur un respirateur, et le mari et père de cet enfant-là voulait me montrer ce que les coupures dans le domaine de la santé, et surtout les coupures aux centres d'accès aux soins de santé, pouvaient représenter chez les citoyens. Cette mère et cet enfant avaient besoin des infirmières 24 heures, sept jours par semaine. On a averti le mari, qui avait l'aide du centre d'accès pour recruter les infirmières dont il avait besoin, que maintenant on ne pouvait plus le faire. C'était le mari et père qui devait recruter les infirmières. Alors, je lui ai demandé, « Est-ce que vous faites ça à plein temps? » Il m'a dit, « Non, je travaille. Je dois travailler puisque quelqu'un doit payer pour ça. »

À d'autres endroits où j'ai frappé, les gens m'ont démontré la situation dans les écoles d'aujourd'hui. On me disait, « Pour que mon enfant commence l'école, j'ai reçu une longue liste de la part de l'école m'indiquant ce dont on avait besoin. » Je ne pouvais pas croire qu'on demandait aux enfants d'apporter le papier de toilette, qu'on leur demandait d'apporter les essuie-mains et d'autres choses pour un montant de 375 \$. Les familles ne pouvaient pas défrayer tous ces coûts.

On nous dit aujourd'hui, « Vous devez aller à un référendum parce que vous ne pouvez pas faire ce que vous devez faire. » On sait que le rapport du vérificateur général parle d'un déficit dans le secteur de la sécurité publique. Le rapport Epps décrit en détail notre déficit dans le secteur de l'énergie. Bien sûr les gens étaient aussi inquiets suite au « blackout » qu'on a eu l'été dernier. On voulait former un nouveau gouvernement qui allait assurer aux citoyens et citoyennes de l'Ontario une meilleure énergie et qu'on ne vivra plus ce que l'on a vécu l'été dernier, c'est-à-dire un « blackout. »

Alors, on veut que le gouvernement assure aux gens et donne aux gens les services qui sont nécessaires. Nous tenons notre promesse électorale. Nous allons couper ces crédits d'impôt qui sont donnés aux écoles privées. Je dois vous dire que ça a été très bien reçu, parce que ce qu'on veut, c'est que ces argents-là soient réinvestis dans le système public. On voit que les classes sont surchargées, les professeurs ont des classes de 30 ou 35 étudiants, elles souffrent de surmenage, et on veut qu'on règle ce problème.

Bien sûr on dit aujourd'hui, « Vous n'avez pas fait ceci. Vous n'avez pas fait ça. » On a été élus le 2 octobre dernier et c'est bien sûr que dans deux mois on ne peut pas réaliser tout ce qu'on doit réaliser. On doit prendre le temps. On doit faire les choses comme on doit les faire. Premièrement, on doit stabiliser nos finances. Pour stabiliser nos finances, c'est important qu'on coupe ces réductions d'impôt pour pouvoir les réinvestir où elles doivent être réinvesties.

On a beaucoup parlé de la réduction d'impôt aux personnes âgées pour compenser les taxes qui sont payées pour notre système d'éducation. Je vous dirais, monsieur le Président, que les personnes âgées dans mon

comté étaient très vexées que le gouvernement ait mis de l'avant une telle proposition, parce que les personnes âgées veulent contribuer à la formation de nos jeunes. Elles veulent contribuer à l'éducation des jeunes parce qu'elles savent bien qu'on doit avoir des personnes qualifiées pour prendre soin des gens, alors on doit avoir de bonnes écoles pour pouvoir s'assurer qu'on donne de la formation adéquate.

Aussi, une chose qui les inquiète beaucoup c'est les soins de santé, alors elles veulent contribuer aussi au financement des soins de santé. On sait que les soins de santé demandent une grande part de notre budget, et ces personnes veulent s'assurer qu'on investisse dans les soins de santé, puis aussi dans les soins à domicile. Encore là, beaucoup de personnes âgées doivent être institutionnalisées parce qu'on n'a pas les soins à domicile nécessaires. On a coupé les heures des soins à domicile, et elles doivent être institutionnalisées ou la famille doit prendre en charge les parents.

Je m'objecte aujourd'hui à ce qu'on adopte la proposition qui est mise de l'avant par le parti conservateur, et je crois que c'est important que l'on passe le « Bill 2 » qui a été mis de l'avant par le ministre des Finances.

1650

The Deputy Speaker: Further debate?

Interjection.

Mr Tim Hudak (Erie-Lincoln): I'll give it my best shot.

I'm pleased to enter the debate in support of the resolution. I won't embarrass myself and the members of the assembly by attempting it in French, but if you do turn to channel 3, I think you might be able to hear it that way. They're distracting me.

I just want to bring some quick words of support for this resolution, because I am very concerned about the broken promises that are impacting the pocketbooks of the people that I represent in the beautiful riding of Erie-Lincoln. Specifically, as has been highlighted by my colleagues across the floor, there was a solemn commitment by then-candidate, now-Premier McGuinty not to raise taxes. In fact, we saw in the second bill in the Legislature the largest tax hike in the history of the province in a single day, particularly concerning, in my riding, many supporters of independent schools, working-class families.

I remember, when knocking on doors, one young single mother with three children whom she put through independent schools. She lived in a duplex—somebody of very modest means—paid her taxes into the public system fully and, because she believed in an independent school and Christian education in this particular circumstance, she paid tuition for three students on top of this.

I think it is the right thing to do, to support parental choice in schools and stand strongly behind that initiative. Granted, they are taking that away, but what I find particularly reprehensible is this notion of retroactivity. Dalton McGuinty's tax increases begin January 1, 2004, in most respects, with the notable exception of the

independent school initiative, which is retroactive to January 1, 2003, meaning that working families that had gone through 11 months of the year expecting up to \$1,400 per child this year in a credit to their tax find out in the eleventh month, at the eleventh hour, that it's being taken away from them. I can't see that this has a major impact on the total dollars to the provincial economy, but it has a major impact on families like those I've mentioned in Niagara and in Dunnville. The \$1,400 they were expecting, going into Christmas, will no longer be there.

I ask the members across the floor, even if they oppose the initiative in general, to please back off the retroactivity. As I have said, it's cruel; it's a punitive measure. I wish and hope they will listen to the debate and back away from at least that measure, and ideally implement the tax credit as a whole.

