



Legislative Assembly
of Ontario

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de l'Ontario

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**Official Report
of Debates
(Hansard)**

**Journal
des débats
(Hansard)**

Tuesday 13 April 2004

Mardi 13 avril 2004

Speaker
Honourable Alvin Curling

Président
L'honorable Alvin Curling

Clerk
Claude L. DesRosiers

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Claude L. DesRosiers

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO

Tuesday 13 April 2004

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO

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*The House met at 1330.
Prayers.*

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

APPRENTICESHIP TRAINING

Ms Laurie Scott (Haliburton-Victoria-Brock): I rise today to make a statement on behalf of our caucus with regard to a press release which was just sent out. The release proudly announces just under \$18 million for Ontario's apprenticeship programs. It appears that the money is to go to the colleges for upgrading their classrooms and equipment. I would like to point out to the members present that although this may seem like a positive announcement, the previous government had done and was prepared to do much more with these programs.

Since 2000, the Progressive Conservative government had invested \$120 million to revitalize the apprenticeship system. This program included expansion of the Ontario youth apprenticeship program, a pre-apprenticeship program for high schools, a journeyperson training program, enhancement to the apprenticeship innovation fund and much more. As well, the 2003 budget included important initiatives like a new training model, which combined a college diploma and apprenticeship; \$5 million to launch the second round of TVOntario's lifelong learning challenge fund, to focus on apprenticeship trades; and a refundable apprenticeship tax credit to encourage Ontario businesses to hire trained apprentices.

It's one thing for the Premier and the minister to announce a small, one-time amount of funding for training and then fill a press release with empty platitudes about the importance of a skills-based economy. It is quite another to have a comprehensive plan for Ontario's apprentices, the system that trains them and lowers taxes for the businesses which need to hire them.

HOCKEY

Ms Laurel C. Broten (Etobicoke-Lakeshore): I rise today to speak to a matter of great importance to the people of Etobicoke-Lakeshore. Etobicoke has now, and always had, a great love for hockey. Etobicoke-Lakeshore is a community with one of the strongest hockey traditions in this province. The Faustina Sports Club, one of the oldest in Toronto, has been around since

1935. Hundreds of Etobicoke families spend the weekend at the hockey rink.

In Etobicoke, we also have a long history of hockey greats. Johnny Bower, who provided outstanding goaltending to the Leafs when they won four Stanley Cups, including the one in 1967, is a long-time Etobicoke resident and a member of the Etobicoke Sports Hall of Fame. Other members of the Etobicoke Sports Hall of Fame are Ken Dryden and Paul Henderson, two names with which hockey fans will surely be familiar. Current Leafs who have roots or have chosen to make their home in Etobicoke include Drake Berehowsky, Matt Stajan, Aki Berg, Tom Fitzgerald and assistant coach Rick Ley. And to top it off, the Lakeshore Lions Memorial Arena in Etobicoke-Lakeshore is the practice facility for the Toronto Maple Leafs.

Etobicoke-Lakeshore residents truly love our Leafs, so when the Leafs beat the Senators in the not-too-distant future, I will have Leafs flags at the ready for all the Senators fans to fly on their cars. I know all my Toronto colleagues will join me in a heartfelt, "Go, Leafs, go!"

HATE CRIMES

Mr Ted Arnott (Waterloo-Wellington): I'm asking all members to join me in condemning in the strongest possible terms an act of vandalism that occurred over Easter weekend. This act was terrible because it can only be interpreted as being anti-Semitic and racist.

As reported in the Kitchener-Waterloo Record, the National Post and the Globe and Mail, vandals attacked and knocked over 12 large headstones in the historic Beth Jacob cemetery located in the city of Kitchener. This act strikes a sickening chord for the Jewish community in our riding of Waterloo-Wellington and for the Jewish people everywhere who are listening to story after story of hateful vandalism, desecration, and recently even a fire-bombing—in Canada, a country known worldwide for the strength of our democracy, diversity and tolerance for people of all nations and creeds. Our freedoms and liberties depend on these principles. To keep them alive, we must never weaken our resolve to speak out against, eradicate and punish fully all hate crimes, those we know to be committed against people based on who they are or how they pray.

What made these acts particularly despicable is that they occurred during both Passover and Easter weekend, a time to celebrate hope and redemption for both Christians and Jews. Before coming to the House today, I

spoke with Gordon Strauss, president of the Beth Jacob synagogue. I told him how badly I felt about this and wished him and his community the best through this horror that we are enduring together. Let this statement and all actions we take contribute not to undue publicity for these cowardly acts but to condemning such acts by refusing to sit back while people are denigrated by crimes of hate and inhumanity.

FERRERO GROUP

Mr Dave Levac (Brant): I'm pleased to rise today to share with the House the very sweet fortune that has come to the city of Brantford in my riding of Brant.

On Thursday, the Ferrero Group announced that they are finalizing plans for their new manufacturing plant, to be located in Brantford. As one of the world leaders in confectionary products, Ferrero is known for making such sweets as Kinder Surprise, Ferrero Rocher, Tic Tacs and Nutella, to name just a few of their brand-name products. This is exciting news for those of us in Brantford who had been promoting the city with hopes of further economic development. My great, great thanks to all of the behind-the-scenes workers and staff, along with council. While the exact size and number of employees has not yet been confirmed, we know it's sizable. This new investment in Brantford is a welcome addition to the growing list of multinational corporations that have recently announced moves into the Brantford area.

The Ferrero Group's decision to locate its manufacturing plant in Brantford is a result of the company's assessment of their needs during development of a global chocolate industry. While the company is based in Italy and Luxembourg, it has expanded production lines to 16 locations worldwide. Brantford was chosen following an extensive North American site review process. We in Brantford are thrilled to be included in Ferrero's expansion plans.

Brantford is a city that has a great deal to offer corporations like the Ferrero Group that are looking for ways to grow and develop. I sincerely hope that other companies will come to see the potential that the riding of Brant offers to members of those companies and many others across the world.

I would like to take this opportunity to welcome the Ferrero Group to Brantford, thank them for recognizing our potential, and again say thanks for the hard work of all the backroom people who did an awful lot of work on our behalf.

1340

GENERAL MOTORS OF CANADA

Mr John O'Toole (Durham): I'm pleased to rise in the House today to congratulate General Motors of Canada on its many environmental initiatives. My Durham riding takes pride in being the birthplace of General Motors of Canada, with the original McLaughlin carriage being built in Tyrone and Enniskillen before Colonel Sam McLaughlin established General Motors in Oshawa.

Here are just a few points of interest concerning GM's environmental stewardship.

GM has reduced CO₂ emissions from its facilities by 35% since 1990. General Motors of Canada has won more Natural Resources Canada EnerGuide fuel efficiency awards than any other auto manufacturer. General Motors offers a wide range of alternative-fuel vehicles, including natural gas, E-85 ethanol and E-10 ethanol.

GM has been recognized for supporting the McLaughlin Bay Wildlife Preserve, located next to its corporate headquarters in Oshawa. The company has received awards from groups such as Durham Region Field Naturalists, Friends of the Second Marsh and the city of Oshawa.

GM's hybrid electric technology enables fuel economy improvements of up to 50% over conventional buses, while reducing emissions.

I'd like to extend my congratulations and the congratulations of this House to General Motors of Canada and its 22,000 personnel nationwide in their pursuit of environmental excellence.

RIDING OF NIPISSING

Ms Monique M. Smith (Nipissing): I rise today to speak of three great assets in my riding: the North Bay Rotary Club, the children's treatment centre and our just-retired mayor, Jack Burrows.

Just over two weeks ago, I attended a tribute dinner for Jack Burrows. Jack was the mayor for nine years and was active in public life for over 15. In November, he retired as mayor but agreed to be the honorary chair for the fundraising initiative for the children's treatment centre of North Bay.

The CTC is a new initiative in our region. It will be the 20th in the province. It was approved two years ago, and the steering committee has been working diligently since then. The executive director was hired in January, and the excitement is growing as we get closer to being able to provide integrated health services for the children of our community. It is a true community initiative.

The North Bay Rotary Club took on the challenge and has been fundraising for this initiative over the last year. On Friday, March 26, they hosted a tribute dinner for Jack Burrows, where they raised over \$20,000 for our new children's treatment centre.

I want to take this opportunity to congratulate and thank our Rotary Club for its great initiative and all the hard work it does in our area. I want to commit my support to the children's treatment centre and a commitment to work with them on the development of the program. And I want to join with my community in paying tribute to our former mayor. I just want to say, as did everyone in North Bay on that day, thanks, Jack.

NATIVE HOUSING

Mr Gilles Bisson (Timmins-James Bay): Mr Speaker, I ask for unanimous consent to give my statement.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Agreed? Agreed.

Mr Bisson: It was kind of tough to get it out of my own caucus, but I want to thank the rest of the House.

I want to take this opportunity to raise with members a very serious issue that's happening not only in our riding of Timmins-James Bay but certainly is happening in Kenora and a few other ridings across the north of the province, and that is the despicable situation of housing in native communities. As the ministers across the way know, as well as former Conservatives who were ministers and certainly myself and Mr Hampton, the member for Kenora, when it comes to taking care of our First Nations, this nation at times doesn't have a lot to be proud of, to put it bluntly.

As we travel into native communities across northern Ontario, we see substandard housing and a situation that's been perpetuated by years and years of underfunding by the federal government. I'm here today as a provincial member to try to suggest something new, that maybe the province should recognize that people who live in communities like Attawapiskat and others live in the province of Ontario and, as such, should get some attention—that means money—from the provincial government to assist with the desperate situation of housing in those communities.

You would know that last winter Global Television, along with CBC and others, came up to report on the conditions of housing in but one community, Attawapiskat. I want people to know two things: It's not just in Attawapiskat, but in many communities in northern reserves north of 50, and it's a situation that's intolerable. I'm calling on the government to work with us to try to find a way to address some provincial dollars toward a very serious issue in those communities so people can get the housing they deserve and need.

GOVERNMENT'S RECORD

Mr Tim Hudak (Erie-Lincoln): There was very interesting news as I awoke this morning and listened to CFRB and read my copy of the Toronto Sun: Premier Dalton McGuinty's approval rating—25%; in fact, a 75% disapproval rating for Premier McGuinty. The Sun article has the sub-headline "GTA survey finds Premier McGuinty floundering at the bottom of the pile in public approval." Premier McGuinty's honeymoon is shorter than that of Britney Spears and Jason Alexander, and a lot less enjoyable. In fact, only 2% of the population found the Premier's performance to be excellent. I guess they got hold of the finance minister in Vaughan to answer the phone as part of the survey.

Do you know what? It's no surprise that 75% of the population is giving the thumbs-down to Premier McGuinty in his first six months in office. This is no surprise; look at the long and growing list of broken promises: broke their promise on the Oak Ridges moraine; broke their promise to decrease auto insurance by 20%; broke their promise to freeze hydro rates; broke their promise on the extension of funding to those who

suffer from autism, among many others, all documented on promisebreakersclub.com. This Premier could beat Pinocchio in a nose-growing contest, hands down. No surprise, because we've seen a lack of vision, a lack of leadership and a lack of any ability whatsoever to keep promises. That explains your 75% McGuinty disapproval rating.

HATE CRIMES

Mr John Milloy (Kitchener Centre): I too rise in sadness and outrage today to condemn events that took place in Kitchener over the weekend. As members have heard, in acts disturbingly reminiscent of those that happened in Toronto several weeks ago, 12 gravestones in Kitchener's Beth Jacob cemetery were toppled. Although this has not been officially classified as a hate crime, it seems it is more than a crucial coincidence that a Jewish cemetery was targeted during the high holiday of Passover. I know the authorities are working hard to bring the vandals to justice.

Some of the targets of recent hate crimes in Ontario have even been Holocaust survivors. In my community, the son of two Holocaust survivors, whose parents are buried in Beth Jacob cemetery, has anonymously offered a reward for information leading to the arrest and conviction of the perpetrators.

These attacks have inspired Ontarians to stand together to condemn these acts of hatred and intolerance and to make it clear that an attack upon one group is an attack upon us all. I know I speak for all members of my community and this Legislature when I say that we denounce all hateful acts and stand behind the Jewish communities in Kitchener-Waterloo and across Ontario.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

EMPLOYMENT STANDARDS AMENDMENT ACT (FAMILY MEDICAL LEAVE), 2004 LOI DE 2004 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR LES NORMES D'EMPLOI (CONGÉ FAMILIAL POUR RAISON MÉDICALE)

Mr Bentley moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 56, An Act to amend the Employment Standards Act, 2000 in respect of family medical leave and other matters / Projet de loi 56, Loi modifiant la Loi de 2000 sur les normes d'emploi en ce qui concerne le congé familial pour raison médicale et d'autres questions.

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

Mr Bentley.

Hon Christopher Bentley (Minister of Labour): I'll defer my statement to ministerial statements.

1350

HEALTH INSURANCE
AMENDMENT ACT, 2004

LOI DE 2004 MODIFIANT LA LOI
SUR L'ASSURANCE-SANTÉ

Mrs Witmer moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 57, An Act to amend the Health Insurance Act to make various immunizations insured services / Projet de loi 57, Loi modifiant la Loi sur l'assurance-santé afin que diverses immunisations deviennent des services assurés.

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

Mrs Elizabeth Witmer (Kitchener-Waterloo): This bill amends the Health Insurance Act to provide that the administration of immunization against chicken pox and pneumococcal and meningococcal disease is covered by the Ontario health insurance plan. This bill takes it a step further to provide for immunization against not just meningitis C, but also chicken pox and pneumococcal disease. As we know, the National Advisory Committee on Immunization has recommended that all children, excluding those with specific allergies, receive these immunizations. Some provinces already cover the cost of these vaccines. However, in our province, parents must pay out of their own pocket.

I believe it's important that all children in this province have access to these vaccines. I believe that's an important principle of medicare. This is an opportunity for the government to keep its promise to parents and children to provide chicken pox and meningitis vaccines to all children who wish it.

MOTIONS

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS

Hon Dwight Duncan (Minister of Energy, Government House Leader): Mr Speaker, I believe we have unanimous consent to put forward a motion without notice regarding private members' public business.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Is it agreed? Agreed.

Hon Mr Duncan: I move that notwithstanding standing order 96(d), the following change be made to the ballot list of private members' public business: Mr Peterson and Mr Leal exchange places in order of precedence such that Mr Peterson assumes ballot item 14 and Mr Leal assumes ballot item 11.

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

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY
AND RESPONSES

FAMILY MEDICAL LEAVE

CONGÉ FAMILIAL
POUR RAISON MÉDICALE

Hon Christopher Bentley (Minister of Labour): Today I had the privilege of introducing An Act to amend the Employment Standards Act, 2000 in respect of family medical leave and other matters. As a government we are delivering positive change for Ontario families, employees and employers. This bill, if passed, would provide up to eight weeks of job-protected, unpaid time off work for those taking care of seriously ill family members.

Years ago we made a decision, as a society, to be with people during the happy times, through maternity and parental leave. This is a statement that we are prepared to be there to support people in the difficult times at the end of life. That is why we have introduced this legislation to protect people's jobs while they care for a gravely ill member.

On ne devrait pas avoir à choisir entre perdre son emploi et demeurer au chevet de son père, de sa mère ou de son enfant qui se meurt. Une société humaine et bienveillante n'imposerait pas un tel choix, et en tout cas ce gouvernement ne le fera pas.

Instead, Mr Speaker, we are asking members of this House to pass legislation which would give working people the ability to take up to eight weeks from their jobs to help their son or daughter, their mother or father or their spouse through the last days of life.

Other amendments contained in this bill would reflect the existing law of Ontario. The amendments would ensure that provisions in the Employment Standards Act, 2000, be written to reflect the fact that they apply to people in a same-sex relationship, whether married or common-law.

The health of the people of Ontario is our most precious resource. We share responsibility to protect our citizens from harm and to care for them in time of need. When families take on the responsibility of becoming caregivers, we owe them our support.

It is clear that an aging population and significantly increasing workplace demands have contributed to high levels of employee stress due to work-family conflict. As a government that cares about people, we are committed to looking after the needs of Ontario families.

A recent Ipsos-Reid poll found that patient care is a growing concern, with almost one third, 32%, of Canadian adults now responsible for the care of older relatives. Dependant care responsibilities can constitute a major time commitment for many workers. This time commitment becomes even greater should the dependent family member become seriously ill. Most of our work-life schedules do not include the additional time to provide the necessary care and support for seriously ill

dependants, which might range from a few days off to arrange for care to several weeks off to be with a loved one who is dying.

To make this time, employees must make a very difficult choice: do their job or provide the care. This is an impossible choice, and the stress of it shows. Reports indicate that employees forced to make the choice are twice as likely to miss work because they are physically or emotionally fatigued. They're 13 times more likely to miss three or more days of work in a six-month period, trying to care for dependants.

That is not all. More than 40% of employees caring for a seriously ill family member have had to quit their job. One quarter of them lost all or most of their savings. This is simply wrong. This government does not believe that anyone should lose their job because they are caring for a parent or child who is dying. Unfortunately, that is exactly what has been happening.

This bill will help caregiving employees by protecting their job, supporting the work-life balance they're struggling to achieve and relieving stress. That is what a society should do.

So what of Ontario's businesses and their needs? The stress borne by employees translates into a cost to employers and businesses. It is a cost not often appreciated; however, it is a fact. Employees making the impossible choice are less productive. They're often forced by circumstance into unplanned absences. When employees are forced to quit their job, the employers lose their skills, training and experience as well as their work.

The costs to businesses are massive. The direct costs of absenteeism alone, due to high levels of caregiver stress, have been estimated to be over \$1 billion per year in Canada. The indirect costs are an additional \$1 billion to \$2 billion per year.

Workplaces are better off when employees can take time off and come back to work able to focus once again on their job and not a personal crisis. The inescapable conclusion is that by relieving caregiver stress, we would reduce the cost to businesses and make workplaces more productive. This bill is good for employees and employers.

What of those who need the care? The bill would help to support the dignity of those in the last stages of life. Palliative care studies indicate that more than three quarters, 80%, of Canadians would prefer to spend their last days at home and not in a hospital or other institution, and yet only one quarter are actually able to do so. The availability of care from family members will allow many to remain in familiar surroundings for much longer. They will have the comfort and support of those dearest to them at the time when they need it most.

It goes without saying that the availability of family medical leave will support our existing health care services. In some cases, it might reduce the demand for those services.

This government is committed to improving the quality of life of the people of Ontario. The legislation that is before us today would provide support to families when

they need it most. It would strengthen the working relationship between employers and employees, making the workplace more productive. And it would provide comfort to people in their last days of life.

This is what government should do. This legislation is good for those in need, good for families, good for employees and good for businesses. This legislation is the right thing to do for the people of Ontario.

1400

Mrs Elizabeth Witmer (Kitchener-Waterloo): I'd like to respond to the statement that has just been made by the Minister of Labour.

First, I would like to point out that the promise was to help parents and others. It didn't seem to restrict it to what it is being restricted to in this new act that's being introduced today. We learn in this new act, which I will acknowledge is a good first step, that individuals are going to be allowed to take time off to support their family. However, we learn now that in the plan that's been put forward by the minister, it only applies in cases of family members who are critically ill, or, stated another way, an individual who has a serious medical condition, with a significant risk of death occurring within a period of 26 weeks or such shorter period as may be prescribed.

It does not apply to other caregivers who obviously wish to be with family members during times of crisis, crises which will not result in death but obviously times when people are seriously ill. In that respect, I think the government has not fulfilled their promise to provide family medical leave for families and individuals who are going through that difficult period of providing care for loved ones who are ill. So this bill is going partway.

This bill also does not provide these individuals who are going to take time off with the support and resources they require during this period. I would remind the Speaker that in our 2003 budget, we proposed improved tax support for people with disabilities and for family caregivers. We know that people who look after individuals with disabilities, and caregivers, have additional costs. We also know that the Ontario tax system already recognizes their reduced ability to pay taxes through several non-refundable tax credits for people with disabilities and individuals caring for disabled or infirm family members.

Three enhancements were proposed to these credits which would have become effective January 1, 2003. First of all, our budget proposed to increase the underlying amounts for the disability credit, the caregiver credit, the infirm dependant credit and the disability credit supplement for children with severe disabilities to \$6,637. Second, our budget proposed to expand the caregiver credit and the infirm dependant credit to include spouses or common-law partners who are dependent by reason of a mental or physical infirmity, and to provide support to more caregivers living apart from dependent relatives. Third, our budget proposed that both the caregiver credit and the infirm dependant credit be reduced when the dependant's net income reaches

\$13,000. Currently, the caregiver credit is eliminated at a different level.

Taken together, all of these improvements to support those individuals who are looking after people with disabilities, and the family caregivers, would have provided an estimated \$50 million in benefits to about 165,000 people in Ontario. This bill, although it does allow people to take some time off—again, it's limited to eight weeks even though the individual who is critically ill and dying may live beyond that time period—doesn't go far enough. There is no support here for parents of autistic children who are caregivers. There's no support here for parents of severely disabled children who have special needs. There is no support here to support the developmentally disabled. What about family caregivers who need to look after parents during times of serious illness? They're not allowed to take time off. They can only take time off if the parents are dying.

Again, this bill is one step forward, but certainly this government needs to do far more for Ontarians than this bill proposes. Our people in this province deserve more than what is in this bill.

Mr Peter Kormos (Niagara Centre): I've read the bill. The New Democrats are eager to participate in the debate on second reading and eager to see the bill go to committee. We're particularly eager to see the bill analyzed from the point of view of thousands and thousands of Ontarians out there who find themselves in tragic but real-life situations and who, as a result of today's announcement, may believe they have some respite as a result of this legislation, should it pass.

But some things jump out, and some things cry out for immediate commentary. One, of course, is the observation, already made, that this applies to family members of a person whose health practitioner certifies is at significant risk of death. I suppose one would expect any family member to have some freedom from the demands of their workplace to attend to and with a family member who is in the final weeks or days. But one has to be able to afford to do it. You see, one can only avail themselves of a leave of absence if their economic situation makes that financially possible.

I'm thinking of a woman I know—I know her because I see her from time to time. She works as a chambermaid in Niagara Falls hotels during the day, and in the evening she works at another hotel where she's a server in the dining room. She works 16 hours a day at two different jobs. I don't know of any tragic situation involving her family members, but should one happen she would be hard pressed to afford to take even a week's leave of absence, never mind two, three, four or five.

I'm thinking of the single mom I've talked about before. I see her often because she works at the gas bar, and I see her as well because she also works at the Avondale—two different locations. Again, she's working at two jobs and raising her kids. Should one of those kids fall deathly ill, God forbid, this legislation would be of no value to her, because financially it would be im-

possible for her to forfeit even one week's pay, never mind eight.

I note that this is leave in addition to leaves that are granted under section 50, under somewhat different circumstances, but I also note that this legislation speaks to a crisis in our community, in our province and in our society about the adequacy of health care.

I, like perhaps so many of you, recall travelling to various places in the world over the last 10, 15 or 20 years. I recall my initial shock in Third World countries at seeing families literally camped out at the hospital with their family members—you know, moms or grandmothers setting up little cooking stoves, and family members being there to cook and prepare food for their family and remove dressings and clean them. I found that shocking. Yet as I visit hospitals and other health care places, just like you, I find that increasingly happening in this country.

One of the biggest single issues in our constituency offices for over eight years now has been the increasing inadequacy of home care support. It does little good to tell a family member, "You have a right to leave your job for one, two, three, four or five weeks," when the real issue is the inadequacy of home care. The real issue is the chronic and ongoing understaffing of nursing and, quite frankly, of all health professionals in our hospitals that makes it mandatory that family members—if a family member is going to receive an adequate level of health care, it's imperative that family members be there participating in it.

The bill is going to get an honest hearing and a legitimate, active and enthusiastic participation in the debate of it by New Democrats. But we're also going to ask this Legislature to consider what questions the bill legitimately asks. Those questions are about the inadequacy of health services and of health care as it exists right now: the lack of investment, the lack of real response by this government to Romanow, the chronic and ongoing understaffing and underfunding of home care, and the inadequacy of wages for so many people out there that makes it impossible for them to take advantage of leaves of absence because it's financially, monetarily, impossible for them to do that.

1410

ORAL QUESTIONS

TAXATION

Mr Ernie Eves (Leader of the Opposition): To the Premier, do you support and agree with the musings of your Minister of Health and your Minister of Finance that meals under \$4 should be taxed in the province of Ontario?

Hon Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs): I can tell you that we are working as hard as we possibly can on a number of fronts with respect to how we're going to address the substantial

deficit left to us by the previous government. In addition to that, we have some very real concerns about rising health care costs, which have been rising dramatically during the course of the past several years, approaching 8%, 9% and 10%. We have a real concern about childhood obesity. And again, as I said, we have a concern about the deficit. So we feel a responsibility to speak to a variety of issues and to consider a number of possibilities.

Mr Eves: I take it from the Premier's rather lengthy response that he does support the musings of his Minister of Health and his Minister of Finance.

Do you not understand that you are talking about raising a tax, putting a tax on meals under \$4 on the most vulnerable in our society, on modest-income earners, those on social assistance and low-income seniors? Yet you seem to be determined to do it. Why?

Hon Mr McGuinty: I appreciate the Leader of the Opposition's desire to stand up for the vulnerable in Ontario, but where was he when he stood as the Minister of Finance on this side of the House and cut welfare rates by 22%? I am proud to say that in our short time in office, we have already raised the minimum wage, we have established a rent bank for those who are finding difficulty making rent payments, and we have begun to invest, for the first time in eight and a half years, in affordable housing. He cannot stand and be seen to lecture us when it comes to standing up for the vulnerable in Ontario.

Mr Eves: The Premier neglects to mention a few small, little subjects, like the fact that when you went through with your little plan to exempt those people, to raise the minimum wage, you forgot to exempt them from the Ontario tax reduction benefit. So you're giving on one hand and your Minister of Finance is taking away even more money than you gave them on the other hand. It's a shell game. You are hurting the most vulnerable people in society. You are taxing them more.

We completely removed over 800,000 people, the most modest-income Ontarians, from the tax rolls in the province. We'll wait and see what you do during your term of office.

To the Premier, are you telling us today that you are going to again break your taxpayer protection promise of September 11 last year that "I, Dalton McGuinty, leader of the Liberal Party of Ontario, promise that if my party is elected as the next government, I will not raise taxes or implement any new taxes without the explicit consent of Ontario voters"?

Hon Mr McGuinty: I assume the Leader of the Opposition is asking me about a piece of legislation which he, in government, contravened; I assume that's the one that they're talking about, just so we're very clear.

Let me say that we are working very diligently to put together a progressive, balanced budget that will achieve, as its end result, to demonstrate our competence when it comes to managing the fiscal issues of the day, that demonstrates we are compassionate when it comes to

looking out for our most vulnerable and, finally, that clearly demonstrates we have a hopeful plan that will set this government on the right course, that will bring us continuing and sustained prosperity, that we will live within our means, that we will make ever-growing investments in health care and education, and the people of Ontario will see real, measurable results at the end of our first term.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): New question. The member for Whitby-Ajax.

Mr Jim Flaherty (Whitby-Ajax): My question is for the Premier. You promised to hold the line on taxes, and now you're not satisfied with going after the dollars of the people of Ontario but you want to go after the loonies and toonies of the people of Ontario.

The people of Ontario already pay an extraordinary level of taxes. On your own estimates they're paying \$18.6 billion this year in personal income tax and \$14.6 billion this year in retail sales tax, and you're going to take more from them. On your own estimates, in a few years you're going to go up to \$23 billion more than that in income tax and more than \$17 billion in retail sales tax.

You promised to hold the line on taxes, and now you're on a spending spree in Ontario. Now you want to take money from seniors and students. We know that 84% of the cafeteria sales in our schools are meals under \$4. Premier, will you confirm that there will not be a soup-and-sandwich tax on the people of Ontario to satisfy your apparently insatiable appetite for taxation?

Hon Mr McGuinty: Let me thank the member opposite for the question, because it gives me an opportunity to distinguish us on this side of the House and the approach we bring when it comes to providing good government to the people of Ontario, and those on the other side of the House. I will not apologize for the revenues we receive from the people of Ontario. What we intend to do, rather than denigrate government day in and day out and castigate our public servants, is make the case for government day in and day out and deliver quality for the money we're receiving from the people of Ontario.

Mr Flaherty: We know you love government, and we know you love spending. You've increased spending in this province by at least \$2.4 billion in less than six months, and that's why you have to tax as much as you are. That's why personal income tax is where it is, that's why retail sales tax is where it is and that's why now you even go after meals costing \$4 or less in the province of Ontario. You've gone on a spending spree, and now you're going after the poorest: the students, the seniors, the people who eat in coffee shops in Ontario. What steps have you taken—you're the government—to control spending in Ontario during your six months?

Hon Mr McGuinty: I am delighted to be able to speak to this matter. Let me begin a lengthy list with only three particular items: In the first case, we are moving to get rid of expensive consultants who were hired by the previous government so that we can get value for the

people of Ontario. We have introduced a law—to our knowledge the first of its kind in North America, if not the world—that will ban the use of taxpayer dollars on partisan, political advertising. Finally, we're going directly to the motherlode—I'm talking about OPG and Hydro One. We're going to bring transparency and sunlight into those contracts, so the people of Ontario understand that we're bringing to them, for the first time in a long time, accountable government.

1420

Mr Flaherty: You promised that you would balance the budget. You promised that you would hold the line on taxes. Instead, you've increased spending by more than \$2 billion in less than six months.

Now, just so the people of Ontario can know what to expect from your big-taxing, big-spending government, will you produce the report? You asked the public service in Ontario to produce a report on the cost of each one of your 231 promises. Will you produce the report so that when the people of Ontario are sitting in their coffee shop trying to choke down a coffee and a soup and a sandwich, they can see what your plans are going to cost them as they go out year after year after year? Will you produce the report so that people can see it?

Hon Mr McGuinty: Speaking of meals, I'm sure that struggling Ontarians find this defence of their cause by this party all too much to stomach. For eight and a half years, they failed to stand up for those Ontarians who are struggling day in and day out to get ahead.

I am proud to say that our platform was reviewed, supported and endorsed by a variety of economic experts. We put those numbers out for the people of Ontario to see during the course of the election. We were upfront with them when it came to our financial plans. What they terribly regret is the fact that this former government was not upfront with them when it came to the situation of our finances in the province of Ontario. We intend to continue bringing transparency and honesty to the management of the people's finances.

The Speaker: Member from Kenora-Rainy River.

Mr Howard Hampton (Kenora-Rainy River): My question is for the Premier. I want to ask why he's going after the lowest-income Ontarians. Whether it's increasing hydro rates, skyrocketing auto insurance premiums or property taxes that are going through the roof, your government is picking the pockets of ordinary Ontarians.

Now your government says that you need to tax meals that cost under \$4. Premier, 95% of all the meals sold in our hospital cafeterias are for under \$4; 86% of the meals sold in our colleges, our schools and our universities are for under \$4. Why are you hiking a tax that will hit the lowest-income people the hardest?

Hon Mr McGuinty: I want to say to the leader of the NDP that I'm not about to speculate on what may or may not be in the budget, but I'm very pleased to take the opportunity to talk about some of the things we are doing for our most vulnerable in a very short period of time.

As I said just a few moments ago, we have increased the minimum wage. We have established a rent bank.

We've established an emergency fund to help those vulnerable people who may have difficulty with the new responsible hydro-pricing regime. We have frozen tuition in the province of Ontario for two years. My understanding is that tuition went up by some 53% under the NDP government. We are standing up for vulnerable people in the province of Ontario.

Mr Hampton: I did not hear a denial, so let me try again. We're not talking about junk food and we're not talking about expensive meals. We're talking about the basic meals that a lot of people across Ontario try to exist on: soup and a sandwich, milk and a sandwich. Now your Minister of Finance says, "Oh, we're going to tax that."

Individuals with incomes of \$100,000 a year got a 35% tax reduction from the former government, but I don't see you going after them; I don't see you talking about even restoring some of that tax. Instead, what I hear is that you're going to hike taxes that affect the lowest-income people. If it's not true, then stand in your place and categorically tell us now that you are not going to hike a tax on meals that cost less than \$4.

Hon Mr McGuinty: Again, I'm not going to speculate as to whether or not a particular provision is going to be found within the budget.

But I can say, generally speaking, as a characteristic of our budget, it will reflect our values as Liberals. It will reflect the fact that we are committed to Ontario's most vulnerable. It will reflect the fact that we are dedicating ourselves to ensuring that those people who find themselves up against it get every opportunity that they need to succeed in the province of Ontario.

The Speaker: New question.

Mr Hampton: Premier, where is your sense of fairness? Here is the reality: auto insurance premiums up 20%; for many people, hydro rates up 20%; transit fees in many places are going up; property taxes are going up; and now, you say, an 8% tax on the most basic meal that people could buy. At the same time, you promised that you were going to end the clawback of the national child tax benefit, which would restore at least \$1,400 a year to the incomes of poor families with children, but you're not. You're going to hike the taxes, and you're not going to end the clawback.

Where is your sense of fairness here? Where is your sense of what's reasonable for the lowest-income people in Ontario?

Hon Mr McGuinty: Again, if we want to compare and contrast, the NDP government raised tuition fees by 53%; we're freezing them for two years. Hydro rates went up some 40% under the NDP government; we understand some of the difficulties involved with raising hydro rates, and that's why we've created an emergency fund to help our most vulnerable. I think that speaks volumes about the difference between the approach that we're bringing to assisting Ontario's most vulnerable and the approach brought by my friends in the NDP.

Mr Hampton: There are 390,000 children in this province living in poverty. Sue Cox of the Daily Bread Food Bank says thousands of families would not have to

use the food bank if the clawback of the national child tax benefit were rescinded—in other words, if you gave that money to the families who need it. The only promise you seem to be keen on keeping, though, is your promise to the Canadian Taxpayers Federation. You need to remember your promise to children.

Will you do two things: end the clawback of the national child benefit and state categorically that you're not going to tax the meals of the lowest-income people in the province? Here's your chance. Say it and do it.

Hon Mr McGuinty: Now I know I'm in government. The Conservatives are accusing me of breaking the Taxpayer Protection Act and the NDP are accusing me of not being prepared to break the Taxpayer Protection Act.

I appreciate the advice. I will take it as constructive advice offered by the leader of the NDP with respect to the benefits available for Ontario children growing up in poverty and his concern about the price of low-cost meals. I will carefully consider that advice as we put together our budget. I can assure you that this budget will, through its details, reflect our concern for and our desire to help Ontario's most vulnerable citizens.

The Speaker: New question.

Mr Tim Hudak (Erie-Lincoln): A question to the Premier: Your government has floated a plan to increase retail sales tax from 0% to 8% on meals under \$4. In your opinion, is that a tax increase?

Hon Mr McGuinty: I know the Minister of Finance would like to speak to this.

Hon Greg Sorbara (Minister of Finance): I just want to make it clear to the members of the House that today is the first day of the campaign of the Ontario Restaurant Association talking about a tax on meals under \$4. I met with the restaurant association and representatives from McDonald's and Tim Hortons. They advised me of the campaign. They were concerned that such a tax would have an impact on the profitability of their businesses. I just want to say to my friend from Erie-Lincoln that it would be entirely inappropriate to comment on any measure that might or might not appear in the budget when it's presented later on in the spring-time.

1430

Mr Hudak: That was just a straight question: whether this would constitute a tax increase or not.

In today's Toronto Sun, in an article entitled "GTA survey finds Premier McGuinty floundering at the bottom of the pile in public approval," they report that in fact a mere 25% of those surveyed approved of that leadership. Let me make a suggestion: Your inability to answer a simple yes-or-no question, if that constitutes a tax increase, may be one of the reasons why you're at 25% in the polls. Let me also suggest that you are at 25% in the polls, Mr Premier, because you consistently break your campaign promises.

The Premier was in TV ads, spending millions of dollars, saying to Ontarians, "I will not increase your taxes." Since coming to office, he has said repeatedly, "I will not raise your taxes." He is the leader of the Liberal

Party; he can say no. Why don't you just say no to this new tax increase, or are you getting ready to take on Pinocchio in a nose-growing contest?

Hon Mr Sorbara: Mr Speaker, I'm not recommending to you that you make the venerable Pinocchio something that is out of order in this House, notwithstanding the remarks of my friend from Erie-Lincoln. I just want to say to him, and I want to make it very clear, that a week ago I was advised that this campaign by the Ontario Restaurant Association would be mounted today. I'm impressed that every single member of the opposition has got on that bandwagon and related their lead questions to that campaign.

I, as Minister of Finance, have said absolutely nothing about the possibility of taxing meals under \$4. I would note that in Canada we are one of only three provinces that does not tax meals under \$4. The taxation regimes around Canada are as varied as the landscape itself. I simply want to repeat, no matter how many times they ask the question, that we are not prepared to make budget announcements before budget day.

FAMILY MEDICAL LEAVE

Mr Shafiq Qaadri (Etobicoke North): My question is for the Minister of Labour, the Honourable Chris Bentley. In today's society, many people find themselves in a position where they are not only caring for young children but also for aging parents. This puts incredible stress on the working people caught in the middle. In addition to holding down a job and building a career and a future for their families, many people want to be there in order to care for gravely ill family members near the end of their lives. Minister, my question is this: What is the government of Ontario doing to help families care for dying family members and to alleviate the stress the situation puts on families?

Hon Christopher Bentley (Minister of Labour): The member for Etobicoke North raises a very important point, and a timely one. Many years ago, we as a society decided to be with people during the happy times, with maternity and parental leave. Today, with the introduction of amendments to the Employment Standards Act, we made a decision as a government to ask this House to be with people at the difficult times of life, at the end of life. With the bill, if passed, we are going to provide up to eight weeks of unpaid but job-protected leave so that family members can be with a gravely ill dependant or parent—an extremely important, significant social advance which recognizes the very points raised so appropriately by the member for Etobicoke North.

Mr Qaadri: Minister, will this initiative present certain cost issues for business? For example, I assume that small employers would have a difficult time coping with the absence of an employee. Are small businesses also expected to provide job-protected leave for employees?