Secondly, to our farmers across the province, I've been reading my recent copy of Ontario Farmer, where they discuss, "Cap Comes off Hydro Rates." It reads, "Despite election promises to keep electricity rates at the same level as set by the former Tory government, Ontario's new Liberal government now says that it will lift the cap on prices...." It has a major impact on seniors in Niagara and a major impact on farmers in my area. Particularly the feather industry and the greenhouse industry, who are up against some very difficult competition, will be impacted dramatically by these initiatives. On the same front page, "Nutrient Enforcement Goes Back to Environment Ministry," the first line of the article in Ontario Farmer reads, "In a move that has side-swiped the Ontario agriculture industry, the new ... government is shifting the compliance ... to the Ministry of the Environment." The agriculture community is very concerned about the early days of the Dalton McGuinty government, not only for the broken promises but for the impact it's going to have on their economic viability, the impact it's going to have on their pocketbooks.

Lastly—I want to share my time with my colleagues—I wanted to point out that I fear that this is just the beginning. I asked a very direct question to the Premier last week, because I suspect—I have not seen the capacity for them to find savings. They bragged in the campaign that they would find \$2 billion in savings. I've not seen a real effort in that respect as of yet. What I think is going to happen is that they'll turn to what looks like an easier road; it's more painful in the long run, but an easier road of hiking taxes. I asked the Premier specifically if he was going to raise the gas tax, if he was going to raise the taxes or fees on wine, spirits or beer, or if he was going to raise personal income tax even more. After 100 or 200 words, the Premier did not give me a yes or a no. During the campaign he was very clear: no new taxes. He was not increasing taxes. In a simple question in the House, you'd think he'd say no. So the message to the taxpayers back home is: Hold on to your pocketbooks; Dalton McGuinty is coming for them.

Hon David Caplan (Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: The answer is no.

The Deputy Speaker: That's not a point of order.

Mr Hudak: I appreciate the Deputy Premier for the day saying that, but I asked Premier McGuinty very directly if he was raising these taxes. You'd think it would be pretty straightforward, because he said during the campaign, "Read my lips:"—basically—"no new taxes." But he refused to answer those individual questions, so I say watch out; the real Dalton McGuinty is in town. Hold on to your pocketbooks because there's one big McGuinty tax hike coming your way.

Ms Churley: I would just say to the member from Guelph-Wellington who stood up, what we're going to do here is make sure, and I hope the Liberals will agree, that the Tories get the last word here, given that it's their members who are putting this forward today. We'll all be nice about that. So that's why I'm standing up now, because as you know—and I'd like to start by saying thank you to all the members who gave unanimous consent today to allow New Democrats a tiny bit of time to debate in this House. This is the new democracy in Ontario, under Liberals. My notes said to me today that New Democrats, due to the rules, aren't able to participate unless unanimous consent is given. Well, unanimous consent was given for 15% of the time, and I'm here holding down the fort today taking that 15% of the time on behalf of the seven New Democrats in this place. Now, the members are going to argue and say that's only fair, up to 20%. We know you're not going to give us party status. Trying to come to an agreement here, we've put forward a reasonable solution to this problem. We believe you should be getting party status when you get 15% of the vote. The number was arbitrarily picked back in 1999 by the then Tory government. We objected then, but finally an agreement was made because that's where they want—

Hon Mr Caplan: You supported it.

Ms Churley: Yes, we did, but it was because our proposal of four, five at the most, was rejected. I hope you end up over here. Given the way you're going and the promises you're breaking, you may very well. I've got to tell you that this is a complete disservice to democracy in this province. In fact, it's not in the Liberals' interest to have only a few minutes of New Democrats today, because we take a different position from these Tories; we do. Mostly, we support you on this. We'll rail against the promises you've broken, and we will rail against the fact that Gerry Phillips, your Management Board chair, and your corrections minister, Mr Kwinter, made it very clear that they knew there was going to be a big deficit. They made it very clear. We have it in the notes. They knew. I'm not saying all the members knew. I don't think all your members were told this; I would like to think not, because they were all out there, Mr Speaker, including you, making promises that they, I guess, thought they could keep, while some of the senior members of the then opposition knew they were not going to be able to keep those promises.

1700

So we will rail about that on and on because we think—I can't use the word, what I actually think about what happened, what Liberals said to get elected, Mr Speaker, but you did, and you got elected knowing that there was going to be a big deficit and you couldn't keep these promises. In this area, on the debate today around the tax credits for private schools, we agree with the Liberals. In fact, before the Liberals were speaking in one voice about this, New Democrats—there were a couple of Liberal members, as you will recall, who were standing up in support of giving taxpayers' dollars to private schools. You weren't all together. I'm glad finally you did, but it was New Democrats in opposition who steadfastly together opposed the Tory move to give public funds to private schools when we saw the demise, under the Tory government, of our great public education system. We have to rebuild that system. We can't afford to be giving money to private schools, so we support the government on that.

I feel very badly about some of the people who, even with an election coming up—I would say they shouldn't have done it, because they knew where the Liberals stood, they knew where we stood, and that there would be a very good chance it might be a different government. They went ahead and utilized the quickly put in place tax break that the Tories brought in just before the election. Perhaps there should be something worked out with those people, especially if they're lower income.

We believe, as New Democrats, that our public system can and should accommodate those families who need cultural education for their children. In fact, we have examples of that already, clear across the province. In my leader's riding—Mr Hampton—he has a large First Nations population. So there are accommodations within the public schools for these kids to get some cultural education.

It's the same thing in my riding. There's a First Nations school in the city, in Dundas school in my riding. It's great and it's paid for by the public system. But it's within that system, therefore abiding by all of the standards of the public system. There are other schools, schools like Contact, alternative schools for kids who are having a hard time coping within the existing education system, that are set up and funded under the public system. To say that it's not possible to help fund through the public system these certain cultural and other special needs—its actually been done, and can and should be improved upon. That's where New Democrats stand. So we support you on that. You've got Tories who don't support you on anything, frankly.

We're pretty upset about the broken promises. One of the major ones was a broken promise about improving and enhancing democracy. We feel, and I believe more than 15% of the population feels, that our viewpoint is an important one in this Legislature in terms of balance, that it's important that our voice be heard, particularly when day after day after day in question period—which has just become a complete farce. It's just a farce as we sit

here. I know the Liberal members when they stand up and ask their questions feel that it's insulting when we say it's fluff, but it is. That's not what democracy is supposed to be all about. Question period and debates in this House are supposed to be balanced, so that all viewpoints are heard so we can make the best possible decisions for all of the people of Ontario. We don't have that any more.

I've been in government and I've been in opposition. I see the pattern that emerges within this very broken system that we have, where ministers get involved in the bureaucracy and they're given their briefing notes. Very tough decisions have to get made in government. I know; I've been there. It's a lot easier, sitting in the opposition benches, to criticize. I know that full well. It's much, much harder to have to sit around that table and make hard decisions.