Hon Mr Bentley: Once again, this legislation is the right thing to do, and responsible businesses recognize

that. The costs to businesses from absences and caregiver stress have been estimated to be upwards of \$1 billion in direct costs and almost \$2 billion in indirect costs. Businesses understand costs associated with the need for workers to give care.

This legislation will in fact benefit business in the long term, because it enables employers and employees to better manage, to recognize the cost. It will ensure that the 40% of workers who are forced to quit their jobs because of the stresses of providing care will not be lost to businesses. Businesses will not lose their work, they'll not lose their skills, they'll not lose their knowledge, they'll not lose their experience. In fact, this legislation will help businesses.

BORDER SECURITY

Mr Robert W. Runciman (Leeds-Grenville): I have a question for the Premier. Last week, Ontarians were shocked to learn that Canada's confessed first family of terrorism, the Khadr, received unprecedented assistance from the federal government to return to Ontario.

While we appreciate that these matters generally lie within federal jurisdiction, the Ontario government used to take an active role in suggesting reforms and improvements to promote domestic security within Ontario. We made submissions on federal anti-terrorism and immigration legislation, offered tangible operational policy improvements, fought for federal funds for emergency management and advanced a security perimeter strategy that promoted both enhanced security and cross-border trade.

Since last October, Ontario's voice in these matters has gone silent. We know Ottawa is reviewing immigration enforcement, conducting a national policy review, designing a new border services agency and reviewing a scathing Auditor General's report on their failed security efforts since 9/11.

My question to the Premier: Can he give us a specific example of any participation by Ontario in these ongoing subjects? Has your government made any submissions on any of these subjects on behalf of the people of Ontario, or are you content to simply let Ottawa do as it wants?

Hon Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs): I know the minister would like to speak to this.

Hon Monte Kwinter (Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services): The member should know—and I'm surprised he doesn't—that I have met with my federal counterpart. I did that very soon after she became the minister responsible in this area. I went to Ottawa and met with her, had lengthy discussions—my officials did. I have visited Albany, New York; I have visited Lansing, Michigan; I have visited Columbus, Ohio. I have met with the homeland security people there. I have met with state police officers, discussing how we can coordinate our activities.

If you don't think that's enough, we have continuing discussions with them. Not only that, but we have made a

recent appointment at the ministry, where we've changed the status of Dr Young so that he is now responsible for emergency response items. I am delighted with what we are doing.

Mr Runciman: That was a non-response with respect to the question, but we're getting used to that.

In all sincerity, I'm urging the minister to get involved. He has actually disbanded the security council of Ontario. We ask him to get a handle on these matters, because they are critically important to the people of this province. What he's really doing is playing an ineffectual role.

Interjections.

Mr Runciman: Mr Speaker, I'm trying to ask a question.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Order.

Mr Runciman: Something more straightforward and immediate: Can the minister indicate whether he plans to write to his Liberal counterparts in Ottawa to express his views on the return of the Khadr family to Ontario and whether he thinks the Citizenship Act needs to be amended to create the capacity to revoke acquired citizenship when it can be shown that the persons in question have used it to further interests harmful to Canadian national interests, such as supporting al-Qaeda and raising monies for it? Can the minister confirm that he will take action, or does he disagree with that idea?

Hon Mr Kwinter: I find it interesting that the former minister should talk about his security advisers. These were ad hoc appointments to deal with you as a public relations item. They did not meet for a single year. These are people who were supposed to be advising you. They did not convene for a year prior to the change of government. Not only that, but I have met with my federal counterparts and we are now dealing with these issues.

1440

ALZHEIMER'S DISEASE

Mr Michael Gravelle (Thunder Bay-Superior North): My question is to the minister responsible for seniors. Like many other members of the Legislature—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Order. Could I get some order, please. It looks like these long holidays have had a negative impact on how we behave today.

The member from Thunder Bay-Superior North.

Mr Gravelle: My question is to the minister responsible for seniors. Like many other members of the Legislature, a growing number of my constituents are families of seniors with Alzheimer disease and related dementias. It is my understanding that Ontario's strategy for Alzheimer disease is now in its fifth and final year. Could you tell the House what steps are being taken to sustain the benefits of this strategy?

Hon John Gerretsen (Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, minister responsible for seniors): Thanks to the member for this very important question. It is indeed a tragedy that over 130,000 individuals in the

province of Ontario, most of them seniors, suffer from Alzheimer's and that that number is expected to rise over the next 10 years to over 200,000. That's why it's so important for a strategy like this to have taken place over the last five years.

The strategy has resulted in expanded respite services, in the hiring of 50 new psychogeriatric resource consultants across the province, and public education coordinators for each of the 39 local Alzheimer Society chapters. Training initiatives have helped educate front-line staff to better serve the people with Alzheimer's disease and their families, and that's just the beginning. We must beat Alzheimer's, and only a collective action by government can make it happen.

Mr Gravelle: As you will know, Minister, I have a very close relationship with the Alzheimer Society in my riding of Thunder Bay-Superior North. They, along with other chapters in the province, have worked very hard on developing the province's five-year strategy, which, as you point out, is now wrapping up. Can we assure the Thunder Bay chapter, as well as the many other partners in the province, that they will play a significant role in the development of our government's follow-up to the provincial strategy? Certainly I presume we'll want to take advantage of their expertise in this vital area.

Hon Mr Gerretsen: Last week, the Ontario Seniors' Secretariat, together with the Alzheimer Society of Ontario, held a think tank here in Toronto which brought together a hundred professionals—academics, researchers, caregivers and service providers—to help individuals and their caregivers deal with the effects of Alzheimer's disease. As a matter of fact, this coming week, on April 16 and 17, the Alzheimer strategy invitational workshop will take place, which in effect will help celebrate the success over the last five years and also generate new suggestions as to how to deal with this tremendously threatening disease in the province of Ontario in the future.

APPRENTICESHIP TRAINING

Mr Rosario Marchese (Trinity-Spadina): My question is to the Premier. You announced money for the apprenticeship enhancement fund today. Can you tell me, are you spending less or more money on this fund than the previous government?

Hon Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs): I was very pleased and proud to make an announcement this morning on behalf of the government which provides in excess of \$18 million to our apprenticeship programs. It speaks to a number of different initiatives within that, including providing more funding for equipment within our colleges and funding for pre-apprenticeship programs, which, as I discovered, are absolutely essential if we're going to get more young people to develop a keen interest in going into an apprenticeship program. So we are proud and pleased to have participated with an announcement this morning at Centennial College, and we look forward to doing much more in the days to come.

Mr Marchese: Premier, I do have the numbers that I can share with you. I'll just offer them to you. The Conservatives spent \$10.3 million in 2003. They budgeted \$10 million for 2004—it's all here—and today you announced \$9 million for this fund. Not only did you not announce new money today; you are cutting over \$1 million from an existing grant. Explain to me why you are masquerading this cut as a funding increase.

Hon Mr McGuinty: Again—we need to provide more details with respect to this particular announcement this morning—it was nearly \$18 million in Ontario's apprenticeship training programs. That included \$3.6 million in the pre-apprenticeship training program. Students can use this program to strengthen their skills to be eligible for apprenticeship in a skilled trade. We're investing \$5 million in the apprenticeship innovation fund to provide our training delivery agencies with the resources to update and develop new training materials. And finally, and I think this is what the member was referring to, we're making a \$9-million investment in the apprenticeship enhancement fund, helping colleges to update their training facilities and allowing them to train more apprentices to industry standards. We understand that if we're going to compete in this highly competitive knowledge-based economy, the best way for us to do that is by investing in the skills of our workers, and that's what this announcement is all about.

ACCESS TO INFORMATION

Mr Frank Klees (Oak Ridges): My question is to the Premier. I'd like to refer to a letter that I'm sure many members of the Legislature received. It comes from the president of the Toronto Association of Law Libraries and reads as follows: "Over the past few months, a worrying trend on government Web sites has alarmed the law library community. Access to many documents such as press releases and government background papers has disappeared from ministry Web sites as new government ministers overhaul their "department Web sites." She challenges you in this letter to ensure that these documents removed are in fact reinstated. Can you tell me why you and your ministers would be removing important government information from the Web sites?"

Hon Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs): I'm sure the Chair of Management Board would like to speak to this.

Hon Gerry Phillips (Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet): In terms of ensuring that the public get the information they're entitled to, as the Premier just said, among other things we've introduced the advertising piece of legislation. In this particular case, I think ministries will be ensuring that their Web sites reflect the up-to-date information that the public deserves. I think that's what you probably will find on the Web sites.

Mr Klees: With respect, this is very serious. There is a very specific action on the part of government, of government ministries, to remove specific information that relates to press releases and background papers; they

have been removed. I spoke to the president of the Toronto Association of Law Libraries this morning. I asked if she had heard from the government with regard to her appeal. She said no, but that she had spoken with the privacy commissioner, who has also expressed serious concern about the government's action in this regard, and indicated that she's looking into it. I'd like to know from the minister, why was this information removed, and will you now, today, commit to the House that whatever has been removed will in fact be replaced on these government Web sites?

Hon Mr Phillips: What I'll undertake to do is make certain that any information the public is entitled to that should be on the Web sites is there.

Interjection.

Hon Mr Phillips: The member is saying they've been removed. Any information that should be on government Web sites to inform the public properly, I'll undertake to ensure that that takes place. It's consistent with everything the Premier has done since elected: to ensure that we are a government that is accountable and transparent, and the information the public is entitled to, they'll get. The information that the previous government chose to disseminate through paid partisan advertising won't be done. If indeed there is information that should be available to the public, that should be on our Web sites, I'll make sure that in fact that takes place.

1450

PUBLIC HEALTH

Ms Judy Marsales (Hamilton West): My question is for the Minister of Health. As you know, the federal government has proposed a new national public health agency in its latest budget. Many cities in the country are now submitting bids to house this new agency.

I understand that Ontario has taken a different approach. I understand that we have submitted a proposal that would take advantage of the talent pool in many cities across Canada. Can you tell me, please, more about the proposal, and why do you think Ontario's proposal is the best choice for the new public health agency?

Hon George Smitherman (Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): I'm pleased to say in response to the member from Hamilton West that the position the Ontario government takes is a position in support of the view of Dr David Naylor, the esteemed dean of medicine at the University of Toronto who prepared a report for the federal government that proposed this agency and further proposed that the agency build on the strengths across our great country.

So the approach that the province of Ontario has supported is one that builds on strengths here in Ontario and also other strengths that can be brought from the various regions. We believe that all hands on deck is absolutely the best way to proceed when we're talking about public health emergencies and therefore that Ontarians will benefit not only from the extraordinary capacities that we have at home in our great province but

from those capacities which exist in other parts of our country as well.

Ms Marsales: As a very proud Hamiltonian, I know we have a plethora of exceptional talent and could offer a good case for making Hamilton the major centre. Why is making Toronto the major centre for the agency good for Toronto and its regions?

Hon Mr Smitherman: In response to the honourable member, I say that what we've done, with respect to this proposal, is build on the extraordinary strengths that exist here in the city of Toronto and add to those these enormous capacities that are present and emerging at McMaster. I was incredibly impressed, at a recent visit to McMaster, to see that they dedicated fully \$10 million of the enormous gift from Mr DeGroot to their infectious disease and public health capacity. Further, given the reality of human and animal interaction around disease, we really felt that those extraordinary capacities that exist at Guelph were an enormous piece of what we call our public health powerhouse: that these three communities, Toronto, Guelph and Hamilton, working together, provide the very best benefit to the country.

With respect to Toronto's role, I do think it's incredibly important, and it's some advice that we've given the federal government as well, that all decision-makers be aligned in the same geographic setting, so that in a time of crisis or emergency all of the decision-makers are close at hand. That's why Toronto's leadership role and connection to the largest public health agency in the country at Toronto and the Ministry of Health and the government of Ontario is critically important.

TAXATION

Mrs Elizabeth Witmer (Kitchener-Waterloo): My question is for the Premier. Yesterday and today, we had the opportunity to hear from the people at the food banks in the province of Ontario. They are extremely concerned about your plans to add a tax to meals under \$4. They've told us this is a regressive tax that is going to detrimentally affect welfare mothers and their children, low-income seniors and the working poor. It's a tax that's going to be imposed upon people who have no means to improve their own financial situation. I ask you, why do you want to tax and hurt those low-income people, who are least able to afford to put food on the table for themselves and for their children?

Hon Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs): The minister would like to speak to this.

Hon Sandra Pupatello (Minister of Community and Social Services, minister responsible for women's issues): I'm very happy to address this House and tell the people of Ontario that for the first time in a very long time we have a government that's prepared to look at the most vulnerable people in Ontario and come to them as partners to help, not like the last government, which in the last 10 years actually cut welfare rates by 22%, which, as this member knows, affected more women and their children than any other group in the country.

Let me say this to the member opposite: We've had the opportunity, in these very short few months that we've been the government, to come forward with some significant change in attitude, which is very important, but as well with additional programs that are meant to help. When the government makes policy changes, we understand that we have to think of our most vulnerable first.

Mrs Witmer: This government has had six months to help the most vulnerable, and this is an issue that they need to deal with. I just want to tell the member, it's not we who are saying this is a regressive tax. These are people from the food bank. In fact, in speaking to the Toronto Daily Bread Food Bank, they are telling us that this tax on meals under \$4 is going to significantly impact the number of people who live in rooming houses without cooking facilities and who rely on small restaurants that provide affordable meals for them and their families. So I say to the minister, when are you going to stand up in your place and tell your Premier that you will not allow this tax to go forward?

Hon Ms Papatello: I just cannot stand the irony of this. Here is a group of people who sat as government and their first order of business was to cut the nutritional allowance for pregnant women on welfare. And we said, "Shame on you for doing that." This particular member was also at the time deputy leader of a government who cut welfare by 22%. Here is a group of people who sat as government and didn't build a single affordable housing unit in this province, who delisted rent control in this province.

Here we have a McGuinty government which is consistent in a short few months: an energy fund for emergencies, a rent bank to prevent homelessness in the first place, and a budget coming out that finally will speak to the most vulnerable in this province. Let me say to the member opposite, in a very short few months we will have done more for the most vulnerable people than the government has seen in the last decade, and I am determined to do that, along with the Premier of Ontario.

TREE INFESTATION

Mr Kevin Daniel Flynn (Oakville): My question is for the Minister of Natural Resources. Invasive insect species such as the Asian long-horned beetle and the emerald ash borer have become a huge issue in this province. Closer to home, the two-lined chestnut borer, which is a native species, has had an impact in the town of Oakville. How are we fighting the spread of these invasive species, Mr Minister?

Hon David Ramsay (Minister of Natural Resources): I'd like to thank the member from Oakville. I certainly regret that the Oakville area has now also been susceptible to a tree infestation, the likes of which the member has referred to, and that we've had two other infestations in the province of Ontario that were first discovered last year in Toronto and Vaughan, with the Asian long-horned beetle attacking hardwoods there and the emerald ash borer in the Chatham-Kent area.

As the member knows and is now witnessing in his own area, the bitter medicine to basically fight these infestations, because there are no effective or approved pesticides, is the radical surgery of cutting down trees in the way of these insects. That's what's happening in Oakville. I'm very pleased, contrary to some reports, that the MNR helped the city forester in Oakville bring in the experts from the US forest service to determine what was the best course of action.

Mr Flynn: This certainly is an urgent problem for the whole province. Whole towns and woodlots have seen certain species of trees already entirely removed. Homeowners and woodlot owners in Chatham-Kent, north Toronto and Vaughan have been devastated because their trees are being cut down. Even in my own community there are reports of a large number of trees that will be felled or have been felled in Oakville. Can you advise if the town of Oakville is able to access the tree replacement fund recently announced by your ministry?

Hon Mr Ramsay: As the member knows, the federal government basically had ordered the taking down of trees, both in north Toronto and Vaughan, and also in the Chatham-Kent area. It is most devastating news to be received by homeowners or the public lands of our municipalities. I had announced about two months ago a \$1-million basic kick-start to a tree fund to start replacing those trees. I would certainly encourage Trees Canada and other organizations to start to contribute to that, because I think we can raise a lot of money. As far as I'm concerned, the Oakville cut can be included in that fund.

1500

LABOUR DISPUTE

Mr Peter Kormos (Niagara Centre): To the Premier: During the last election, you claimed that things were going to be different. You claimed that you were going to bring workers and management together. Well, workers at Casino Windsor have been on strike since April 3. They want to go back to work, but management refuses to meet with them.

Your House leader, the member from Windsor-St Clair, told the Windsor Star that there's nothing he can do. But, gosh, he's only the House leader. You're the Premier. Will you keep your promise? All you've got to do is get on the phone and tell the management at Casino Windsor to get back to the table. Being the Premier carries that kind of clout. You know that all it takes is the will on your part to pick up the phone, call the management at Casino Windsor and tell them to resume negotiations, to get back to the table. Will you do that?

Hon Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs): I know the member is not suggesting that we somehow involve ourselves in the collective bargaining process and interfere. But I'll take this opportunity to express to parties on both sides our desire that they work together in their general interest.

I can tell you, this is more than just a matter of passing interest to us. We are losing significant revenues on a

daily basis as long as this strike goes on. So it is in our interest, just as it is in the interest of parties on both sides, that they come to the table, work together and resolve this matter at the soonest possible opportunity.

Mr Kormos: You see, Premier, the nexus between this government, as with the last two governments, and the casinos is somewhat more intimate than, let's say, the connection between this government and, oh, a private corporation that's somehow listed on the stock exchange.

You're right. The government's losing money every day. These casinos generate nearly \$100 million a year in revenue for this government. The workers who are on strike want to see those profits go to health care and education. They want to get back to work. They want to end the strike. Those workers and their leadership are eager to get back to the negotiating table.

You have incredible influence, make no mistake about it, on the management at Casino Windsor. All it will take is a phone call. Will you do that? Will you get on the phone and tell Casino Windsor to get back to the negotiating table, so that this strike can end?

Hon Mr McGuinty: I will not involve our government in any way, shape or form in what might be perceived to be interference in the resolution of this matter. But I can say this to the member opposite: We have mediation services that are available. If there is anything at all that we can do to work with both sides, bring them together and bridge the gap, we would be only too pleased to do so.

REPORTING OF GUNSHOT WOUNDS

Mr Garfield Dunlop (Simcoe North): My question today is for the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services. Last December, you told reporters that the McGuinty government was preparing legislation that would compel hospitals to report gun wounds to police. With the rash of gun-related crimes we have seen over the last few weeks, when can we expect to see your legislation come before this House?

Hon Monte Kwinter (Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services): The member will know that most Ontarians feel that it's important that when someone who has been wounded, either by gunshot or knife, turns up at a hospital, the police should be aware of it. I think that's something that most people will support. You should know, and I'm sure you do, that under Bill 31, schedule A, it actually provides that medical practitioners may inform police when they feel that it would be appropriate.

So we agree that it's an issue we have to address. Bill 31 makes provision that it may be done. The big issue is whether it can be mandatory. Notwithstanding what some members may think, there are human rights implications, there are privacy implications, and we are looking into how we can get the stakeholders together so we can address this. That's where we stand on it.