I also know what happens when backbenchers in government are given questions to ask the government of the day. They're not up asking hard-edge questions that the people need to hear, like that of my colleague today, the member for Nickel Belt, around funding for autistic children. We railed against the previous government's position on that, and we rail against this government. I will say to the government and I will say to those members who believe our position on this—and I believe there are many who support our position on full funding for autistic children over the age of six. They need us to be calling on the government day after day. They need the pressure there. They don't just need the government of the day—in fact, it's to the detriment of the people of Ontario, from my point of view, to have the only views you're hearing in opposition in this place mainly coming from Tories. I fundamentally disagree with their policies, and I think most of the Liberals do as well, but they're being pushed further and further to the right.

I will say again that as ministers and as some of the members who want to see more progressive policies put in place, as promised by the Liberals in the election, they're going to need to hear our voices. I have report after report after report just in the past few weeks of people coming forward wanting reinvestment in the environment, in conservation and efficiency, in violence against women. It goes on and on—that's just a few—where people are saying there is a huge social deficit. They're not happy hearing the Liberals, who have now come to power, saying things like, "We didn't know about the deficit. Now that we know about it"—it seems we're hearing things like—"we have to accelerate our agenda now." This is when it comes to hydro: "We were going to take those caps off. We weren't going to do it until 2006, but because of this deficit that we really didn't know about, we're going to have to accelerate that. We're going to have to do it sooner." Or we're hearing phrases like, "We have to stabilize our finances." My favourite one is the new terminology from some of the Liberals now around a new slogan for breaking what were called ironclad promises now being called "taking responsible action."

If you ask me; if you ask New Democrats; if you ask the parents of these autistic children; if you ask the parents and families of those 12,000 children who are waiting for mental health services; if you ask people in Walkerton, many of whom have ongoing, lifelong illnesses; if you ask people who are concerned about drinking water because of a report recently released showing that in many cases we don't know if our drinking water is safe or not; if you ask people who are eating meat, after the meat scandal; if you ask people now after the building collapsed here in Toronto what's more important to them, I think they're going to tell you that they want you to keep your promises and they want us to be in a position where we're reminding you day after day of those important promises that were made in a campaign, many of which have now been broken because of a deficit you say you didn't know about.

Now, Tories have their particular point of view, and that's reflected in their motion before us today. They know, as I know of course, that it's going to be voted down, and I think it should. I don't agree with the motion. I have concerns, as they do, about the retroactivity, particularly if low-income people went out there and borrowed money or are suffering as a result of that investment and are not going to now get what they thought they were investing in. Perhaps the government needs to look at—I see some puzzled frowns. I think the government needs to take a look at that and see if there's any undue hardship, because I think we would all agree that we don't want to see some people, through no fault of their own—perhaps they should have listened more carefully to campaign promises and waited. But I think the government would agree that there may be some hardship as a result.

I don't support this resolution before us today. I don't support most of the Tory positions on anything. I do support some of the Liberal positions. I support many of the campaign promises you made that are now being broken. I want to have the opportunity—I loved question period. I liked the days when I was able to get up and ask questions of the then government of the day. I don't have the opportunity to do that any more.

I know there's a proposal before us.

1710

Mr Norm Miller (Parry Sound-Muskoka): Democratic renewal.

Ms Churley: Pardon me?

Mr Miller: Democratic renewal.

Ms Churley: Democratic renewal.

I'm the critic now for our—I know you don't know who is the critic for what any more in the New Democratic Party, because it's not listed up there. We've got the list of the ministers and Tory critics on the Web site, but the New Democratic ones aren't. So let me tell you what I'm the critic for: environment. As the critic for the environment when the Tories sat over there, I was one of the people in the very early days who warned them that a Walkerton could happen, before it happened. Do you recall that?

It was even raised when Mr Harris, the then Premier, was interviewed at the Walkerton inquiry, by the head lawyer, that there were four or five warnings given to the government that something like that could happen. Two questions I asked in the Legislature were cited as pre-warnings that Walkerton could happen.

The government of the day was chastised for not listening to the opposition and for not listening to some others from outside, the then environmental commissioner and others, because it was very clear that with the kind of cuts and downloading and privatization that was happening, things were going to fall apart. Some of us could see it.

So I would say to the government members that it's important to have that voice on the other side, and you're not going to get it from the Tories. They're not going to be on their feet saying, "We want you to invest more money in hiring more meat inspectors," because they're the people who laid those people off in the first place, or "more building inspectors," because they're the people, because of their huge tax cuts, who laid them off in the first place, or "water inspectors, more nurses, and we want you to keep your promise of hiring"—what is it?—"8,000 new nurses." That's important. People voted for you because of those promises.

We want to be here, and you can rest assured that we will be here, in one form or another anyway, to make sure that you are held accountable to keep those promises. I think, if I look at some of my colleagues, my former opposition members here, you would want us to do that. You don't have strong opposition now—speaking of which, I must say that I find it passing strange and somewhat hilarious to hear Tories stand up and complain about the omnibus bill, the closure bill that the Liberals have imposed on this place, including this bill.

There are three bills and two substantive motions that the Tories are now starting to complain about. I want to remind them, as I called out earlier today, that they've been hoisted on their own petard because their House leader—I presume it was the House leader—got in bed with the Liberal House leader and made a deal.

Mr Richard Patten (Ottawa Centre): It must have been a big bed.

Ms Churley: That was a big event. I want to warn them: when you get in bed with the government House leader, you think you're all cozy and warm and things are going to work out OK. Then the next thing you know, you're lulled into sleep and you're pushed out on the cold floor in the middle of the night.

That's what happened here. You made this deal, you called it programming, and you did it without consulting with New Democrats because, after all, we don't have party status; we don't count in this place. It's the House leader, I believe, who said you almost had consensus. It's kind of like being almost pregnant. You can't be. You didn't have consensus, but because we don't have official party status, and that's the way things are being run around here now, which is why there's so much animosity and unkindness and nonsense in this place—there

always is, but it's worse than ever is because there's this attitude that both the parties can go away behind closed doors and make a deal.

This is called programming. Talk about doublespeak. What it really was, was a closure motion, the likes of which we've never seen in this Legislature, even under the Tories before: three different substantive bills and two substantive motions.

Mr Patten: It's been around since 1860.

Ms Churley: Yes, but in Britain. In Britain, let me tell you, when it was programmed, it was all parties agreeing. In this case, the New Democrats were left out and didn't agree. But now we've got government members standing up and complaining about this closure motion. They agreed to it.

Mr Patten: You wouldn't agree with anything.

Ms Churley: I'm just talking about the fact that they did agree to it and now they're complaining about it. I think they must have learned a lesson here. I think it's fine if we can all agree. That's the way this place is supposed to work, which is why we need to resolve this issue and get back to some kind of normalcy here, so that in certain areas we can agree to move the agenda forward.

I'm not supporting this resolution today, for the reasons I outlined. Thank you very much for this opportunity.

The Deputy Speaker: Further debate? The member from Guelph-Wellington.

Mrs Liz Sandals (Guelph-Wellington): Thank you, Mr Speaker. Let me congratulate you on your election as Deputy Speaker. It's very good to see you in the chair this afternoon.

When we heard from the member for Dufferin-Peel-Wellington-Grey, whose motion we're debating, he seemed to be asking two questions. He talked about whether the Liberal government is keeping its promises and then he asked whether we're obeying the law. I'd like to answer those two questions.

First of all, are we keeping our promises? This seems to be about our tax package that he's concerned about. I know certainly when I went door to door, I talked very clearly about getting rid of the private school tax credit. In fact, long before I even started going door to door, I was speaking out against the private school tax credit. When our leader, Mr McGuinty, was on the campaign trail, he spoke out very clearly about getting rid of the private school tax credit and reinvesting in public education. Even before the campaign started, immediately upon the announcement of the private school tax credit by the Tory government, our leader, Mr McGuinty, spoke out immediately against the private school tax credit and said that a Liberal government would get rid of it. We've been talking about getting rid of the private school tax credit ever since the day it was introduced. It was absolutely clear what we were going to do about the private school tax credit.

Why are we going to do that? The member from Toronto-Danforth has just very eloquently talked about

the value of public education and its ability to accommodate all children, regardless of their economic background, their social background, their ethnic background. We're the people who invest in special education, in public education. Public education invests in English as a second language. Public education invests in all children, and the member from Toronto-Danforth has just very eloquently laid out the argument in favour of public education. I must say, it therefore seems passing strange that her colleague, the member from Beaches-East York, just voted a few minutes ago in favour of keeping the private school tax credit in committee.

Ms Churley: Who did?

Mrs Sandals: The member from Beaches-East York. He did, in committee, a few minutes ago. I'm getting very confused about the NDP position on this because they also voted in favour of keeping the private school tax credit when we had first reading of the bill.

Ms Churley: No, that was first reading. We hadn't seen it yet.

Mrs Sandals: Now we've seen it, we've had second reading and it's in committee.

I believe the member from Toronto-Danforth when she makes her eloquent argument that that's what she truly believes. I believe my colleague in the NDP from Trinity-Spadina, who I also know passionately believes in getting rid of the private school tax credit. I must say I do think it's very strange that the NDP in committee would be voting that they should keep the private school tax credit.

However, we in the Liberal Party have been absolutely, totally clear on the subject of the private school tax credit. We have absolutely kept our promise to get rid of it and that's exactly what we're doing. What about the corporate tax cuts? When I was going door to door, I would hear over and over again, "I don't get enough home care. My kids' classes are too big." This just isn't working.

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Mr Ted McMeekin (Ancaster-Dundas-Flamborough-Aldershot): Did people ask about corporate tax cuts?

Mrs Sandals: No. In fact, what people said to me when I went door to door was that they understand that if we're going to fix health care, fix education, fix the environmental problems, and if we're going to reinvest in our electricity system to actually make it work, you can't give away the revenue base. You have to have money to pay for it. So we told people we were going to stop giving away corporate tax cuts, and do you know what? We did it. We've kept our promises. We've also kept our promise around getting rid of the education property tax credit for seniors. We've kept all of our promises. I want everyone out there to remember that we are keeping our promises.

Ms Laurel C. Broten (Etobicoke-Lakeshore): I'm pleased to rise today and have an opportunity to respond to the opposition day motion. Our friends across the House are saying that we should have a referendum on rolling back the Tory tax cut plan. We had a referendum,

and that was on October 2, and the results were very clear. Each and every day, as we went out to our various communities to talk about what changes we would make as a government, the priority issue that we talked about at every single doorstep, in every single schoolyard, was the fact that our current Premier, then the Leader of the Opposition, was committed to becoming the Premier of this province that would put public education first. That is a commitment I made to the people of my community in Etobicoke-Lakeshore. That is a commitment we are keeping. We are going to be a government that reinvests in public education because public education is the ladder of opportunity for all. That ladder of opportunity is one where each and every child, whether they come from rural Ontario, Etobicoke-Lakeshore, the Beaches or the north, deserves a good public education.

I want to talk to you a little bit about why public education is so important to me personally. This is a story that I shared with my own community during the campaign. The value of public, accessible education is one that is close to my heart. My grandmother raised 10 children. She did not have a lot of money, and she had a husband who left her in the early, early days. She was one of the first women who sought out child support. What she gave to those children was the ability to get a good education. Those 10 children became doctors, lawyers, engineers, teachers, social workers and labourers. In fact, one of her children was a predecessor—my uncle, Albert Roy, was a member of this very House many years ago. The value of public education and the opportunity that public education system gave my family is one I look at and say it got us where we are as a family today. My commitment to public education is one that is very close and dear to my heart.

Something that was very concrete on the campaign trail was our recognition of the need to reinvest in the public education system, that we were going to roll back the private school tax credit and the seniors' education property tax credit. We were clear to families who said to us on the campaign trail that they disagreed with us. We said, "If you disagree with us, then we're not the people for you, but let me be clear about what we are going to do." We were always clear that those were the steps we were going to take.

Our commitment to public education has been further highlighted as we've sat in the Legislature these last number of days. Despite the extremely serious financial situation that our province is in, with a \$5.6-billion deficit, we have found the money to reinvest in our public education system. We are making the commitments that we need to make in order to make sure that the system works for kids in our city schools: ESL classes, making sure that our new Canadians and the kids in our inner-city schools have the money that they need. We're proud of that fact because we know, like in my own family, public education is the great equalizer. It will allow all of those children to become whatever their families want them to be and reach the goals that they've set out for themselves.

I also want to talk about the fact that we were also clear on the campaign trail that we would roll back the corporate tax cut. As some of you in this House know, I came from the corporate world. My colleagues said to me, "You're not going to raise corporate taxes, are you?" I said, "We are going to roll back the most recent corporate tax cut." Yes, we are, because we need the money to reinvest in our public services. The people on Bay and King and wherever they are in the business world understand. They're the very people who are prepared to reinvest in those public services, because they themselves have used those public services. It's more important to them to make sure that their grandmother has a good long-term-care facility, that their child has a good education system and that we have an opportunity to reinvest in and re-strengthen our public education system. So I say to the those folks that they are responsible. I thank them for that, and I thank Ontarians for giving us the mandate in the referendum that we had on October 2 to do the good work that we intend to do and for allowing us to meet the commitments that we have made.