Mr Dunlop: Recently, the chief of Canada's largest police service, Julian Fantino, called on the government to introduce legislation forcing hospitals to alert police

about gunshot wounds. As well, the Ontario Medical Association has already endorsed mandatory reporting of the names and addresses of gunshot victims. Forty-eight of 50 US states have mandatory reporting as well.

The Ontario Association of Chiefs of Police considers mandatory reporting to be one of its priorities. Citizens in the province agree with you. They already think, though, that reporting of gunshot wounds is mandatory. Isn't it time that you introduced legislation, almost on an immediate basis, to support our police and keep our communities safer? We need the legislation now. We believe you should keep the promise you made to reporters in December and introduce the legislation immediately.

Hon Mr Kwinter: I started my answer to the first question by saying I certainly support the idea of reporting gunshot wounds. The problem we have—I have talked to Chief Fantino and the Ontario Association of Chiefs of Police about it, and I am meeting with the Ontario Medical Association this Friday to discuss this very issue—is that if we're going to do it, we have to do it right. There is no sense bringing in legislation that will not withstand a charter challenge and that will not withstand criticism under privacy legislation. It is something we have to do right. I am meeting with the stakeholders to make sure we get it done and that we get it right.

TRANSPORTATION INFRASTRUCTURE

Mr Bob Delaney (Mississauga West): My question is for the Minister of Transportation. With growth and prosperity in the GTA has come a growing population, and population growth brings increased traffic. More and more people are commuting from the 905 region into Toronto for work and other activities. To maintain the competitiveness of the region and keep our economy strong, we must keep traffic moving. What action has your ministry taken to combat GTA congestion and improve the efficiency of the GTA transportation network?

Hon Harinder S. Takhar (Minister of Transportation): It is absolutely true that we have about 100,000 people moving into this area every year, and in 20 years we will have maybe another two million people. That will create really serious problems in this area, and that is why we are committed to having a region-wide approach that will address the long-term needs of this region. We are committed to having legislation introduced about the Greater Toronto Transit Authority, which will address the long-term needs. In the short term, we have introduced high-occupancy vehicle lanes and implemented yield-to-bus legislation, and we are also improving highways like the 400 series to address some of these needs.

Mr Delaney: One way to ease traffic congestion is to encourage people to leave their cars at home and take public transit. An increase in the use of public transit has the added benefit of improving our air quality by cutting down harmful vehicle emissions. To accomplish this, we must improve public transit by making it more efficient and more accessible. Minister, what efforts is the government making to ease gridlock by promoting public transit?

Hon Mr Takhar: I couldn't agree more with the statement he made. I think it's absolutely essential that we need to encourage public transit in the GTA. First, we will need to make sure that people can move from one place to another in an efficient and timely manner. We are committed to providing sustainable funding for transit needs and have already announced \$1.05 billion, along with our federal and municipal partners. We have also given money to the TTC and are committed to improving GO Transit service and increasing parking at GO Transit stations.

1510

BORDER SECURITY

Mr Robert W. Runciman (Leeds-Grenville): I am going back to the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services because we didn't get an answer from him regarding the Khadr family coming into Canada to access the Ontario health care system. This is a family that has publicly professed support for the Al-Qaeda terrorism organization and supported the September 11 attacks on the United States.

I asked the minister a very clear question earlier which I think Ontarians have a right to have answered. We see that trade hinges on border security—we saw that article on the weekend—and I will go back to the minister with the question: whether he thinks the Citizenship Act needs to be amended to create the capacity to revoke acquired citizenship where it can be shown that the persons in question have used it to further interests harmful to Canadian national interests, such as supporting Al-Qaeda and raising money for it. Do you agree with that? If you do, will you do something about it instead of warming a chair over there?

Hon Monte Kwinter (Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services): I find it somewhat comical that that minister is telling this minister about warming a chair.

I'm sure the minister will understand that this issue is a federal matter. It's a matter that is being dealt with—

Mr Runciman: Abdicate the file; that's your response.

Hon Mr Kwinter: It's all right for you to tell me that it's my responsibility, but why don't you—

Interjection.

Hon Mr Kwinter: You should know that this is a federal responsibility, and I have every confidence that they will deal with it.

PETITIONS

ONTARIO DRUG BENEFIT PROGRAM

Mr Tim Hudak (Erie-Lincoln): I'm pleased to present a petition from seniors, including Millie Willick

and Bev Smith and Gord Smith from Stevensville, Ontario, that reads as follows:

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas, during the election campaign, the Dalton McGuinty Liberals said they would improve the Ontario drug benefit program but now are considering delisting drugs and imposing higher user fees; and

“Whereas the Liberal government has increased costs to seniors by taking away the seniors' property tax rebate and increased the price of hydro;

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

“The Dalton McGuinty Liberals should keep their campaign promise to improve the Ontario drug benefit program and abandon their plan to delist drugs or increase seniors' drug fees.”

In support, I affix my signature.

ONTARIO BUDGET

Mr Lorenzo Berardinetti (Scarborough Southwest): I have a petition which is addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario, and it reads as follows:

“Whereas the parliamentary tradition in Ontario of presenting annual budgets in the House of the Legislative Assembly has existed for decades; and

“Whereas the previous government, in 2003, showed disrespect for our public institutions and the people of Ontario by presenting a budget inside a private, for-profit auto parts factory; and

“Whereas the previous Speaker of the Legislative Assembly condemned the actions of his own party's government;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to uphold parliamentary tradition and hold a public presentation and debate of the 2004 budget, and every budget thereafter, by our publicly elected members of Parliament inside the legislative chamber.”

I have signed my name with it, and I agree with it.

TAXATION

Mr Toby Barrett (Haldimand-Norfolk-Brant): I have a petition, entitled “Stay the Course on Small Business Tax Relief,” which is particularly important given the Ontario government is now considering scrapping the retail sales tax exemption on meals under \$4.

“Whereas business tax cuts have helped fuel the strongest economic and job growth ever seen in Canada;

“Whereas corporate income taxes on the smaller businesses that create most of our new jobs have been scheduled to be reduced to 5% in 2004 and 4% in 2005;

“Whereas the corporate income tax rate for manufacturing and processing firms has been scheduled to be cut to 10% for 2004, 9% for 2005 and 8% for 2006;

“Whereas the general corporate income tax rate has been scheduled to be 11% for 2004, 9.5% for 2005 and 8% for 2006; and

“Whereas the capital tax on employers is on the road to be cut by 10% in 2004, with the plan to scrap it entirely;

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

“That the government of Ontario stay the course and maintain the scheduled tax reductions for job-creating businesses.”

I affix my signature to this.

ACCESS TO PROFESSIONS AND TRADES

Mr Kim Craiton (Niagara Falls): “Whereas Ontario enjoys the continuing benefits of the contributions of men and women who choose to leave their country of origin in order to settle in Canada, raise their families, educate their children and pursue their livelihoods and careers; and

“Whereas newcomers to Canada who choose to settle in Ontario find frequent and unnecessary obstacles that prevent skilled tradespeople, professional and managerial talent from practising the profession, trades and occupations for which they have been trained in their own country of origin; and

“Whereas Ontario, its business, its people and its institutions badly need the professional, managerial and technical skills that many newcomers to Canada have and want to use,

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

“That the government of Ontario, through the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities and other institutions and agencies of and within the government of Ontario, undertake specific and proactive measures to work with bodies regulating access to Ontario professionals, trades and other occupations in order that newcomers to Canada gain fair, timely and cost-effective access to certification and other measures that facilitate the entry or re-entry of skilled workers and professionals trained outside of Canada into the Canadian workforce.”

I’m pleased to attach my signature to this petition.

TILLSONBURG DISTRICT MEMORIAL HOSPITAL

Mr Ernie Hardeman (Oxford): I have a petition signed by a great number of residents in my riding and the surrounding ridings.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the Tillsonburg District Memorial Hospital has asked for ministerial consent to make capital changes to its facility to accommodate the placement of a satellite dialysis unit; and

“Whereas the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care has already given approval for the unit and committed operational dollars to it; and

“Whereas the community has already raised the funds for the equipment needed;

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

“That the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care give his final approval of the capital request change from the Tillsonburg District Memorial Hospital immediately, so those who are in need of these life-sustaining dialysis services can receive them locally, thereby enjoying a better quality of life without further delay.”

I affix my signature to this petition.

TUITION

Mr Tony Ruprecht (Davenport): I have a petition signed by a few hundred students from the Canadian Federation of Students. I’m delighted to tell you that this government has listened to the Canadian Federation of Students and has frozen tuition fees already, but if I don’t read this petition I will be remiss in my duties. Therefore, I must still read it.

“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 role by freezing and reducing tuition fees;

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

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

“(2) Take steps to reduce the tuition fees of all graduate programs and professional programs for which tuition fees have been deregulated since 1998.”

Since I have agreed, and since the government has already done so, I thank you very much for accepting this petition.

ONTARIO DRUG BENEFIT PROGRAM

Mr Cameron Jackson (Burlington): This petition continues to grow in popularity. I’m over 2,800 signatures.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the Liberal government was elected after promising in their election platform that they were committed to improving the Ontario drug benefit program for seniors but are now considering delisting drugs and imposing user fees on seniors; and

“Whereas prescription drugs are not covered under the Canada Health Act unless dispensed in a hospital; and

"Whereas the federal Liberal government refuses to acknowledge this as a necessary health service despite the Romanow report's strong support for a national drug program;

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

"To immediately and unequivocally commit to end plans for the delisting of drugs for coverage under the Ontario drug benefit program;

"To immediately commit to ending plans to implement higher user fees for seniors and to improve the Ontario drug benefit plan so the seniors can obtain necessary medications; and

"To instruct Premier Dalton McGuinty to demand more health care funding from Ottawa instead of demanding more funding directly from seniors."

This has my signature and full support.

1520

LANDFILL

Mr Jim Wilson (Simcoe-Grey): I present this petition on behalf of my constituents of Simcoe-Grey and also my colleague Garfield Dunlop from Simcoe North.

"Whereas the county of Simcoe proposes to construct a landfill at site 41 in the township of Tiny; and

"Whereas the county of Simcoe has received, over a period of time, the necessary approvals from the Ministry of the Environment to design and construct a landfill at site 41; and

"Whereas as part of the landfill planning process, peer reviews of site 41 identified over 200 recommendations for improvements to the design, most of which are related to potential groundwater contamination; and

"Whereas the Minister of the Environment has on numerous occasions stated her passion for clean and safe water and the need for water source protection; and

"Whereas the Minister of the Environment has indicated her intention to introduce legislation on source water protection which is a final and key recommendation to be implemented by Justice Dennis O'Connor's report on the Walkerton inquiry; and

"Whereas the Minister of the Environment has announced expert panels that will make recommendations to the minister on water source protection legislation; and

"Whereas the Ministry of the Environment will now be responsible for policing nutrient management; and

"Whereas the citizens of Ontario will be expecting a standing committee of the Legislature to hold province-wide public hearings on water source protection legislation;

"We, the undersigned, call upon the government of Ontario and the Ministry of the Environment to immediately place a moratorium on the development of site 41 until the water source protection legislation is implemented in Ontario. We believe the legislation will definitely affect the design of Site 41 and the nearby water sources."

I agree with the petition and I've signed it.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Member from Durham.

PROPERTY TAXATION

Mr John O'Toole (Durham): The riding is Durham, just plain Durham, and the member's name is O'Toole.

"To of the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas recreational trailers kept at parks and campgrounds in Ontario are being assessed by the Municipal Property Assessment Corp (MPAC) and they are subject to property taxes; and

"Whereas owners of these trailers are seasonal and occasional residents who contribute to the local tourism economy without requiring significant municipal services; and

"Whereas the added burden of this taxation will make it impossible for many families of modest income to afford their holiday sites at parks and campgrounds;

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

"That these seasonal trailers not be subject to retroactive taxation for the year 2003 and that the tax not be imposed in 2004 and that no such tax be introduced without consultation with owners of the trailers, trailer parks, municipal governments, business, the tourism sector and other stakeholders."

I'm pleased to sign this in support of my constituents from the riding of Durham.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Thank you, to the member from Durham.

SEWAGE SLUDGE

Mr Jim Wilson (Simcoe-Grey): I think you're doing pretty well there, Mr Speaker.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas we, the residents Wasaga Beach, wish to bring forth our concerns regarding the transfer of approximately 5,700 tonnes of 14-year-old sludge, which contains metals from the North Simcoe transfer station, to our recently closed landfill site. To date, there are no EBR requirements for hauled sewage.

"Due to this and the geography of the Wasaga Beach site being so close to the longest freshwater beach in the world and other sensitive areas, there exists a threat to the environment and the public's health. The questionable product should be moved to a desolate location. Once damaged, the environment and people cannot be replaced;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows: To stop the sludge from being transferred to Wasaga Beach."

I quite happily sign that petition.

SENIOR CITIZENS

Mr Cameron Jackson (Burlington): Again, I have petitions from Joan Faria of Hamilton. She's done an incredible job. It's a very simple petition.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

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

“To immediately commit to action and funding to ensure the rights and protection for our senior citizens living in nursing homes and retirement homes in Ontario.”

It has my signature of support as well.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling) The member from Durham.

ADOPTION DISCLOSURE

Mr John O’Toole (Durham): I appreciate that. I will try to read quickly and briefly here.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas in Ontario adopted adults are denied a right available to all non-adoptees; that is, the unrestricted right to identifying information concerning their family of origin; and

“Whereas Canada has ratified standards of civil and human rights in the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, the UN Declaration of Human Rights and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child;

“Whereas these rights are denied to persons affected by the secrecy provisions in the adoption sections of the Child and Family Services Act and other acts of the province of Ontario;

“Whereas research in other jurisdictions has demonstrated that disclosure does not cause harm, that access to such information is beneficial to adult adoptees, adoptive parents and birth parents, and that birth parents rarely requested or were promised anonymity;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislature of Ontario to enact revision of the Child and Family Services Act and other acts to:

“Permit adult adoptees unrestricted access to full personal identifying birth information;

“Permit birth parents, grandparents and siblings access to the adopted person’s amended birth certificate when the adopted person reaches age 18;

“Permit adoptive parents unrestricted access to identifying birth information of their minor children;

“Allow adopted persons and birth relatives to file a contact veto restricting contact by the searching party; and

“Replace mandatory reunion counselling with optional counselling.”

I’m pleased to support this on behalf of my constituent Julie Jordan.

LCBO OUTLET

Mr Jim Wilson (Simcoe-Grey): I have a petition for an LCBO agency store in the village of Baxter.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the LCBO agency store program is intended to revitalize our small towns and villages and to provide

rural consumers with responsible and convenient access to LCBO services,

“We, the undersigned, hereby petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to make available to the village of Baxter an LCBO agency store.”

I agree with this petition and have signed it.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

COMMITMENT TO THE FUTURE OF MEDICARE ACT, 2004

LOI DE 2004 SUR L’ENGAGEMENT D’ASSURER L’AVENIR DE L’ASSURANCE-SANTÉ

Resuming the debate adjourned on April 6, 2004, on the motion for second reading of Bill 8, An Act to establish the Ontario Health Quality Council, to enact new legislation concerning health service accessibility and repeal the Health Care Accessibility Act, to provide for accountability in the health service sector, and to amend the Health Insurance Act / Projet de loi 8, Loi créant le Conseil ontarien de la qualité des services de santé, édictant une nouvelle loi relative à l’accessibilité aux services de santé et abrogeant la Loi sur l’accessibilité aux services de santé, prévoyant l’imputabilité du secteur des services de santé et modifiant la Loi sur l’assurance-santé.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): We will continue the debate. It’s the member from Simcoe-Grey.

Mr Jim Wilson (Simcoe-Grey): I’m pleased to rise and speak about Bill 8, which is the Commitment to the Future of Medicare Act.

I sat in on committee hearings in Sudbury, Ottawa and Toronto here just a few weeks ago, and I want to tell you that as a former health minister—I served as health minister from 1995 to 1997, for about two and a half years—this legislation actually makes me look pretty mild compared to the draconian approach the new health minister, Mr Smitherman, is taking.

I’ve asked the government to withdraw the bill on several occasions, and I see now they’ve at least agreed to go back out to the public before third reading to see if anybody out there agrees with them. Hospitals, volunteer board members of all of our hospitals—I’ve got Markdale hospital, which is Grey Bruce Health Services, Stevenson Memorial Hospital in Alliston and Collingwood General and Marine Hospital. Certainly I can’t name one volunteer who serves on those hospital boards, nor the senior staff of the hospitals, nor the CEO of each of those hospitals—none of those people agree with this legislation. Not one of them, that I’m aware of, supports the legislation, and I’ve had a lot of letters and e-mails with respect to this legislation.

The big problem is that, yes, governments in the past—and I remember I was the first health minister

under Mike Harris's government to have to order the takeover, as you'd say in layman's language, of a hospital board. I can remember Grand River Hospital, where my brother died. It was so bad there during the weeks I visited that I took over the board and sent people in. It couldn't have been worse. By the way, when the chaplain first saw me after making the announcement, she said, "Thank God," because the former board had taken away chaplaincy services that don't even cost any money. It's coffee and doughnuts and a room for all faiths to gather when a family—and particularly in the case of my brother, who died at 38 years of age of cancer, going through the palliative care stage.

The government of Ontario always had the ability to move in on governance in hospitals, but corresponding rights were also accorded under current legislation, which Bill 8 would amend, that says the government can only do that in the public interest. Bill 8 removes the key words "in the public interest" from hospital legislation and allows the minister to impose his or her will—in this case, his will—on any hospital regardless of what the local volunteer board members might say, regardless of what the chief executive officer might say and regardless of what the community might say. And by the way, the community owns these hospitals.

1530

We have over 100 corporations in Ontario. The community owns those hospitals. People in the local community can buy a membership—in some cases it's \$2; in some cases it's \$10. That hospital is a private hospital; all hospitals in Ontario are. They're not owned by the government of Ontario; they're owned by the community. And those people who take up membership on a hospital board or as a member of the hospital corporation are entitled to vote at annual meetings. They own the hospital on behalf of their communities. All the Minister of Health can do is use financial levers and moral suasion to try to get a hospital to abide by provincial policy.

The words "in the public interest" always gave the Minister of Health a need to be cautious when looking at and thinking about moving in on hospital governance in a particular community. That community, the volunteer board members of that hospital, could, under current legislation, take the government to court. I guess my point is that you don't do it lightly. The Minister of Health can't move in unless there's a really serious concern about patient care or a really serious concern about how that particular hospital is being governed. A really serious concern about the finances of a hospital could be a good reason. But at the end of the day, the community, as I said, had the right to take you to court and object to arbitrary measures that the Minister of Health of the day might try to impose on a particular hospital. That right is being removed.

In the last campaign, I don't remember the Liberal Party talking about removing the rights of volunteer board members in hospitals. I just don't remember you talking about it, nor do I believe, as a former Minister of Health, that you need this legislation. It has nothing to do

with the future of medicare, other than your adding the word "accountability" to the Canada Health Act, and you can't do that because you don't have jurisdiction to add words to the Canada Health Act. If you don't like the Canada Health Act, talk to your federal cousins and ask them to add a sixth principle to the Canada Health Act called "accountability." Your legislation is null and void, basically, and I'm sure that someday there will be a court challenge to that part of Bill 8.