The Deputy Speaker: Further debate. The member for York South.

Mr Mario Sergio (York West): It's close. It's York West. It's just on the northern boundaries.

I join the debate on the motion put forward by the Leader of the Opposition, which is part of our democratic process. The Leader of the Opposition has chosen to introduce this motion, but unfortunately it fails to accomplish what perhaps the Leader of the Opposition was intending. In the few minutes that I have, I'll explain why it fails and does not deserve support.

We are just coming out of eight years of unabated attack on our wonderful institution. This requires leadership, it requires quick action and it requires a positive attitude. Dalton McGuinty and the Liberals, the new government, are just beginning to deliver on that. Why is that? It's because we have said what we are saying today and we are doing what we were saying during the election campaign.

We were asking one particular thing of all the candidates, and of course of our leader: We need change. Do you know what? The people of Ontario embraced that call for change. We are doing that today. I have to say, less than a month since we have taken possession of this wonderful House here and started to work on behalf of the people on Ontario, we have already delivered on a very large number of those promises. We have already done a lot of those things we said we would be doing for the people of Ontario. This is what the people of Ontario wanted us to do, and we are delivering on that. They want us to start repairing the damage of eight years of unabated attack, chaos, cuts and confrontation in all areas of our systems and those institutions that are very dear to everyone, to the people of Ontario, especially health care, education, the environment, clean air and clean water. Those are the things about which the people of Ontario said, "We want change, and we want you to deliver that change." I have to say that I'm very proud to be on this

side of the House with our leader, Dalton McGuinty, and a majority Liberal government. We are doing exactly what we said we would be doing, and we will continue to do that.

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What are some of those things that we said we would be doing and to which the people of Ontario said, "Yes, this is the change that we want to see"? Among many others, we have raised the minimum wage, which was untouched for many years. We have frozen tuition for universities. We have initiated new rent control so we can offer some assistance to the really needy. We have eliminated the private school tax credit, which we said we would and the people said, "You should." We must do it and we did it. We said we would freeze car insurance rates, and we have done that. We have begun the wonderful dialogue of meeting with the people to do better than what the previous government did. That is for all the people of Ontario.

We have said that we would roll back the corporate tax cuts and apply those in the most needy areas—that is, health care and education. We did that. We also said, yes, we'll raise tobacco taxes because it is an important area, especially for our health; not necessarily to raise taxes but it is for our health. We did that.

Are we being accused fairly of not delivering on those promises? Absolutely not. I believe we are entering an era of renewal, positive, of more confidence in this government, and this is what the people of Ontario want from their elected members. We are doing that today.

I think it's much more noble to say to our seniors, "You can go into a long-term-care home with the confidence that you will have a bed, that you will have assistance, that you will have care, that you will have a very clean environment," than to give another tax credit to those who don't need it. It's our responsibility to see that when our people say, "I need a hospital bed," that indeed you will have a hospital bed, that you will have a nurse, that you will have an emergency department that will receive you, that you don't have to be fearful that you may be redirected anywhere else in the city or, for that matter, anywhere else in the province.

There is much to say. It's a very important issue, and I want to give an opportunity to some other colleagues to respond to the motion that is on the floor today. Mr Speaker, I do thank you for the time that you have allowed. I want to say, congratulations on your appointment—so deserved.

Mr Lorenzo Berardinetti (Scarborough Southwest): I will be very brief. I will not be supporting the opposition day motion.

What I'm most concerned about is that they want to have a referendum. I recall in my municipal days, back in 1997, when the city of Scarborough, the former city of Toronto, the city of East York and the city of North York were forced to amalgamate. Those cities held referendums at that time, and an overwhelming majority—over 70%—said no to the amalgamation. Yet the Conservative government of the day went ahead, amalgamated Toronto

and basically, in my view, did something that was extremely detrimental to the former cities of Scarborough, East York etc.

So I don't think that the Conservatives can speak today and ask for a referendum when they've ignored past referendums that have been overwhelmingly in one direction. That's something that they should think about before they put forward something of this nature.

Mr McMeekin: I'm pleased to join the debate too. The opposition resolution talks about bending the law at whim. I want to suggest that they're insisting on too strict a paradox, to insist that somebody else do something that they themselves couldn't do. The taxpayer protection legislation was routinely broken by that government. That's no admission in any sense that we're doing that. In fact, we were quite clear, concise and unambiguous when we filed our record of tax plans with the appropriate authorities.

The member from Whitby talks about being worthy of trust. I find that particularly ironic coming from a finance minister who—you know, there are two kinds of attention deficit disorders. There's the medical definition, and then there's the attention deficit disorder we saw repeatedly practised by that government. They spent so little attention on the deficit that we've got a cumulative disorder and a mess on our hands.

In the throne speech, you may recall, there was some reference to building a three-storey house. It would be irresponsible to put the third storey on without putting the fire out in the basement. I think we had a more serious problem there. I think we had something gnawing away at the very foundation of our economic well-being: these tiny, terrible, Tory termites who were eating the foundation of our well-being. It was quite tragic.

The philosophy on that side of the House was what could perhaps most clearly be characterized as the Reagan-Bush trickle-down theory—

Mr Levac: Voodoo.

Mr McMeekin: Yes, déjà voodoo economics. I suppose trickle-down would work if there weren't so many giant sponges at the top. That's one of the problems that we've had with that government and their friends over there.

There's absolutely nothing wrong with tax cuts. As the mayor of the only municipality—another amalgamated municipality, deputy whip—in all of Ontario that had the privilege of leading a council that reduced local taxes an unprecedented six years in a row, I can tell you, I share your concern about that issue.

Tax cuts make sense if three conditions are met: first of all, if you can afford it—that's pretty simple; you don't buy a new car if you can't afford it—secondly, if it doesn't hurt, destroy or denigrate public services; thirdly, and I think it's as important as the first two, if it narrows the gap between the richest of us and the rest of us.

Mr Levac: What happened?

Mr McMeekin: It certainly didn't happen over there. The gap has grown. We've got a \$5.6-billion mess on our hands, even before we start talking about Pickering and

the energy kerfuffle that we're in. Public services in some sectors are simply in chaos. Read the series of articles on nursing home concerns across the province. If that doesn't break your heart—the shameful arrogance and waste of energy in not moving forward there.

I want to conclude in the last few seconds I have by talking about the private school tax credit. When I was elected here and kind of wet behind the ears, the then Minister of Education came over and said to me, "Have you any concerns?" I said, "Well, this UN stuff on discrimination concerns me. When I was here in 1975 to 1977, we used to have a practice of creating select committees. Why don't you do that? We can look at all sorts of things—the affiliated school model. We don't have to pit community against community. There are other ways that we can go, other models that work." She said, "That's a great idea, but we're not going to do that because we're not going there." Then a little later on we discovered, sadly, the willingness to pit community against community. I stand in my place to say that we were clear, concise and unambiguous, and you've lost the moral authority on that side of the House to dare to put this kind of motion in this House.

The Deputy Speaker: Further debate?

Mr Khalil Ramal (London-Fanshawe): First, Speaker, I don't think I congratulated you on your new position. Congratulations.

I'm honoured, always, to speak in this House, to bring the views of my riding of London-Fanshawe. Definitely, I'm going to vote against the opposition day motion of the Taxpayer Protection Act.

Interjection: I'm shocked.

Mr Ramal: You shouldn't be shocked, because cancelling the tax credit for private schools was part of our promises. When we campaigned, we promised the people of Ontario that when we got elected we were going to cancel that tax credit. Then, on October 2, when we formed the government, we came here to start implementing our promises, to try to execute our promises. One of them was the tax credit for private schools.

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I know a lot of people are going to be upset about it. It's going to hurt some people across the province. But during the election we told the people of this province we were going to cancel it. I hope they take caution and take this issue into consideration, especially when we have a deficit of close to \$6 billion. We cannot afford to give tax credits to corporations, to private schools or to any institution with money we don't have.

In the meantime, because we are taking this action, our friends from the Conservative side are accusing us of breaking our promises. It's not promise breaking; it's implementing our promises. We promised and we are delivering right now. We would like to see this money invested in our health care and in our public education.

Last week, our Minister of Education went and spent about \$112 million to assist various schools across the province.

Hon Mr Caplan: Invested.

Mr Ramal: Yes, invested in our public education system to help newcomers to this province integrate and benefit our economy. It's a good step toward assisting our public education system in this province.

I get a lot of complaints from my constituents. They come to me and talk about health care, about the collapsing of health care. We want to implement our promises. We want to assist health care. We want to assist our public system. We want to put it into the shape and condition to be able to deliver, to be able to help our kids, to prepare our kids, the future generation.

Interjection: That's good.

Mr Ramal: Excellent. A constituent came to me last Monday and talked to me. He had brought the Star about nursing homes. His name was Andrew York. I guess he doesn't mind me mentioning his name. He has an aunt in a group home. His aunt has been neglected. When he listened to our health minister, he was so impressed. He said, "This kind of government, this kind of ministry, has our support and I hope my aunt will be treated better under this government." I think she will.

I want to assure all the people in London-Fanshawe and across the province that this government and our commitment will be delivered on time.

Mr Miller: I'm very pleased to join in the debate this afternoon, in the short time I have available, to support the opposition motion that's really highlighting how the Liberal government said one thing to get elected, and now that they're elected, they're doing something very differently. They're breaking their promises. That's what we're really highlighting today. In particular, a couple of big promises: that they wouldn't increase taxes, that they were going to balance the budget. Those are a couple key promises.

I distinctly remember hearing now Premier McGuinty, when he was running in the election, many times say, "I won't lower your taxes, but I won't raise them either." I think the people of Ontario believed that. I thought he was being straightforward when he made that statement. But now that they're the government, they're definitely not living up to that promise.

They've been breaking their promises and blaming it on what they call, the inherited Tory deficit, the \$5.6 billion. We call it the bogus deficit because, as is becoming clear, if they really wanted to balance the budget, they could do so.

In today's Toronto Sun, that is highlighted. There's an article, "What's the real deficit?" It's highlighting the fact that John Williamson, the Ontario director of the Canadian Taxpayers Federation, has looked at the deficit situation and notes:

"The Liberal government has overplayed its hand' and 'the Liberals are making the province's fiscal situation appear worse than it actually is.' Williamson said new data show that Ontario revenues will be up \$3 billion over earlier estimates, and that 'any deficit this year above \$600 million is a Liberal deficit.'

"Williamson's explanation is clear and concise.

"First, he notes, when former provincial auditor Erik Peters prepared his estimate of a \$5.6-billion deficit this year for McGuinty," it was based on the earlier predictions of, I think, a 1.8% growth rate. "But they didn't take into account what is now expected to be a \$3-billion surge in government revenues this year, due both to an improving economy and more cash from Ottawa.

"Second, McGuinty said in his election platform last May that he could deal with what he described ... as a \$2-billion 'hidden' Tory deficit and still balance the books." That's \$5 billion. You add the \$3 billion and the \$2 billion together and that's \$5 billion. That leaves \$600 million, and we have four months left in the financial year to balance the budget.

The other key broken promise that I think really negatively affects northern Ontario, my area, is increasing taxes. You know that Ontario businesses will be paying 27% higher taxes than they would have had we been the government January 1, 2004. I think that is really key, and it's a bad thing. Businesses are making decisions every day about investment, about whether to increase production, and they take into account all the costs of doing business, whether it be their electricity price, which this government has put up 28%, or their taxes, which this government is putting up 28%, and all the various components of a business decision. I met with one company from my riding this morning that's going through that very process. I think it can do a lot of damage.

I don't have much time, so I'm going to leave some time for the member for York North to finish up. I'd just like to see this government honour at least two promises: the promise to not increase taxes and the promise to balance the budget. For that, I would like to support this resolution this afternoon. I'll leave the balance of the time to the member for York North.

Mrs Julia Munro (York North): Thank you very much for allowing me the opportunity to make a few closing remarks about the resolution we are debating here today. I want to make it clear that I will be supporting this resolution. In the time I have available, I'd like to concentrate on one particular aspect of this resolution, and that is the one that deals with the equity in education tax credit.

This tax credit is something that the families of 100,000 students in this province have understood to be available to them. Something that I think attention needs to be drawn to again is the fact that most of the families who would benefit from this are in fact those families of hard-working, modest income. Much has been made to suggest that it can be for people who would otherwise not need a tax credit, people who are of substantial means but, in fact, Statistics Canada demonstrates to us that, no, it is those of modest income.

The independent schools have a tradition of being able to provide opportunities for families where a special focus may be needed or required by the particular family. I think it is particularly unfortunate that this government has chosen to make it retroactive. Those even outside the

independent school community have recognized how unfair it is for those families who would have made financial decisions that now appear to have been made in error by the fact that this has now been made retroactive. It's also a very dangerous precedent for this government to set with regard to other possible sectors that might face this same kind of instability. I think it's most regrettable that, while this government promised to remove this tax credit, they did not indicate that they would be making it retroactive.