The other part of it, as I said, is that it's so draconian. As hospital administrator Paul Darby of the Collingwood General and Marine Hospital said to me, "Mr Smitherman looks to be more draconian than even you, Jim." Actually, I think I said that to Paul in jest and he said it back—I've actually heard that phrase from several people. As I said at the very beginning of my remarks, I was a fairly mild health minister compared to what Mr Smitherman is trying to do, and I did the greatest change in health care in modern history with health care restructuring and the commission, and also the big construction boom. In fact, we had a contract problem, getting hosed on some contracts, because there were only so many large construction firms in Ontario that could build all these health care facilities not only that we announced as government but that were already being built in the province—the largest health care construction boom in the history of the province since hospitals were incorporated over 150 years ago. No one can deny that. It's a fact of life.

I simply ask the government—I would withdraw the legislation and not embarrass yourselves. I thought your committee members—Monique Smith and others—tried to do a very good job of explaining this legislation a few weeks ago, when I was on the road with them for a few days in committee hearings. But I'm afraid those same members of the social development committee, of which I am a member, are going to hear the same thing over again from hospital boards, from all those community volunteers, from people like Bernie Grandmaître, a former Minister of Municipal Affairs. I couldn't believe it: I was sitting 10 feet away from him when he made a presentation on behalf of Ottawa Hospital and Montfort hospital and actually said he was ashamed to be a Liberal that day. He went on at great length to scold the government for some five or six minutes, which is at great length in committee hearings, to tell them that. He stopped short of tearing up his Liberal membership card, but he couldn't understand, particularly in the case of the Montfort. The Sisters of St Joseph—two great-aunts in my family were Sisters of St Joseph, now deceased—were very worried about French-language services, about maintaining a French-language hospital. The Sisters of St Joseph of course are very worried about being taken over, because they're predominantly a Catholic hospital, with a Roman Catholic ethos in their hospital, and they would like to keep that. They don't want some pagan or atheist minister of the day who doesn't believe in God, which will happen in this House. Society is changing; it will happen. But a government of the day that gets so politically correct may actually try—

Interjection.

Mr Wilson: It's exactly the submission from the Sisters of St Joseph.

Ms Monique M. Smith (Nipissing): Actually, it isn't at all.

Mr Wilson: It is. They talk about Catholic ethos. I have a 20-year history on this issue, believe me. I'm the one who had to go down to St Mike's after Ruth Grier messed it up, when they were \$69 million in debt, and talk to the sisters. The fact of the matter is, they would be worried that some Minister of Health would arbitrarily impose his or her will upon them. The law is so clear that almost anyone of any age who can read can figure it out for themselves.

So these volunteers, the chief executive officers of the hospitals, my local hospitals—Markdale, Alliston and Collingwood—are not making this up. They are very, very concerned about it. I don't see the need for this legislation. You have current legislation on the books that was refined when I introduced the health care restructuring act a few years ago, I guess in 1996. It was refined to make sure that both parties, the hospitals and the government, have rights. You are taking away the hospital's rights. You have not changed that bill. I can't emphasize it enough. I think you'll regret the day when a minister in secret cabinet meetings—

Mr John O'Toole (Durham): Rue.

Mr Wilson: —rue the day. In the cabinet, the health minister, without informing the members, could very easily be ordering a hospital to do something it doesn't want to do. It will create a huge impact on your local communities and you'll wonder what happened. You'll wonder, what piece of legislation did we introduce to allow Mr Smitherman or his successors to be so draconian? You'll look back at this debate, you'll look back at Bill 8 and you'll regret that you ever voted in favour of it.

So just withdraw it. No one will notice. It will be a one-day wonder in the media. If you withdrew a bill, you probably would get credit in terms of maybe bringing up the Premier's popularity, which is lower, by the way, than Mike Harris's ever was. Mike was always over 50% in the eight years I served with him. Mr McGuinty could use his popularity coming up. Withdrawing Bill 8 would help the Liberal Party, would help the Premier with his popularity and would be the right thing to do for the province of Ontario.

The Speaker: Questions and comments?

M. Gilles Bisson (Timmins-Baie James): C'est intéressant d'écouter un membre conservateur dire à l'Assemblée que le gouvernement est draconien. Je pense que c'est carrément intéressant. Je me rappelle que le gouvernement conservateur, quand ils ont été élus en 1995, a introduit un morceau de législation qui s'appelait projet de loi omnibus 26. Ce projet de loi donnait au ministre de la Santé dans le temps, mon collègue, un pouvoir absolu de créer des commissions de restructuration dans le domaine de la santé et de restructurer les hôpitaux.

On regarde le fusionnement qui était fait par ce gouvernement sur la question des hôpitaux, où on a fusionné

beaucoup d'hôpitaux, un hôpital à l'autre, ensemble, avec le pouvoir donné ou accordé par la législation directement au ministre de la Santé. Je trouve cela très intéressant qu'un député conservateur, un ancien ministre de la Santé, a dit aujourd'hui, « Vous autres, vous êtes draconiens. » C'est pas mal difficile à prendre.

I also want to say that I agree with my colleague from Simcoe-Grey on one point: that the government would probably be doing the hospital sector and volunteers who are on the boards of hospitals a great service just to withdraw this legislation. The title purports to try to do something to enhance medicare in Ontario. The reality is that it doesn't do that. It actually goes in the direction of giving the minister additional powers to impose their view. Remember, you give that right to the minister. There may be a Liberal government at this point, but in the future you might be giving it to a government that will have the same rights. Do we really want to give the Legislature that kind of right when it comes to running our community hospitals? I say that withdrawing the bill would be the best thing to do.

1540

Mr Brad Duguid (Scarborough Centre): I listened carefully to the comments of the member from Simcoe-Grey. In fact I believe he was the Minister of Health at one time, but I'm not positive about that; he may have been. I appreciated his comments, but I find the suggestion that we should withdraw this bill a pretty odd comment and a strange approach coming from a former minister, if you ask me. Frankly, I look at the things that were going on in the health care system when he was in government and what little was being done to deal with it.

We need to have accountability in this system, plain and simple. We need to find a way to get the institutions within the health care system to go along. The only way to do that is to ensure that there is some level of accountability in this system. The member knows full well, because he was the Minister of Health—in fact, as Minister of Health I'm sure he did this—that we have the ability, if we want, to walk into a hospital and replace the board with a supervisor, but that's not something we want to do. We want to have other tools to try to prod the system along, instead of walking in there in draconian fashion and taking over the hospitals ourselves.

We need to prod the system along. We need to get those lineups for procedures reduced. We need to improve primary care. We need to make sure that Ontarians are healthier. We need to make sure that we increase the number of nurses in the hospitals. We need to make sure there is greater accessibility to doctors. These are things we cannot accomplish by being soft on this issue. We have to have accountability. We're going to stand up and demand accountability within this system. We are going to get it and we're going to turn this health care system around, unlike the previous government.

Mr O'Toole: I would say quite the contrary: that the member from Simcoe-Grey should be listened to. In his time as minister there were enormous changes in health

care. The main failure in the partnership with the people of Ontario and indeed Canada was the federal government. I think we all know that.

This bill is no way to build bridges with one of the more important components of the health care delivery system, that is, our hospitals. I spoke last week on this bill and I have spoken with the member from Kitchener-Waterloo as well. The article in the *Metroland* on March 23, 2004, characterized this as “the failure for the future of health care.”

I am pleased to say that under pressure from former Minister of Health Wilson and former Minister of Health Elizabeth Witmer, the government has relented and decided to hold public hearings on Bill 8. I can tell you, if you hold public hearings—I did sit in on the clause-by-clause of the now version of Bill 8 and I didn't see one single amendment adopted from our health critic, the member from Kitchener-Waterloo, or the NDP critic, Ms Martel, from Nickel Belt—not one single amendment. It's quite conspicuous when all these people put all this effort into making presentations and there is not one single respectful amendment.

The point I am trying to make is I think the *Toronto Star* had it right. They said in their article, “Bill 8 will decide health care future.” It goes on to say that it's actually the demise of the health care future.

I have a lot of respect for the effort the former minister from Simcoe-Grey, Jim Wilson, put into rebuilding health care, from \$17.4 billion to almost \$29 billion when we were finished. Clearly there has to be accountability. This way isn't accountability; it's about taking complete, undemocratic control over the hospitals in Ontario.

Mr Rosario Marchese (Trinity-Spadina): I just want to say how much I agree with the member from Simcoe-Grey. It's amazing what happens when people get into opposition. They tend to agree a lot with each other. Then they get into government, by and large, and they change. It's a bit bizarre how that happens, but it does. Then they come back into opposition and they change again. It's extraordinary.

Some of the observations that the member from Simcoe-Grey made are quite appropriate and correct. He made reference to Bill 26, except I think he's got a little more fragile memory on this issue than we do, because Bill 26 was one of the most egregious examples of draconian powers that a minister could give unto himself. It's for that reason that the member from Simcoe-Grey said that someone criticized the Liberals for being worse than the Tories, and the example that individual wanted to use was Bill 26, because that's the bill we all make reference to as a way of showing how a government can forget so much and decide that, “In order to make changes, we need to give ourselves absolute power.” That's what Bill 8 is all about. It's for that reason that Bill 8 equals the effect of Bill 26; in fact, in most cases surpasses—surpasses—the effect of Bill 26. At least in this example, for Liberals to have attacked the Tories for being so egregious in their desire to have absolute power, that they should forget and then institute Bill 8—you get

members here standing up for their two minutes saying how great this bill is and what it will allow them to do, how it will allow them to improve medicare and so on, and they forget that Bill 8 is worse in its effect than Bill 26.

The Speaker: The member for Simcoe-Grey has two minutes in which to wrap up.

Mr Wilson: I just want to follow up what my NDP colleague has just said—absolutely right. This bill—I wish the media were here. I wish Richard Brennan and the gang were here, who criticized me on Bill 26. This bill goes far beyond Bill 26. Bill 26 set up the health care restructuring commission. You had full access to the courts. You didn't like any of the processes of that committee. In fact, that's how the French-language hospital in Ottawa won their appeal. There's no appeal now. One thing that the health care restructuring commission did was close Wellesley Hospital. It was, frankly, a rat-infested, filthy hospital. I agreed with their decision, even though it was their decision to take.

I wouldn't have had to do Bill 26, I wouldn't have had to do a health care restructuring commission, and you don't need any courts. Bill 8 says the minister can order the hospital closed by telling the local board to take a hike. So when people go on about all the rhetoric for Bill 26, Bill 26 contained some fundamental rights of justice for all parties as we restructured the system.

The Liberal government today—and my NDP colleague and others on this side are right: You don't even have to bother with a commission that took three years; you don't even have to bother with the courts; you simply order the hospital closed. If this bill passes, the minute after it passes and receives royal assent, any minister of the day can close a hospital on his or her own whim. You have no rights and the volunteer boards are gone and the CEO will become an employee of the Ministry of Health and the Minister of Health. Today, under current legislation, the CEO is an employee of the hospital and only the hospital and those volunteer board members who represent the community.

The system isn't so broken—in fact, they say the system is better today than it was a decade ago—that you have to take over boards, throw out the volunteers and, without any recourse to any rights, you could actually close hospitals or do whatever the heck you wanted in the system, and there's not a darn thing the people of Ontario will be able to do about it because you're taking away their access to the courts. Shame on you.

The Speaker: Further debate.

Mr Marchese: I just wanted to say that I had the pleasure—

Interjection.

Mr Marchese: It's only 10 minutes. You've got to compact your speech in such a little time.

I want to say that I was in this committee for one day, replacing my colleague Shelley Martel from Nickel Belt, and I've got to say that during all of the deputations, all the members who came in front of that committee said they had a problem with Bill 8. Normally, you will have

bills coming before you and you'll find a couple of people saying, "This is great," and a couple of people saying, "This is bad." Normally, that's the kind of balance you get. Not for this bill. For Bill 8, they were all opposed to this bill.

Mr Lou Rinaldi (Northumberland): Check out the amendments.

Mr Marchese: The amendments, contrary to what some of the Liberal folks are whispering in my little ear, don't fix it.

Here's what I have to say about the bill, because you see, if you criticize it, people will say, "Ah, it's the opposition. They're always critical, they always criticize, because that's their job."

So I make reference to a number of people who came before the committee who say the following.

Lawyer Michael Watts said this: "I want to focus on what I perceive to be two of the greatest dangers of part III of the bill as currently drafted, which are (1) the shift of control from voluntary boards to the minister, and (2) the resulting increased likelihood of arbitrary political interference in the governance and management of hospital operations."

1550

Here's the problem: Most of the members, because they are so new, don't realize the effect of such language and such a problem contained in such a bill. They simply think, "Oh, it's not that bad. George Smitherman just wouldn't do the things that other people attack him for. He just wouldn't do that." You see, when you're in government, you can do no wrong; you can only do good. Only the previous government was evil; the current government is good. So whatever you do as Liberals, automatically it has got to be good. Correct? Of course. That's the problem with the new members: They just don't see the inherent problems attached to the language of this bill. The old members, if they're in cabinet, just have to say, "Oh, yes, what are you going to do?" If they're not in cabinet, they're not going to say a word. That's basically the way it works.

But Michael Watts said that there are two problems: "the shift of control from voluntary boards to the minister," which is what this bill is all about—the CEOs will not be able to exercise the control they ought to have. The minister now has that control. But remember, good folks watching, because it's the Liberals in power, you don't have to worry, because they are good and the others previous to them were bad; you simply have to take Liberals at their word when they say that, and move on.

The second point, "the resulting increased likelihood of arbitrary political interference in the governance and management of hospital operations," doesn't seem to bother Liberals, but it bothers people like Michael Watts, who is an active lawyer in this field and was profoundly worried about the language contained in this bill. He wasn't the only one who had worries; most of the people who came in front of the committee expressed the same opposition.

The other person I cited on other occasions is the following. Here's what the Ontario College of Family

Physicians said, including Ms Janet Kasperski, the executive director of the Ontario College of Family Physicians. She speaks to many aspects of the bill, the preamble and other parts, because many of the members refer to this bill as, "Oh, God, doing so much good," or that it will do so much good. This is what this person has to say about your bill. "The preamble," she says, "gives lip service to primary health care, but the bill is silent on how primary health care will be strengthened." So what is the point of saying that primary health care will be strengthened if they don't talk about how that will happen, except saying that it will be? Saying it doesn't make it so.

She goes on: "We read Bill 8 with a heavy heart. This bill is aimed at provider accountabilities but is silent on government and public accountabilities." In other words, what this government is saying is, "We will make everyone else accountable except ourselves." Remember: If you're a Liberal, that's OK. Making the rest of the world accountable is OK because, naturally, what you're about to do is a good thing. Only those who are bad or the critics of it must be, obviously, not knowledgeable or must be an interest group or something, because they don't see it.

Mr Ernie Parsons (Prince Edward-Hastings): It's going back to committee.

Mr Marchese: Going back where?

Mr Parsons: It's going back to committee.

Mr Marchese: Therefore, when you listen to experts in the field who tell you about Bill 8, you say, "Something has got to be wrong with this bill." It's not a question of listening to Marchese or some other person in our caucus, but of listening to the critics who have no vested interest except to serve the public interest. What you are saying is, the critics don't serve the public interest; only you do. Only you can make others accountable because it is right and just. The critics must be wrong and must be serving a special interest.

I've got to tell you that you've got to watch yourselves, because even friends of yours—and I want to repeat: Bernard Grandmaître was a friend of mine here when he was in opposition; a good man, a very decent man. It was so puzzling and interesting to hear him accuse you folks of some terrible things. Monsieur Bernard Grandmaître said that he was a former Liberal, and as a former Liberal cabinet minister from the David Peterson era, he said:

"As a Liberal, I have seen better days. This law, Bill 8, is not the product of the Liberal Party I know. In fact, it is a flagrant contradiction to some of the most basic principles that inspire and have always inspired my party. This bill is a serious breach of confidence and of democratic principles, and like Mr Lalonde, it's hard for me to believe this is being done by a Liberal government."

What he's saying is, he doesn't recognize you people. It's possible because, once you get into government, you change so much that people like Bernard say, "I don't know you any longer." But rather than Liberals admitting

that they have changed, they would prefer to say, "Oh, perhaps Bernard was confused," or perhaps he didn't quite understand you as clearly as he would have liked to, or perhaps some of you might say, "We talked to him and he's of a different view." Sorry, this is Bernard Grandmaître, former Liberal cabinet minister, coming before the committee, saying he doesn't recognize you, and doesn't recognize you through the actions of Bill 8.

You say in your bill, or the minister tried to say again and again, that there will be negotiated accountability agreements. We argue that nothing can be further from the truth. If you look at various parts of this bill, it's not true. On page 25 of the revised bill, it says the following:

"If the health resource provider and the minister do not enter into an accountability agreement within 60 days after the minister gave notice under subsection (1), the minister may direct the health resource provider to enter into an accountability agreement with the minister and with any other health resource provider on terms as the minister may determine, and the health resource provider shall enter into and shall comply with the accountability agreement."

That's why we say it's a draconian bill. The minister can, could, will, would have the power to say, "You'll do as I say." It's not negotiated.

Let me give you a second example. On page 27, subsection 21.1(4) reads as follows: "The minister shall consider any representations made under subsection (3) before making a decision to issue a compliance directive or an order under subsection 26(1)."

There's nothing here about negotiation. It's about draconian powers that the minister gives to himself, worse than Bill 26, then reviled by both Liberals and New Democrats. Bill 8 is now reviled by Tories and New Democrats, and everyone that came in front of the committee deputing against it. I say "reviled" because many of those members had strong, negative feelings against Bill 8.

Ms Smith: "Reviled" is a little strong.

Mr Marchese: "Reviled" is strong for many.

We oppose Bill 8. We will continue to oppose it as long as it takes.

The Speaker: Questions and comments?

Mr Peter Fonseca (Mississauga East): On October 2, 2003, the people of Ontario—12 million—chose change. If you do what you always did, you get what you always got. The previous government threw money at health care. Yes, they threw money. It ballooned, almost to \$27 billion.

Here is what 12 million people in Ontario were saying: "I'm waiting longer still to get my services in health care. I am waiting longer for cardiac care, for cancer care, for hip and knee replacements, because the previous government did not believe in building a health care system." Really, there was no system. The previous government just threw money at something they did not believe in.

This bill is needed to build a health care system. There are changes needed. Through this bill, here's what we're

talking about: We're putting hospitals on a sustainable financial footing. But that comes with accountability. We're creating a culture of accountability to improve outcomes, the outcomes that 12 million people told us they wanted.

They want to make sure they get their cancer care, that they get their diagnostics in a timely fashion. They want to make sure that they have access to primary care, that they have a family physician. They do not want to see ballooning budgets of 10% in hospitals. Do you know why? They know it's not sustainable. What they said was, "We want this Liberal government to fix the system, to create a system." That is what we are doing.

New emphasis has also been put on healthy living. The previous government got rid of 12,000 nurses. We believe nurses are the heart of this system, and we are behind building a system.

1600

Mrs Elizabeth Witmer (Kitchener-Waterloo): I'd just like to join in the comments on Bill 8. I found it interesting to hear the member speak just a few minutes ago. It's regrettable that he doesn't have a history in this House. I had the opportunity over the weekend to meet with some nurses. If he'd had the same opportunity, he would have heard those individuals say they were appreciative of the system our government put in place. We actually introduced the focus on prevention, we introduced the heart health program, we introduced the Alzheimer's strategy, we introduced the healthy babies program, we introduced the preschool speech and hearing program—the list goes on and on. We actually recognized that we needed a system that began with prevention. We also introduced the primary care system.

Interestingly enough, I was with a nurse today who indicated to me how appreciative she was. She said, "Do you know the impact that you and your government had on nursing throughout all of Canada?" The steps that were taken in the province of Ontario are steps that have influenced the development of policy.

Let me talk about the system we put in place. The system began with prevention. It went into primary care and then, of course, we had the hospitals. It was our government that started investment in home care and long-term care. We created 20,000 new beds. We made investments in order that people could continue to have care in their homes as opposed to staying in long-term-care facilities or hospitals. We are very proud of the comprehensive system and the foundation we put in place, and I hope this government will do something to build on it.

Mr Bisson: I want to come back to the comments made by the member from Trinity-Spadina. I think he touched on one of the central elements of what our jobs here as legislators basically should be and what action this government and this Legislature should take vis-à-vis Bill 8. I well remember the Liberals prior to the campaign and during the campaign. They faulted the Conservatives for not consulting; when they did consult, they faulted them for not listening; and when they listened,

they faulted them for not taking action on the advice given by stakeholders.

The member from Trinity-Spadina raises a very good point; that is, virtually everybody who came to this committee to present on Bill 8 was opposed to Bill 8. I would take it that the government would keep its campaign commitment that “We Liberals will withdraw the bill because we see that the majority of Ontarians are opposed to this bill.” After all, they did promise in the last election that they would consult, that they would listen and that they would take action on suggestions brought forward by the public.

Well, what better way? A legislative committee travelled the province extensively, and members of the communities affected by this bill had an opportunity to come and present. At the end of the day, they said they didn’t like the bill.

I’m going to have an opportunity a little bit later to talk specifically about what parts of the bill—there’s now a feud by the hospitals in the riding of Timmins-James Bay, and I assume it’s not much different than the views espoused by many people across this province.

This bill does the opposite of what the government intends in the title of the bill. They call this a bill that enhances the medicare act, but when you really look at what this does, it takes the power that elected boards now have and moves it into the minister’s office. At the end of the day, I don’t think that’s a good thing. It was Liberals, along with New Democrats, who criticized the former Tory regime when they did that to education by appointing supervisors. Why the Liberals would do that when it comes to health care is beyond me.

Mr Kim Craitor (Niagara Falls): I’m pleased to have the opportunity to participate in the debate regarding Bill 8.

In the two minutes I have, let me just bring Bill 8 back to my riding. Unfortunately, I’ve had two situations—I have a number of hospitals in my riding—with families who contacted me regarding concerns about services at their hospital. I remember when the first person called me, and my comment was, “Well, I’m the MPP, but the hospital has its own organization, has its own set-up.” The fellow said to me, “Well, your government funds them, and as the funder, they should be accountable to you if I’m not satisfied with the information that I’m getting or the lack of services.” I think that hit home with me, when I realized that that’s what Bill 8 is all about. If you’re not satisfied, then there is an alternative, and in this case, it’s the minister. It’s sort of the last resort.

Subsequent to that, I had another family that called me with some concerns, and unfortunately, the patient has cancer and it was a very emotional situation. I spent time with her and the family. Again, it crossed my mind, “Well, why are you contacting me as your local MPP?” The response was, “Well, you fund them. If I’m not satisfied and I think there should be some other recourse, I’m going to the local member, whoever it is, because the government uses my tax dollars to fund the hospitals.”

So what have I just said? I’ve said that Bill 8, if necessary, allows the minister that opportunity because

that’s what the public perceives. They simply perceive that if they’re not getting the service that they feel they’re entitled to or something’s gone awry in looking after a member of their family, they have initially their local MPP whom they’ll contact and expect me or any other members to get involved, to participate, and try to help out. The last resort above that, if it has to go beyond that, is the minister. As he said, that’s sort of the last resort.

The Acting Speaker (Mr Ted Arnott): That concludes questions and comments. The member for Trinity-Spadina has two minutes to reply.

Mr Marchese: I thank friends—and foes as well—for their remarks. I just would remind the foes from Mississauga East and Niagara Centre—Niagara, somewhere there—of a couple of things.

Just to remind you, member from Mississauga East: When the Liberals were in opposition, they and us—we here and you there—we excoriated the Tories when they introduced Bill 26 for having the same kind of powers given to their minister as you’re giving to yours in Bill 8. Excoriated. You say, “We’re simply going to use the election of having 12 million people give us the power to do what we want.” You’re saying it was bad for the Tories to give themselves powers that were unwarranted and draconian, but it’s not so bad for you. You’re saying that’s OK. You’re saying that 12 million people are saying that it’s OK if Bill 8 gives the minister extraordinary powers, because you got elected to introduce change—whatever that is.

We’re telling you it’s not OK, and what’s not OK, member from Mississauga East, is to sound like the Tories. Your line about “Tories threw money at it” is usually a line that comes from the Tories. It doesn’t surprise me, but maybe Liberals would be surprised for you to be saying that out loud in such a loud way, because you then sound like the Tories. New Democrats say you sound like them, but some of your constituents don’t know that. So don’t say that so out loud, because what you’re saying is that Bill 8 gives your minister these extraordinary powers because you want to be able to make the changes you want because you want to be able to make the cuts you want, and whether CEOs or hospital boards agree with you is irrelevant. What you’re saying is that Bill 8 will cut through all that, and you’ll get the job done and you’ll be able to get hip replacements faster. I’m telling you, it’s not going to work.

The Acting Speaker: Further debate?

1610

Mr Tim Hudak (Erie-Lincoln): I’m pleased to enter into debate on Bill 8 on behalf of the people of Erie-Lincoln to express a very strong concern—that’s probably an understatement, “strong concern”—and the very, very harsh comments we’ve heard from individuals and groups in the Niagara Peninsula. I had the chance to attend the hearings in Niagara Falls, among other places. I’m going to share with the House some of those comments, particularly from the Niagara Peninsula, what people—real people; not just politicians speaking on behalf of the government, but actual individuals—are saying about Bill 8.

I think it's important to look back on how this bill was born. How did this bill come into existence in the Legislature? What were the circumstances surrounding its entry on first reading? I think, to look back, we were in the middle of quite a public storm over a series of broken promises by Dalton McGuinty in his first few weeks in office—I guess not entirely unlike most of these six months in office, but at that point in time in particular there was a debate on P3s, the public-private partnerships, when very clearly during the election campaign the Liberals gave the implication, if not saying outright, they were going to tear up these agreements, that they were opposed to P3s. Lo and behold, the actual decision was to maintain the P3 hospitals in Brampton and the Premier's own area in Ottawa, and rightly so. Many groups raised up a significant protest over this obvious broken promise. However they like to package it, the only difference is that our P3s had a blue ribbon; theirs have a red ribbon. Otherwise, it's the same deal.

So in order to try to change the page from this scrutiny and this public upset over their broken promise on P3s, they rushed to the Legislature what became Bill 8. While Bill 8 contained significant amounts of rhetoric and platitudes about protecting the public aspect of the health care system, its contents entirely belied the kind of rhetoric that we heard.

You know the expression "You can't judge a book by its cover"? Well, certainly in these circumstances, you could not judge the bill by its preamble—much like the Liberal campaign document, where they said one thing during the campaign and now something completely different while in office.

So an absolutely staggering coalition of individuals from diverse points of view, whether it's doctors, nurses, hospital administrators, union leaders or volunteer boards, all came forward and protested Bill 8 in its original form. How often do you see that kind of coalition of groups with these different viewpoints criticizing a bill? The bill was poorly written, it was poorly thought-out and, I think, rushed into the Legislature after the P3 flip-flop to try to change the page. But it wasn't taken through the appropriate political tests before they put it out there publicly.

In fact, I think the only people who are pleased with this legislation are the printers, because of the scads and scads of legislative amendments that have had to take place to correct pretty well every page in this bill, save the title. So the printers may be very happy, but I don't know if that's the best way to create jobs in the province of Ontario, by having bills rewritten from stem to stern.

A couple of aspects that I want to address in my time include the health quality council and, again, some of the comments I've heard locally about this bill. The health quality council, no doubt, is a sheep in wolf's clothing. They make it out to be this powerful committee that is going to report to taxpayers across Ontario on the state of the system and then do something about improvements to the system, but when you see what the legislation actually says, it is a powerless committee. It won't have

any independence from government, and it will have very limited ability to criticize the government. Let's look at the details.

For example, every individual will be appointed by cabinet. That's strike one. Every member of that committee will be rubber-stamped and approved by cabinet, which I would argue will limit their ability, their latitude, to speak independently and be critical of the government of the day.

Secondly, despite a campaign promise and a promise, I think, in the minister's preamble, the council will not report directly to the people of Ontario. In fact, the council will report first back to the minister, and the minister will then deem what's appropriate to go forward into the public. They can also—

Mr John Yakabuski (Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke): The cloak of secrecy.

Mr Hudak: The cloak of secrecy will descend on the health quality council. So they'll only report back publicly on issues that the minister gives them the green light to report back about. So much for direct and fulsome reporting.

Third, the council has absolutely no mandate whatsoever to reflect on how the government is managing the health care file. One analogy: It's going to sit quietly in its cage and wait for the minister to feed it by hand and teach it the catch phrases that the minister wants to hear. He may as well have bought himself a parrot to repeat back the minister's political catch phrases as what they're doing with the health quality council, which is significantly limited in its ability and certainly does not in any way resemble the way it's described in campaign promises or in the preamble. So again, it's a sheep in wolf's clothing.

With respect to other parts of the bill, they talk a lot about the accountability mechanisms and accountability agreements. I think we all agree that when we invest health care dollars, we want to maintain maximum accountability. There are ways of doing this through particular fiscal levers, depending on results across the system, or particular surgeries that you want to enhance. Competition, I think, as a Conservative, I always say, is an excellent way to ensure hospitals or other parts of the greater public sector improve their performance. There's no mention of that. Instead, what we have for accountability is a takeover of the volunteer boards in hospitals. Whether it's the Douglas Memorial Hospital in Fort Erie or the Haldimand War Memorial Hospital in Dunnville, their boards are effectively taken over by the Ministry of Health.

I'm not clear why members across the way are convinced that having the Ministry of Health, that leviathan, that behemoth of bureaucracy, run the hospitals is going to result in greater accountability. Speaker, you're a veteran, both on the government and the opposition side. You've seen how quickly—better put, how slowly—large bureaucracies like the Ministry of Health respond. In fact, probably a snail on Quaaludes going up a ramp would reach its destiny more quickly than this kind of

approval process through the Ministry of Health. So why they would have faith that the ministry bureaucracy will manage better accountability—I think, in fact, this witch's brew, this hybrid they put forward, will actually result in less accountability.

The same thing goes for agreements that hospitals may have with doctors or surgeons. Hospitals across this province will bring forward particular agreements to attract a doctor to an underserved community like Port Colborne, to bring a specialist to the West Lincoln Memorial Hospital in Grimsby. Under this bill, they want to have all of those approved by the Ministry of Health. I don't think the doctor's going to wait around that long for the bureaucracy to pass it from desk to desk for approval at the minister's or deputy minister's desk. I think we're going to lose a lot of doctors and specialists as a result of that kind of initiative.

I agree with the hospitals in my area that strongly stand against these provisions that are going to manacle the administrators and the boards to the desk of the deputy minister or the Minister of Health. Maybe there's another motive here too. Hospitals can play an important role in offering constructive criticism or alerting the public to when the Ministry of Health or the government is failing the needs of hospitals. Maybe by having this reporting mechanism, by making sure that the CEO becomes a dual employee, both to the hospital and the Ministry of Health, it's their backdoor way of silencing their critics in the system, to again bring this shroud of secrecy over decisions. So I wonder if part of the thinking was to silence the role hospitals play in pointing out where a government's health care policy is inadequate.

Let's look at what the West Lincoln Memorial Hospital board had to say on February 26 at the public hearings in Niagara Falls. They said that the proposed amendments that are in the bill “do not go far enough,” particularly when it comes to the ministry's role and the role and accountability of the executive director. They say that they have “no ability to negotiate and it's a bastardization of the term ‘negotiation’ and destroys faith, not only with us but our staff and ultimately our community as a whole.”

Hospitals in Dunnville and West Haldimand have similar concerns. They say, “There should be no direct authority by the minister over our executive director if the minister is not directly accountable for all the actions of the hospital. This hybrid approach is harmful, it will not work, and you know it was harshly criticized in British Columbia,” where it was the model.

Similar concerns were expressed by the St Catharines and District Labour Council. It says that this bill would “grant the ministry virtually unprecedented power to require individuals and organizations to comply with the health care initiatives,” and they “could override collective agreements.” That's just one of the many criticisms coming on Bill 8.

The Acting Speaker: Questions and comments?

Mr Peter Kormos (Niagara Centre): I suspect this will be the last chance I get to speak to this bill, at least

until it comes back for third reading. I'm not looking forward to third reading debate, because third reading debate isn't going to be any more joyful than second reading debate was. This bill's a dog. It's a mongrel, a three-legged mongrel. This dog should be put to rest. This dog should be put out of its misery because it's a sick three-legged mongrel that's a biter, quite frankly. You can't trust it around kids, you can't trust it around old people and you can't trust it around strangers. Put it out of its misery.

1620

I've just never seen a bill where nobody—nobody—who appeared in front of the committee supported it. As I've said before, these guys couldn't even come up with somebody's brother-in-law to show up under the guise of some fake organization, saying that they supported the bill; you know, like a ringer. They couldn't even come up with a ringer. They couldn't even come up with the president of a Liberal riding association to call themselves some sort of health care consultants. Nobody. Nothing. Zip. Zero. Nada. Not a one. It was just remarkable.

Look, at the end of the day, if you want real accountability, don't give Stalinist powers to your Minister of Health, to this government or, quite frankly, any subsequent government. Build democracy into the health care system. Adopt the proposition I made by way of a bill in the last Parliament, and I'll be proposing it again. Let's directly elect hospital boards. You want democracy? You want accountability? Directly elect hospital boards. The largest single expenditure of taxpayers' dollars is the health care system, the largest single expenditure of taxpayers' dollars locally in our hospitals. We elect school board trustees. Let's elect hospital board directors and members. That will build accountability. That will build democracy. That's the solution.

M^{me} Laurel C. Broten (Etobicoke-Lakeshore): Je suis très fière de prendre quelques minutes pour donner mon appui au projet de loi 8. Ce projet va créer un Conseil ontarien de la qualité des services de santé. Ça va garantir l'accessibilité aux services de santé et va créer un système avec imputabilité. C'est un projet qui va mettre en place des modifications de la Loi sur l'assurance-santé.

Les valeurs de notre gouvernement et de la population ontarienne sont clairement établies dans le préambule, qui démontre clairement aussi la différence entre notre gouvernement et celui avant nous. Le préambule nous dit, « La population de l'Ontario et son gouvernement reconnaissent que l'assurance-santé—leur régime de services de santé publics—traduit des valeurs canadiennes fondamentales et qu'il est indispensable de la préserver pour la santé actuelle et future des Ontariens et des Ontariennes. »

Ce sont ces idéologies qui ont été mises en place après l'élection que l'on vient de passer. Aussi, les citoyens de ma communauté d'Etobicoke-Lakeshore et les citoyens à travers l'Ontario nous ont demandé de « souscrire à l'interdiction d'un système à deux vitesses, de la

surfacturation et des frais modérateurs, conformément à la Loi canadienne sur la santé. »

Nous, avec la population ontarienne, croyons « en l'imputabilité des pouvoirs publics comme moyen de démontrer que la gouvernance et la gestion du système de santé permettent » de favoriser l'intérêt public.

Entre autres, c'est pour toutes ces raisons que je suis très fière d'avoir la chance aujourd'hui de démontrer la différence entre notre gouvernement et celui qu'on vient de remplacer le 2 octobre. Merci beaucoup.

The Acting Speaker: Merci beaucoup. I'm pleased to recognize the member for Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke.

Mr Yakabuski: I want to compliment the member from Erie-Lincoln for his contribution to this debate. I also want to congratulate our health critic, Elizabeth Witmer, for being named an honorary nurse by the Registered Nurses Association of Ontario for her work when she was the Minister of Health.

I want to touch on one part of this bill that we haven't heard much about in this House. We've talked about what this does to hospitals and hospital boards, but I also want to talk about doctors who would prefer not to work within the confines of OHIP, those doctors who bill the patients directly and have those patients collect from the insurance, the provincial plan, individually. Those doctors are being outlawed by this bill. You know, I can't think of a more accountable doctor than the doctor who clearly shows his patients exactly what his or her professional services to them are costing the provincial treasury, doctors like Dr Robert Kidd in my riding of Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke, in the town of Renfrew. These people, many who have been physicians for some time, don't wish to change at this stage of their careers. They may leave the profession rather than be choked by this bill which will, again, create a further shortage of physicians in this province.

They talk about accountability being needed in the health care system. The doctor who is willing to bill the patients directly and have those people collect their refund from OHIP is the most accountable doctor. Those patients, I believe, understand better than anyone else what the cost of those services is to all of the taxpayers of this province. I don't think that's something this bill should be doing.

The Acting Speaker: There's time for one last question or comment.

Mr Bisson: I want to make the point yet again, because I think some of the government members missed what we've been trying to say here from the opposition. That is, virtually everybody who came before the Bill 8 committee was in opposition to this bill. It would seem to me that should ring off some alarm bells in the Liberal caucus to do something pretty drastic to be able to respond to the concerns of those people, those deputants who came before us to present. Somehow or other, I don't think the government quite understood the message, because I listened to the questions and comments that we just had, and here we are again, government

members getting up and saying, "Oh, gosh. Oh, gee. Such a good bill."

What this bill does is exactly what Liberals and New Democrats railed against when the Conservatives were in power. Let me remind you. The government of the day, the Conservative government, decided they wanted to take control of education. They were mad at school boards, because school boards, in their view, were being irresponsible, not a view that I and my caucus colleagues in the New Democratic Party shared, and certainly nobody in the Liberal caucus in opposition shared that view either.

So we in opposition—New Democrats and Liberals together—said to the Conservative government, "You can't take away the responsibility of duly elected boards over questions about how those school boards should operate. What you're basically doing by putting them under direction of supervisors is taking the control away from those elected people and putting the decision-making in the hands of the Minister of Education." We said that was wrong; Liberals said it was wrong.

Now we've got a Liberal government elected that seems to forget what they promised the people before and during the election, and that is not to wrestle power from the hands of duly elected boards. The problem with this bill is, you're taking the power from duly elected hospital boards—who are volunteers, I might add; they don't get paid to do this—and putting it in the hands of the Minister of Health. I say that's wrong. We should withdraw the bill. It is not a step in the right direction.