In the moments that remain, I think there are a couple of things that need to be addressed here in supporting this motion: first of all the danger of the retroactivity; the danger of setting a precedent, the instability that comes with that; and the fact that there have been broken promises, certainly in the area of the P3 hospitals and in the area of eliminating the hydro cap. These are all things that set a tenor for this government, one that suggests cynicism for the people of Ontario. I think this is a dangerous precedent for this government to embark on.

I would also suggest that it is most unfortunate that we are here today looking at a resolution that reveals that kind of potential for cynicism, when we look at voter apathy and the need to embark on government and public office with greater integrity. What we're looking at today, then, are promises that aren't being kept and a punitive kind of response to the equity in education act.

The Deputy Speaker: The time for debate has expired.

Mr Eves has moved opposition day number 1.

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

All those in favour will say "aye."

All those opposed will say "nay."

In my opinion, the nays have it.

Call in the members. This will be a 10-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1752 to 1802.

The Deputy Speaker: Will all those in favour please stand one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Ayes

Arnott, Ted	Hardeman, Ernie	Ouellette, Jerry J.
Baird, John R.	Hudak, Tim	Runciman, Robert W.
Barrett, Toby	Jackson, Cameron	Scott, Laurie
Chudleigh, Ted	Martiniuk, Gerry	Sterling, Norman W.
Dunlop, Garfield	Miller, Norm	Tascona, Joseph N.
Eves, Ernie	Munro, Julia	Wilson, Jim
Flaherty, Jim	O'Toole, John	Yakubuski, John

The Deputy Speaker: Will all those opposed please stand one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Nays

Agostino, Dominic	Flynn, Kevin Daniel	Oraziotti, David
Arthurs, Wayne	Fonseca, Peter	Parsons, Ernie
Bartolucci, Rick	Gerretsen, John	Patten, Richard
Bentley, Christopher	Gravelle, Michael	Peterson, Tim
Berardinetti, Lorenzo	Hoy, Pat	Phillips, Gerry
Bountrogiani, Marie	Jeffrey, Linda	Qaadri, Shafiq
Bradley, James J.	Kennedy, Gerard	Racco, Mario G.
Brotten, Laurel C.	Kular, Kuldip	Ramal, Khalil
Brown, Michael A.	Kwintar, Monte	Ramsay, David
Brownell, Jim	Lalonde, Jean-Marc	Ruprecht, Tony
Bryant, Michael	Leal, Jeff	Sandals, Liz
Cansfield, Donna H.	Levac, Dave	Sergio, Mario
Caplan, David	Marsales, Judy	Smith, Monique
Chambers, Mary Anne V.	Matthews, Deborah	Smitherman, George
Colle, Mike	Mauro, Bill	Sorbara, Greg
Cordiano, Joseph	McGuinty, Dalton	Takhar, Harinder S.
Craitor, Kim	McMeekin, Ted	Van Bommel, Maria
Delaney, Bob	McNeely, Phil	Watson, Jim
Di Cocco, Caroline	Meilleur, Madeleine	Wilkinson, John
Dombrowsky, Leona	Milloy, John	Wong, Tony C.
Duguid, Brad	Mitchell, Carol	Wynne, Kathleen O.
Duncan, Dwight	Mossop, Jennifer F.	Zimmer, David

Clerk of the House (Mr Claude L. DesRosiers): The ayes are 21; the nays are 66.

The Deputy Speaker: I declare the motion lost.

It being past 6 of the clock, this House is adjourned until 10 o'clock tomorrow morning.

The House adjourned at 1805.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO
ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Lieutenant Governor / Lieutenant-gouverneur: Hon / L'hon James K. Bartleman
Speaker / Président: Hon / L'hon Alvin Curling
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)	Halton	Chudleigh, Ted (PC)
Ancaster-Dundas- Flamborough-Aldershot	McMeekin, Ted (L)	Hamilton East / -Est	Agostino, Dominic (L)
Barrie-Simcoe-Bradford	Tascona, Joseph N. (PC) First Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Premier Vice-Président du Comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative	Hamilton Mountain	Bountrogianni, Hon / L'hon Marie (L) Minister of Children's Services, Minister of Citizenship and Immigration / ministre des Services à l'enfance, ministre des Affaires civiles et de l'Immigration
Beaches-East York / Beaches-York-Est	Prue, Michael (ND)	Hamilton West / -Ouest	Marsales, Judy (L)
Bramalea-Gore-Malton- Springdale	Kular, Kuldip (L)	Hastings-Frontenac-Lennox and Addington	Dombrowsky, Hon / L'hon Leona (L) Minister of the Environment / ministre de l'Environnement
Brampton Centre / -Centre	Jeffrey, Linda (L)	Huron-Bruce	Mitchell, Carol (L)
Brampton West-Mississauga / Brampton-Ouest-Mississauga	Dhillon, Vic (L)	Kenora-Rainy River	Hampton, Howard (ND)
Brant	Levac, Dave (L)	Kingston and the Islands / Kingston et les îles	Gerretsen, Hon / L'hon John (L) Minister of Municipal Affairs, minister responsible for seniors / ministre des Affaires municipales, ministre délégué aux Affaires des personnes âgées
Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound	Murdoch, Bill (PC)	Kitchener Centre / -Centre	Milloy, John (L)
Burlington	Jackson, Cameron (PC)	Kitchener-Waterloo	Witmer, Elizabeth (PC)
Cambridge	Martiniuk, Gerry (PC)	Lambton-Kent-Middlesex	Van Bommel, Maria (L)
Chatham-Kent Essex	Hoy, Pat (L)	Lanark-Carleton	Sterling, Norman W. (PC)
Davenport	Ruprecht, Tony (L)	Leeds-Grenville	Runciman, Robert W. (PC)
Don Valley East / -Est	Caplan, Hon / L'hon David (L) Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal, Deputy House Leader / ministre du Renouveau de l'infrastructure publique, leader parlementaire adjoint	London North Centre / London Centre-Nord	Matthews, Deborah (L)
Don Valley West / -Ouest	Wynne, Kathleen O. (L)	London West / -Ouest	Bentley, Hon / L'hon Christopher (L) Minister of Labour / ministre du Travail
Dufferin-Peel-Wellington- Grey	Eves, Ernie (PC) Leader of the opposition / chef de l'opposition	London-Fanshawe	Ramal, Khalil (L)
Durham	O'Toole, John (PC)	Markham	Wong, Tony C. (L)
Eglinton-Lawrence	Colle, Mike (L)	Mississauga Centre / -Centre	Takhar, Hon / L'hon Harinder S. (L) Minister of Transportation / ministre des Transports
Elgin-Middlesex-London	Peters, Hon / L'hon Steve (L) Minister of Agriculture and Food / ministre de l'Agriculture et de l'Alimentation	Mississauga East / -Est	Fonseca, Peter (L)
Erie-Lincoln	Hudak, Tim (PC)	Mississauga South / -Sud	Peterson, Tim (L)
Essex	Crozier, Bruce (L) Deputy Speaker, Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Vice-Président, Président du Comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative	Mississauga West / -Ouest	Delaney, Bob (L)
Etobicoke Centre / -Centre	Cansfield, Donna H. (L)	Nepean-Carleton	Baird, John R. (PC)
Etobicoke North / -Nord	Qaadri, Shafiq (L)	Niagara Centre / -Centre	Kormos, Peter (ND)
Etobicoke-Lakeshore	Brotten, Laurel C. (L)	Niagara Falls	Craiton, Kim (L)
Glengarry-Prescott-Russell	Lalonde, Jean-Marc (L)	Nickel Belt	Martel, Shelley (ND)
Guelph-Wellington	Sandals, Liz (L)	Nipissing	Smith, Monique (L)
Haldimand-Norfolk-Brant	Barrett, Toby (PC)	Northumberland	Rinaldi, Lou (L)
Haliburton-Victoria-Brock	Scott, Laurie (PC)	Oak Ridges	Klees, Frank (PC)
		Oakville	Flynn, Kevin Daniel (L)
		Oshawa	Ouellette, Jerry J. (PC)
		Ottawa Centre / -Centre	Patten, Richard (L)

Constituency Circonscription	Member/Party Député(e) / Parti	Constituency Circonscription	Member/Party Député(e) / Parti
Ottawa South / -Sud	McGuinty, Hon / L'hon Dalton (L) Premier and President of the Executive Council, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs / premier ministre et président du Conseil exécutif, ministre des Affaires intergouvernementales	Stormont-Dundas-Charlottenburgh	Brownell, Jim (L)
Ottawa West-Nepean / Ottawa-Ouest-Nepean	Watson, Hon / L'hon Jim (L) Minister of Consumer and Business Services / ministre des Services aux consommateurs et aux entreprises	Sudbury	Bartolucci, Hon / L'hon Rick (L) Minister of Northern Development and Mines / ministre du Développement du Nord et des Mines
Ottawa-Orléans	McNeely, Phil (L)	Thornhill	Racco, Mario G. (L)
Ottawa-Vanier	Meilleur, Hon / L'hon Madeleine (L) Minister of Culture, minister responsible for francophone affairs / ministre de la Culture, ministre déléguée aux Affaires francophones	Thunder Bay-Atikokan	Mauro, Bill (L)
Oxford	Hardeman, Ernie (PC)	Thunder Bay-Superior North / -Nord	Gravelle, Michael (L)
Parkdale-High Park	Kennedy, Hon / L'hon Gerard (L) Minister of Education / ministre de l'Éducation	Timiskaming-Cochrane	Ramsay, Hon / L'hon David (L) Minister of Natural Resources / ministre des Richesses naturelles
Parry Sound-Muskoka	Miller, Norm (PC)	Timmins-James Bay / Timmins-Baie James	Bisson, Gilles (ND)
Perth-Middlesex	Wilkinson, John (L)	Toronto Centre-Rosedale / Toronto-Centre-Rosedale	Smitherman, Hon / L'hon George (L) Minister of Health and Long-Term Care / ministre de la Santé et des Soins de longue durée
Peterborough	Leal, Jeff (L)	Toronto-Danforth	Churley, Marilyn (ND)
Pickering-Ajax-Uxbridge	Arthurs, Wayne (L)	Trinity-Spadina	Marchese, Rosario (ND)
Prince Edward-Hastings	Parsons, Ernie (L)	Vaughan-King-Aurora	Sorbara, Hon / L'hon Greg (L) Minister of Finance / ministre des Finances
Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke	Yakabuski, John (PC)	Waterloo-Wellington	Arnott, Ted (PC) First Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Premier Vice-Président du Comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
Sarnia-Lambton	Di Cocco, Caroline (L)	Whitby-Ajax	Flaherty, Jim (PC)
Sault Ste Marie	Oraziotti, David (L)	Willowdale	Zimmer, David (L)
Scarborough Centre / -Centre	Duguid, Brad (L)	Windsor West / -Ouest	Pupatello, Hon / L'hon Sandra (L) Minister of Community and Social Services, minister responsible for women's issues / ministre des Services sociaux et communautaires, ministre déléguée à la Condition féminine
Scarborough East / -Est	Chambers, Hon / L'hon Mary Anne V. (L) Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities / ministre de la Formation et des Collèges et Universités	Windsor-St Clair	Duncan, Hon / L'hon Dwight (L) Minister of Energy, Chair of Cabinet, Government House Leader / ministre de l'Énergie, président du Conseil des ministres, leader parlementaire du gouvernement
Scarborough Southwest / -Sud-Ouest	Berardinetti, Lorenzo (L)	York Centre / -Centre	Kwinter, Hon / L'hon Monte (L) Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services / ministre de la Sécurité communautaire et des Services correctionnels
Scarborough-Agincourt	Phillips, Hon / L'hon Gerry (L) Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet / président du Conseil de gestion du gouvernement	York North / -Nord	Munro, Julia (PC)
Scarborough-Rouge River	Curling, Hon / L'hon Alvin (L) Speaker / Président	York South-Weston / York-Sud-Weston	Cordiano, Hon / L'hon Joseph (L) Minister of Economic Development and Trade / ministre du Développement économique et du Commerce
Simcoe North / -Nord	Dunlop, Garfield (PC)	York West / -Ouest	Sergio, Mario (L)
Simcoe-Grey	Wilson, Jim (PC)		
St Catharines	Bradley, Hon / L'hon James J. (L) Minister of Tourism and Recreation / ministre du Tourisme et des Loisirs		
St Paul's	Bryant, Hon / L'hon Michael (L) Attorney General, minister responsible for native affairs, minister responsible for democratic renewal / procureur général, ministre délégué aux Affaires autochtones, ministre responsable du Renouveau démocratique		
Stoney Creek	Mossop, Jennifer F. (L)		

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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**Regulations and private bills /
Règlements et projets de loi d'intérêt privé**

Chair / Président: Tony C.Wong
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Khalil Ramal, Tony Ruprecht, Tony C.Wong
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