The Acting Speaker: The member for Erie-Lincoln has two minutes to reply.

Mr Hudak: I appreciate the comments by my various colleagues. I want to reinforce the two major points of my remarks. First, in rebuttal to the member for Etobicoke-Lakeshore, who read off the government's speaking notes about the health quality council: Let's be honest here. This board, this health quality council, is not independent. They're all going to be hand-picked by the staff in the Premier's office—no independence on this board.

Secondly, despite what they say, these people are not reporting directly to the public. They report to the Minister of Health, who then deems what goes into the public sphere. This notion that they're going to be reporting on the health care system is nonsense. They report to the health minister, who decides what moves forward.

Third, they cannot report on how the government is managing the health care file. They will report only on what the Minister of Health deems appropriate. They have no independent research or reporting ability.

This is clearly a wolf in sheep's clothing. The quality health council has no teeth. The quality health council is an empty vessel. The quality health council is a dog that don't hunt. The quality health council is all hat, no cattle. It is a parrot no more; it's an unparrot. The quality health council will not do as they say.

Secondly, I still have not heard a good answer as to the government's faith in how the Ministry of Health can

do a better job at running hospitals than our volunteer boards and our local administrators. As the member for Niagara Centre said, this is Stalinist planning. Maybe there's an old Gosplan plan out there. They can dust off and bring in some Brezhnev-era castaways who can implement this kind of massive health care planning over the backs of the local volunteers and local governance.

I have no faith. Let's let this dog lie. Let's move on and bring forward a brand new bill that can actually do something to improve the health care system, not this dead dog.

1630

Acting Speaker: Further debate?

Mr Bisson: I've got about 10 minutes to try to put on the record a couple of things that need to be said about this bill. Much of what we've been saying as New Democrats, and to a certain extent what the Conservatives have been saying, about this bill I don't want to repeat over the next 10 minutes. It's been said, and it's pretty apparent the government ain't listening at this point, that this bill wrestles the control of duly elected hospital boards away from those boards and puts it squarely in the hands of the Minister of Health. Quite frankly, that's something that I think is wrong-headed. We opposed it while we were in opposition. When the Tories tried to wrestle, and succeeded in wresting, the decision-making for education out of the hands of elected school boards and put it in the hands of the Minister of Education, it was our critic, Rosario Marchese, and my leader, Howard Hampton, and the rest of the NDP caucus and, I would say, the Liberal caucus who bemoaned that, who fought against that, who campaigned against that.

What disappoints me: I thought we finally had an ally onside in the Liberals, when it comes to wresting control from duly elected boards to the minister's office, but we now have a Liberal government that yet again has flip-flopped. While in opposition, they opposed taking the responsibility of things from duly elected boards into ministers' offices. They opposed it during the election. Now what are they doing by way of this bill? The same thing as the Tories. So, voted for change, but it seems to me that not a lot of change has happened on that particular point.

I want to put on the record a couple of things that were said by some people I represent in the riding of Timmins-James Bay. These are only two of the letters I've received and I wanted to put them on the record. In fact, I wish I had time to read them all here. Unfortunately, I've only got about eight minutes left and I'm not going to have enough time to even do these justice. First of all, these are letters that come from hospital boards within the riding of Timmins-James Bay. We have in our riding the hospital on Moose Factory Island that's run by the Mushkegowuk Cree of James Bay. It's a federally funded hospital, at this point, with some provincial funding. We're in the process of transferring that over to the province as negotiations unfold. There is a provincial hospital in Moosonee called James Bay General. We have another one in Hearst, l'Hôpital Notre-Dame. We

have the Sensenbrenner Hospital in Kapuskasing. We have the Smooth Rock Falls Hospital in Smooth Rock Falls and another hospital, Timmins and District Hospital, in Timmins.

All the hospital boards have told me the same thing. They said, "Gilles, we can't have this legislation passed, because they're taking power from the people who sit on our community boards for those hospitals and putting the decision ultimately in the hands of the minister. We can't support it." They've asked me to come here and put on the record some of the issues. They've asked to have this bill go back to committee. I will say—give the government credit on but one thing—they've accepted our arguments from the New Democratic caucus, the work that the health critic for the New Democratic caucus, Shelley Martel, did, along with the rest of us, who said that this bill has to go back to committee after second reading. It had gone out to committee after first reading. There was consultation. Virtually everybody was opposed to it. It's now here for debate.

We hope the Minister of Health is listening and that when we do go back to committee, if they don't withdraw the bill, they at least try to amend it to take away that repulsive idea of wresting the final decision-making from hospital boards into the hands of the Minister of Health. I'll say that it is going back to committee. One of the things that all the hospitals have asked me is to try to get this bill back to committee. We were successful in that, and in the negotiations we had with the government House leader over the last two weeks we managed to get days in committee, as well as days in committee for amendments. At least we were able to do that.

I want to put this on the record from the James Bay General Hospital. I've got to say to people that James Bay General is one of the most unique hospitals in Ontario. It operates a physical location in communities in Attawapiskat and Fort Albany. Basically, they're like parts of a hospital wing out of Moosonee. They operate their administration and a clinic out of Moosonee. It's the only provincial hospital on the James Bay coast. They have a lot of challenges because they're having to serve people on James Bay, where there are no all-season roads. The only way to get patients out of there is by air ambulance. We fly in them down in the Sikorski helicopter when they've got to leave those communities to get services and fly them back by helicopter at quite an expense. It's the only way we can provide those services that are not readily available in the community. This hospital board has really done a lot of work to try to pioneer health care in the north. I've got to say this board has worked very hard, has taken the responsibility seriously. It's made up of 90% Mushkegowuk Cree people, who are sitting on the board. The chair is Stella Wesley, a First Nation member out of Fort Albany. They all take their responsibility seriously, and they asked me, "Can you get the government to back down on this one? We've been working hard as representatives of the community, when it comes to health care in our communities, and the government is trying to take that away from us."

I want to put on the record this letter, signed by Stella Wesley, chair of the board of directors of the James Bay General Hospital. It reads:

"The central problem with Bill 8 is that it gives Queen's Park the power to impose anything it likes on any individual hospital. The government can bypass hospital boards, the people who know the most about the hospital and the services it provides to the community.

"We strongly recommend that the bill be returned to the standing committee for public hearings following second reading for further amendments. Ontario hospitals would welcome the opportunity to work on additional changes that will allow us to move forward together. Our specific concerns are as follows."

On that point, we are going to committee. I want to tell Stella and the rest of the board of the James Bay General and others that we are, in fact, going to committee on that issue.

They say, "First, although a reference to negotiated accountability agreements has been included," and that's part of the amendments, "the legislation still permits these agreements to be imposed after a period of 60 days without referral to a third party dispute resolution mechanism." It's still basically the same thing: The minister has the right to do what he or she wants. "Throughout discussions between the Ontario Hospital Association, you," meaning the Minister of Health, "and your officials on suggested amendments to the bill, it has been made clear that the due process provisions are insufficient and that the bill must expressly provide for referral to dispute resolution, such as arbitration." They're saying that if you're not going to withdraw the bill, at least do what would make it a little bit less offensive.

"Second, the bill gives the minister extensive powers to issue a broad a range of compliance directives and orders against the board—again without first referring the matter to third party dispute resolution or, at minimum, obtaining approval from cabinet." He can do it without even talking to cabinet, which I find bizarre. "Again, it has been made very clear that this is not acceptable to hospitals and the volunteer board members dedicating so much time and effort to their governance roles.

"Third, we cannot endorse provisions which give the government authority to issue orders directly against hospital leaders, thereby undermining the role of the board. We therefore believe that sections 26.1 and 27 should be deleted in their entirety." They're basically saying what we're saying: pull the bill back.

"Fourth, to ensure the communities continue to receive the services they need, the inclusion of 'accessibility' or 'timely access to care in the community' must be included within the definition of 'public interest.'" I think this is a really important point, because the bill says this is all about increasing and making better our medicare system in Ontario but there's no provisions in the bill for making that happen.

Imagine being a person in a community like Attawapiskat, Fort Albany or any of the other communities that are basically landlocked from any other place in

Ontario and you have a heart attack. You'd like to know there is provision in this bill that, at the end of the day, will put some services in your community to take good care of you should you need them. They're saying you've got to put that in the bill so there is some definition about what "timeliness" means when it comes to services.

"Fifth, we are very concerned that section 9 has been amended extensively to allow for a broad range of clinical payments by hospitals and other facilities to physicians, contrary to recommendations made by the OHA that these payments be made permissible only 'in a narrow range of circumstances.'"

That very much limits the ability of this hospital especially to fulfill its mandate when it comes to providing services. At the end of the day, health care costs money, and you've got to make sure they've got the bucks to provide services. I'm here to say that it does cost more to provide health care in a northern community like Attawapiskat or Fort Albany compared to Timmins, Iroquois Falls or Toronto. We need to recognize that in some way in our funding formulas, if not in the bill itself.

I want to say in the last few seconds I have that I have similar letters that I won't have a chance to put on the record from the Timmins and District Hospital, from the Kapuskasing-Hearst people and from Smooth Rock Falls, all saying basically the same thing: "The bill is flawed. Don't do what the Tories did. Don't centralize decision-making in the hands and in the office of the Minister of Health. You've got to leave that where it belongs, and that is in the hands of the people who are duly elected and who volunteer many hours on hospital boards to make sure that control lies within communities and not in the minister's office."

I just put this as a thought: Imagine, if you will, that those types of decisions are being made outside of your community by a minister in Toronto, and you're sitting somewhere in Timmins or Thunder Bay or Simcoe, how uncomfortable that makes one feel. I think that would be enough to make you change your mind.

1640

The Acting Speaker: Questions and comments?

Mr Bob Delaney (Mississauga West): It is my pleasure to rise again in support of Bill 8. The taxpayers of Ontario now spend \$28 billion each year on health care. For most of the past decade, this figure has risen by about 10% each year, on the watches of the two opposition parties while they formed the government of Ontario between 1990 and 2003. If the taxpayers of Ontario have been spending 10% more each year, it is fair to ask if they have received health care service that is 10% better or 10% more accessible or 10% faster, year after year.

Taxpayers have spent lavishly on health care for more than a decade but lack the ability to know how well their money is invested. The Provincial Auditor can count how much, but he's not properly equipped to evaluate how effectively Ontarians' money is spent. That's why health quality councils will be so valuable. By collecting data that is clear and consistent across all Ontario hospitals

and is collected regularly, we will be able to make an informed judgment on how effectively Ontario health care institutions use the people, time and money allocated to them on an annual basis.

It is interesting that not one deputation before the justice and social policy committee came from an institution that said to us, "We're below par for institutions similar to ours." Everybody said they were among the best. But surely half of all Ontario health care providers are in the bottom half province-wide on an ongoing basis.

Bill 8, with its health quality councils, allows Ontarians to finally see how effectively health care providers use their resources. This measure of professionalism and accountability is long overdue and will be seen as an example of how this government faced up to a serious challenge and solved it for the best interests of all Ontarians.

Mr Garfield Dunlop (Simcoe North): I'm pleased to make a few comments this afternoon as well. I have to start right off the bat by saying we're almost at the end of debate here on the second reading of Bill 8, and of course we won't be supporting this piece of legislation in its current form. We do, however, want to compliment my critic, the former Minister of Health, who was instrumental in making sure that we do in fact have committee hearings on second reading, and I understand there are three days of clause-by-clause as well. That's my understanding right now. I think it's important that we get the stakeholders who are interested in this bill to come back and try to convince the government that this is a huge mistake.

It's interesting to note that the previous couple of speakers have talked about accountability. Every time we brought up the word "accountability" when we were in government, this group of people who are now on the other side of the House continually complained about it. They chastised us in many ways about accountability. It was never enough. It didn't matter how much money we spent; it was never enough.

But the problem we have here today, as I mentioned earlier in previous hits and in my comments before, is what we are doing to the volunteers in our health care system. That is the most important part of this bill that I am most confused about and against in most forms. Quite simply, it takes the life and heart out of hospital boards, foundations and auxiliaries. That's what we have here. That's what this bill is doing. You will never convince me that, in its present form, this bill is satisfactory to those people who are the heart of our health care system.

It has been a pleasure to speak here this afternoon. Again, I want to say we will be opposed to this bill and look forward to committee hearings and third reading debate.

Mr Marchese: I want to congratulate my friend from Timmins-James Bay for bringing us the perspective of the hospital board at James Bay General, because that perspective is no different than any other perspective we've heard from all the deputants who came from all over Ontario. It's the same thing over and over again in

terms of the lament of hospital boards saying that the minister is giving unto himself absolute powers that they consider to be a bad thing for boards, for CEOs, and yes, indeed, even accountability.

I remind the Liberals that when the Tories decided to use their centralist powers to centralize education financing, to attack teachers and to diminish them, to belittle them—unlike any other government had ever done before—to belittle the trustees, as they did over and over again, to amalgamate boards all over Ontario, the Liberals said that was wrong; that that would cause chaos in the system; that there would be no peace and there would be no positive change as a result of that. We said that, and I agreed with Gerard Kennedy, the now Minister of Education, who used to say how awful it was that Conservative governments would centralize power so strongly in their own hands, so centrally. That's what Bill 8 does. What we're saying to Gerard and others is, you're doing the same thing in health as the Tories did in education. You attacked them then, and we attack you now for doing the same thing.

You cannot bring about positive change by forcing hospital boards and CEOs to do your will. It won't happen in a way that is natural, in a way that is healthy. You're not going to get the change you need by doing what you're doing in Bill 8. It's wrong, and we're fighting it.

Ms Jennifer F. Mossop (Stoney Creek): I can understand why my friend the member from Erie-Lincoln thinks this is a bill about centralizing power in the Premier's office, because that's how his government operated. That's the way they operated for eight years.

I also have people who come to my office, and they say, "What happened to my health care system over the last 10 years? What happened to it?" A man was in my office a week ago and said, "My very old, frail mother had a broken pelvic bone." That's very painful. She was in the hallway of the hospital. There was no room for her. There was no bed for her. There was no one to help her to go to the bathroom. There was no one for him to complain to, except overworked nurses. So he came to me and complained to me, which makes perfect sense, because I am his duly elected representative and I can go to the Minister of Health and say, "Here is a problem."

Why shouldn't the Minister of Health have an accountability agreement, an understanding with all the hospital boards in this province that says, "These are our goals, and these are our demands"? The people who pay for this system, who pay through the nose for a system they are not happy with, would like to know that we're all on the same page; that we know this is what we want and this is how we're going to get it. It's perfectly reasonable.

Again, I can understand why there's some confusion, because the province has operated for so long under a system where there was a centralized power, where the staff of the Premier's office was basically running the show, where everything came out of there. It was centralized. We are trying to change that, and we have,

by changing the system. Every single Liberal MPP sits on a policy committee. We all have input on what's happening, and this bill has had the input of people all across this province. It has gone to consultation, like this government never did, and if it has to go back, it will go back, because we're committed to that kind of openness.

The Acting Speaker: The member for Timmins-James Bay has two minutes to reply.

Mr Bisson: I want to take my two minutes on the comments made by the member for Stoney Creek, because that's exactly the reason why we shouldn't be doing what you're doing by way of this legislation.

Let's be clear: If there are decisions to be made in a hospital somewhere in Ontario, who do citizens most trust and feel most confident will make the decision in a way that's conducive to the needs of the community? It's local hospital boards. I don't want the Minister of Health in Queen's Park in Toronto making a decision about what's going to happen in my local hospital, let's say, in Kingston, Sudbury, Thunder Bay or Moosonee, because at the end of the day, they're far away. Go to any of our ridings and ask most citizens who the Minister of Health is, and they wouldn't even be able to give a name, never mind try to influence a decision. I want the boards to make those decisions. We have other mechanisms by way of government to work with hospitals in order to advance whatever health policy we want to do. That's called funding. That's how you deal with this stuff.

Now, the member from Stoney Creek—I couldn't believe it—said, “Well, you know, that's why I got elected. I got elected so I can walk across the aisle and go talk to the Minister of Health about the concerns.”

1650

Ms Shelley Martel (Nickel Belt): Good luck.

Mr Bisson: Good luck: exactly, like my good friend from Nickel Belt says. Can you imagine? There are many, many ministers of health who have sat on the other side who, quite frankly, didn't listen to their own cabinet, their own backbenchers, let alone the opposition. That's happened over the years.

And we want to put more power in the hands of the Minister of Health? We don't live in a totalitarian state here; we live in a democracy. At the end of the day, I want to know the decisions are being made the closest possible to where the decisions are going to affect the people, and that is by way of the hospital boards. So I've got to say again, do what the vast majority of people who came before this committee have said. After first reading, and we did hearings, virtually nobody agreed with this legislation. So I say, withdraw it. You would be doing Ontario a great service.

The Acting Speaker: Further debate on Bill 8?

Mr Bisson: Can I do it again?

The Acting Speaker: I'm afraid not. Further debate?

Mr Smitherman has moved second reading of Bill 8, An Act to establish the Ontario Health Quality Council, to enact new legislation concerning health service accessibility and repeal the Health Care Accessibility

Act, to provide for accountability in the health service sector, and to amend the Health Insurance Act.

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

All those in favour, please say “aye.”

All those opposed, please say “nay.”

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

Call in the members. This will be a 30-minute bell.

Order. I would like to inform the House I've received the appropriate documentation from the chief government whip, asking that the vote on the bill, the recorded vote, be deferred until tomorrow at the appropriate time when we have deferred votes.

Orders of the day.

GREENBELT PROTECTION ACT, 2003

LOI DE 2003 SUR LA PROTECTION DE LA CEINTURE DE VERDURE

Resuming the debate adjourned on April 6th, 2004, on the motion for second reading of Bill 27, An Act to establish a greenbelt study area and to amend the Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Act, 2001 / Projet de loi 27, Loi établissant une zone d'étude de la ceinture de verdure et modifiant la Loi de 2001 sur la conservation de la moraine d'Oak Ridges.

The Acting Speaker (Mr Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Mr Gilles Bisson (Timmins-James Bay): It's a doubleheader today. I come in on the next game—whoohoo—but this time on a different bill. That's the beauty of House duty, right? When you're on House duty, you get the opportunity to speak to bills.

I want to put a number of things on the record when it comes to the whole issue of this particular bill that we call the greenbelt legislation. I want to put on the record right up front that, generally, we're supportive of what the government is doing, as I think we can all accept.

Interjections.

Mr Bisson: What's the matter with you guys? You don't like the—

Interjections.

Mr Bisson: But—

Interjection: You're going to spoil it.

Mr Bisson: But I just want to put a couple of things on the record quickly up front. That is, generally, I think we can all agree in this House that we need to have a more sane planning process when it comes to development on sensitive lands such as the Oak Ridges moraine and other areas across this province. That's like motherhood and apple pie. Only the Tories would argue against apple pie and motherhood. Well, maybe not motherhood, but certainly apple pie. They only like the blueberry pie, but that's another story.

I think we can all agree on that one and, in jest with my good friends from the Conservative Party, I think even they probably agree with the principle.

I am a little bit concerned, however, not so much with what this government has done but with what the

previous government did. I sat on the committee, back between 1990 and 1995, that made all of the massive changes to the planning rules that we have in the province of Ontario—many of the very rules that this government, the Liberal government, is looking at trying to bring back by way of this bill and other future Planning Act amendment bills that will be brought back to the Legislature a little bit later.

I remember sitting on that particular committee, because it was quite an interesting committee to sit on as a new member back in 1990. Imagine that: I used to be a new member in this place, in 1990. I was about 40 to 60 pounds lighter, a little less grey and I had more hair, but let's not go there.

What we were trying to get at is that there's a huge problem in the province of Ontario, as there are in other provinces and jurisdictions out there, in the way that we approach planning. For example, one of the things that we have seen in our cities across North America, and I would argue in some places in Europe as well, is the whole issue of urban sprawl. What we've seen is, as communities are in a rush to develop because population bases get bigger, for all kinds of reasons—either economic activity, immigration or just overall population growth within existing populations—there's very bad planning when it comes to how we develop our cities.

If we look at the city of Toronto over the last 30 years, we have seen a huge amount of urban sprawl. In fact, just go up Highway 400, if you're not caught in a traffic jam, and take a look at the amount of development. We've seen huge amounts of developments around Highway 400 over the last five years, I would argue. If you look around the Canada's Wonderland area, there's a huge development that has been worked on for the past five or six years. I was just driving by there with my wife on Monday as we were coming down to the Legislature and I remarked to myself as I looked at it the amount of development that we have there. What we've got is a cookie-cutter approach to planning. It's like house, house, house, house, house, a street and a whole bunch more houses. There's really not a lot of creativity about how we've approached planning in that particular area.

One of the things that we looked at when we were on the committee back in 1990 under the NDP government was, how do we use existing space better? In other words, infilling. One of the things we need to look at is, rather than moving to a concept where we have the population moving from downtown cores out into the suburbs, we should be looking at how we can maintain good, healthy lifestyles in the centre of a city in order to encourage people to stay within the downtown area.

That's what you call infilling, and one of the ways you do that is by proper planning—addressing issues, for example, like traffic. Are people able to live in a downtown community without needing to utilize a car? If we can keep people off the roads, there's less pollution, less traffic congestion and just a healthier place for people to live. How do we deal with issues of transit? For example,

if I happen to live on the corner of Bay and Edward, where I do, at 633 Bay, am I able to move and do my shopping three, five or six blocks away, either by a nice walk, without having to worry about leapfrogging through traffic, or if I need to go a little bit further, how can I get onto the transit system to be able to move?

How do you plan quiet spaces within those cities? If I live in the downtown area and I decide I want to take a little walk, I can take a little walk and enjoy a calm area in the city where there's not as much traffic, and I'm able to enjoy some of the parks—making sure that we do that type of planning when it comes to the developments of our cities.

We have a golden opportunity with the development of the waterfront. If we go that way, and I know that's somewhat controversial, we need to take a look at those issues so that if people decide they want to live in the downtown core—and we should try to enhance and promote that—we do a good job of planning. So when people do make the choice, they're making a choice that makes some sense from a quality-of-life perspective. Those are the kinds of things that we were trying to put in place by which of changes to the Planning Act.

There were a whole raft of other issues with regard to the appeal process. For example, if a municipality decided to change the zoning in a community over a particular piece of land because of whatever development was going on, there would be a sane and rational process for people to be able to raise an objection. The whole question of intervener funding was first raised by our government because most citizens don't have the dollars necessary to appear before the Ontario Municipal Board, the OMB, and to have the lawyers and the legal experts they need to put together a submission that allows them to get to the OMB and, second, to make the argument once they are there. We argued that there should be some form of intervener funding to allow citizens who are affected by a particular development in their community to be able to represent themselves in a way that they were at least on the same footing legally with the developers or other proponents who happened to have large interests in that project and were able to spend the kind of money needed to create the briefs and hire the lawyers etc to get before the Ontario Municipal Board.

The unfortunate part is that all of those positive changes that were made in the Planning Act—I think it was the 1992 or 1993 Planning Act; I can't remember the exact year—virtually all of them were thrown out the door by the Tories when they were elected in 1995. I really regretted that at the time and I still regret it now, because we tried, under the Planning Act, to deal with many of the things this government is now trying to deal with more than 10 years later. I think that's rather unfortunate, because if we had kept the Planning Act—I'm not saying it was perfect. I'm just saying a lot of progressive things were done. There were a lot of public hearings, as far as consultation on white papers, and also by way of legislative committees that travelled, I believe, an entire winter on that particular issue.

1700

We had the opportunity to develop some pretty good legislation, very simple things; like when a municipality is building a new sidewalk, they cut the curb so the person who is needing to move in a wheelchair or a person who has difficulty walking doesn't have to step over the curb. Issues like traffic lights: making sure that we take into account that there are people who are not able to see and need to have the audible signals on traffic lights on corners where it would make sense to do that, because there is a known population that frequents that area that has need for such traffic lights. All of those things were looked at under the NDP government in its Planning Act—if I remember correctly, Minister Cooke was the one who passed that as municipal affairs minister—all of which was basically done away with when the Conservatives came to power.

Then I sat on the second committee, which was the committee that the Tories put in place. It was the ballyhooed repeal of the NDP Planning Act. They basically went out and destroyed virtually all of the work we had done and, I would argue, to a certain extent some of the work that the former Peterson government had done in running up to making the changes that we eventually ended up making as New Democrats. I thought that was rather unfortunate.

The ironic part, and the reason I raise this, is that after the government made the changes to the Planning Act, I was sitting on committee and saying, "You're going to regret the day that you did that, because you're going to have some bad planning, some very bad decisions that will come back to haunt us. But, number 2, you're doing it wrong. You're making changes to the Planning Act, in regard to the powers of the OMB and the powers of citizens to be able to get to the OMB, that at the end of the day are unmanageable. You're going to end up having to bring more legislation to the Legislature to fix the problems that you create in the repeal of our Planning Act and by not putting something that's better or, in your view, more streamlined into the legislation."

Unfortunately, that's exactly what happened. That legislation ended up, by way of the government majority, being passed; and then, when passed, we found there were all kinds of problems. For example, we limited the ability of citizens to get before the OMB. What a dumb thing to do. Citizens are the ones who are affected by planning. Let's say I live in community X and somebody wants to build a hog farm right next to my neighbourhood. I should have the right—not that I have anything against hog farmers. They're an integral part of our community of Ontario. Hog farmers are people who have worked hard at a business that is needed in the province of Ontario. But do you put a hog farm right next to a sensitive area, where you've got a number of people living in a community? Those are pretty real issues.

Well, the government put an amendment to the legislation that said, in short, if in the view of the OMB somebody had a vexatious application to appear before the board, they could determine what was vexatious and

prevent that person from getting before the board. Let's put this idea: If you have a pro-development OMB, they're going to see something fairly vexatious. The threshold for vexation is certainly going to be lower for a pro-development board than it would be for a board that's not necessarily non-pro-development but more consistent with good planning practices.

I always thought that was dumb. I always thought that it was dumb that the government should take the position of not allowing citizens to go before the OMB to have their day in court. After all, we do live in a democracy. People should have the right to disagree with decisions the government makes, either municipally or provincially. They should have a mechanism to express that view.

Now the problem with planning is, you can't express that by way of a provincial ballot. It's pretty hard to say, "I'm going to vote for or against the government. We're going to form a government on the basis of a planning issue," let's say, "in downtown Vaughan." Certainly the people in downtown Vaughan might vote for a candidate who believes in their view, but certainly a person in Kenora, Timmins or Hamilton is not going to vote on the basis of what's happening in Vaughan. So one of the good ways, other than local municipal election results, for the citizen to be able to get some impact on decision-making and have their say in court was their ability to get to the Ontario Municipal Board. That's something I always agreed with.

I don't see a restoration of the right of people to get to the Ontario Municipal Board in this legislation. I'm just saying, if we're trying to make some changes to the Planning Act by way of this legislation, we should, especially on the issue of the Greenbelt Protection Act, which deals with the Oak Ridges moraine, give citizens an increased ability to get to the board, should they have a concern. I would even go so far as to suggest that there should be some sort of intervener funding available. For example, we all went through the debate on the Oak Ridges moraine. I remember the Conservative government, upon being elected, basically opened up the Oak Ridges moraine to development—big long story.

Myself, along with our critic, Marilyn Churley, the member for Toronto-Danforth, who has worked very hard on this particular issue, fought the government tooth and nail all the way. I remember going to debates with Steve Gilchrist, the then parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Municipal Affairs, I think at one point, and eventually minister for a very short while—got himself in trouble and had to resign—fortunately, unfortunately, depending on which side of that resignation you were on. But I remember going to debates in the area affected by the Oak Ridges moraine, and I was always astounded at the size of the crowds that came out for those particular debates or rallies, opposed to the development of the Oak Ridges moraine.

The government tried to argue that it needed to do this development for whatever reasons they were putting forward, and at the end of the day came up with a pretty

weak response, I think, where they basically said they were going to allow 6,500 or 6,200 housing units to be developed on the Oak Ridges moraine.

I remember us, in opposition, along with the Liberals being really opposed to that saying, "Whoa, you can't have any development on the Oak Ridges moraine. It's like trying to build the Adams mine in Kirkland Lake. You don't do those things on an aquifer. It just doesn't make any sense. If there's going to be any kind of development, it has to be done under good planning law." That was our big problem: If you're going to have any development on the Oak Ridges moraine, you have to have a Planning Act that deals with those issues that are sensitive to the problems that arise when you develop a housing development or industrial complex on something like a moraine. I would argue you probably have to try to keep that down to a pretty darned dull roar, but if there is any development, it has to be done in the confines of a good Planning Act.

At the time, Liberals and New Democrats fought together against the Tories. I remember going to those speeches. Mr Colle was there, and other Liberal members; I remember the late Mr Agostino being at a couple of them. They were passionate defenders of the people on the Oak Ridges moraine. I remember going to the debates, and it was always about who was going to defend the Oak Ridges moraine people more? Was it going to be the New Democrats or the Liberals?

We would go to the debates and say, "You can't trust the Liberals. They're going to tell you what they want to tell you now because there's an election looming. But, at the end the day, they're pretty cozy with developers." We saw what happened during the Peterson era, when the Peterson government was in power from 1985 to 1990. They really snuggled up with the developers. It was a real close bond between the developers and the province of Ontario. You just had to look at the fundraising that happened within the province. I remember really well the coziness that was developed between the developers in Ontario and the Liberals. We tried to tell people at the time: "You can't trust the Liberals on this. At the end of the day, if they get elected, they're going to forget that promise quicker than you can shake a stick. They're going to completely forget that they made that promise to you."

I remember people getting mad at me for raising that at public debates. I remember one particular debate that I went to. It was Mr Colle and Mr Gilchrist who were at that one. I remember raising that, and the organizers got mad at me. They challenged me at the meeting and said, "We don't want you being partisan when you come to this meeting." And I said, "I'm not being partisan, I'm just telling you how it is. I don't believe for one second the Liberals are going to keep their commitment to stop development on the Oak Ridges moraine." They said, "Mr Bisson, you're taking a partisan view. You're a nice guy, and that's why we invited you, but you're being much too partisan."

What's the first thing Dalton McGuinty did after being elected in October? How many days after? It was within

days of being elected. All of a sudden, it was total amnesia on the promise. They completely forgot what they promised the citizens of Ontario. But I knew that; I said that. I repeated that at debates, to the agitation of some of the organizers. Basically, they went in and broke their commitment to the people of Ontario, especially people who are affected by the Oak Ridges moraine, and they allowed development to happen. Now, the Liberals are, you know—

Mr Rosario Marchese (Trinity-Spadina): God bless them.

Mr Bisson: God bless them. They get elected. "Vote for change. Rather than 6,200 houses, we're going to build 6,000." What change. Oh, that was so exciting.

Mr Marchese: That's an improvement.

1710

Mr Bisson: It's better. It's in the right direction—not very far, but in the right direction. I just say to the Liberals, I wish you would at least keep some of your campaign promises. Some of them I agree with. Some of my friends—they are still my friends and I'm not going to hold it against them—voted Liberal on the basis of your promises. And I would say to some of my friends, "But you can't trust them on issues such as the Oak Ridges moraine, bringing the minimum wage to \$8 an hour, auto insurance etc. You can't trust them because at the end of the day, a Tory is a Liberal, a Liberal is a Tory." I always say to people at election time, "Liberals talk like New Democrats, but once they become elected, they act just like Tories." Just look at Jean Chrétien. Remember him? Monsieur Chrétien, who was elected Prime Minister of Canada, the guy who left all the time bombs for Paul Martin—but that's another story.

Mr Richard Patten (Ottawa Centre): Lit little bombs—like poof.

Mr Bisson: Poof. Threw little bombs over—exactly. I remember listening to him during the debate in the 1997 federal election, I believe it was.

Mr Marchese: Wasn't it 1993, when they got elected?

Mr Bisson: You're right, 1993. My mistake. He ran around, and when you listened to him, you thought he was a New Democrat. "I'm going to scrap the GST. It's terrible what it does to the people."

Mr Marchese: And then he denied he even said it.

Mr Bisson: My Lord, he got elected and denied he ever said it, like my good friend Mr Marchese says. Then he said, "NAFTA—I get elected, I take NAFTA and I rip it up. I rip it up in the House of Commons, because it's a bad deal for Canada." Not only did he not rip it up, Mr Chrétien got elected and then negotiated stronger trade deals for industrialists in this country, to the consternation of the workers—especially the workers of Ontario. So I just say to people, I want to remind you, we're there again.

Prior to the election, the Liberals promised what? No development on the Oak Ridges moraine, zero. Once elected, like Monsieur Chrétien, they break their promise. They get there and they say: "Oh, we're not going to

have 6,200 or 6,300 houses. We think that's too many. We'll have 6,000. That way we don't break our promise." Well, there's an old saying that you can't fool all of the people all of the time. I don't have enough time to go through it, but I think sometimes you've got to wonder.

I want to say again to the members of the Liberal caucus, and to the members of the Legislature generally, that we generally support what you're trying to do with this bill. There is a problem we have with the development we're going to see in Niagara with regard to the new housing development that is being looked at in that particular area. My colleague Madame Churley has raised this issue and is quite concerned, as are people in the Niagara area. We have some concerns about that.

We have concerns about your not keeping your promise to scrap the development on the Oak Ridges moraine. But this bill deals with some of the planning issues that are affected by way of how development should happen in that area. We'll allow the bill to go to committee, because I think we need to have a pretty good discussion at committee, and especially to make some amendments at clause-by-clause, to make sure that the bill actually does what it purports to do by way of the title.

I appreciate this time for debate, and I very much look forward to the questions and comments from the members opposite.

The Acting Speaker: Questions and comments? The member for Pickering-Ajax-Uxbridge.

Mr Wayne Arthurs (Pickering-Ajax-Uxbridge): It's those multiple municipal ridings that make it extremely interesting, particularly in light of this particular legislation, as it sits directly within the study area, as do many of the ridings. It's an opportunity to look comprehensively at the Golden Horseshoe. To my knowledge, it is the first real attempt to do that. Certainly there have been planning initiatives in the past in a broad way. The Oak Ridges moraine debate during the last sitting of this Legislature was an important debate to help articulate the importance of groundwater, the cold-water streams, the urban forest, rural and local forests, and agricultural opportunities. This is the first real opportunity the government has taken to look at the Golden Horseshoe in its entirety. I think it's a really strong recognition that the greater Toronto area, which has always been the focus of activity, doesn't stand alone. It stands in a context, and that context extends beyond its own boundaries.

There is an opportunity for municipalities to take a bit of a breather in some respects over the next year or so, once the legislation is in place, so that the consultation can go on effectively. There are lots of opportunities within those municipalities to look at what they are currently doing, to look within their current urban environments at other opportunities that will exist for further urban development, to look at intensification, as well as look at their edges. This is part of it. This doesn't say there won't be any growth; it says that during this study time there is a boundary that says if you're not currently

in an urban envelope, you can't come forward for development. It doesn't say there won't be any development in those areas.

Rightfully, there will be a need to accommodate the growth in the GTA, and there are areas that will be well suited for development, but this is a bit of a breather to look at those very carefully and, I think, an opportunity for municipalities to look at what they currently have, the context they're in, without feeling under the gun for approval or for the Ontario Municipal Board to impose decisions upon them.

The Acting Speaker: Further questions and comments? The member for Simcoe East.

Mr Garfield Dunlop (Simcoe North): I just want to clarify, Mr Speaker, that it's Simcoe North. I didn't want you to put that in Hansard for a long period of time. Simcoe East used to be a much smaller riding. When I came along, they knew they needed a bigger riding for me to look after.

I'm pleased to comment on a few things today. I want to start by saying that I have taken a lot of my leads from my colleague Julia Munro, who is having some difficult times with her health right now, and who I'm sure will be in the House later in the week. Julia has analyzed this bill inside out and upside down. She has some strong points and some areas in the bill where she's supportive of things, but she also has some concerns.

One of the concerns that I know I've talked about in the past is compensation. There's no question that we've grown into a trend in Ontario over many decades where people are sort of using their land as their retirement package. It's important to note that a lot of people were counting on some of their land for resale. They weren't all going to be multi-millionaires; some were just going to have the opportunity to sell it, and hopefully there would be some kind of speculation down the road. That may or may not happen with this. So I hope there is a process in place, whether by regulation or something we add to the bill—I think the government has to look at a type of compensation package, because eventually this land basically becomes almost dead. It stays as green land, but there will be no possible use for it for anything else in the future. I think we have to be very careful about that.

Some of the comments I've heard so far have been interesting. Mrs Munro will probably be back later in the week, and hopefully we'll get a chance to hear some of her comments in the next few days. I look forward to further debate.

Mr Marchese: I congratulate the member from Timmins-James Bay again for raising many important issues, one of which was the Oak Ridges moraine. The Oak Ridges moraine gave the Liberals one heck of a headache. Prior to the election they all said, "We're going to stop the Oak Ridges moraine." The Premier was convinced he could do it. In opposition, he thought he would get powers when he became Premier and just do it. But the problem is that when you become Premier, you understand your limitations.

They realized they couldn't stop the Oak Ridges moraine. I think they went from preventing the construction of 6,500 units to the building 6,000 units, a total gain of 500 units. The Liberals say, "Good heavens, it's better than what the Tories got." That's not what you said in opposition. In opposition you said you were going to stop the entire development. That's why it's so hard for us to believe you, now that you're in government, in terms of any promise you might make. It's hard to trust you. It was important for the member from Timmins-James Bay to raise this as a concern.

I have as great concerns about Liberals and developers as I do about Tories and developers, because they are so close. It's hard to distinguish a Liberal close to a developer from a Tory close to a developer, except maybe by the suit, but I don't even think the suit could distinguish one from the other. So I've got to worry about development as it relates to developers, as it relates to anything this government is saying. That's why, as we support this bill, we want it to go for second reading because there are a whole lot of concerns, including the task force and whether we're going to delineate what kind of powers they have and many other issues the member has raised.

1720

Mr Jeff Leal (Peterborough): Bill 27, the Greenbelt Protection Act, is certainly an important bill for someone who has spent 18 years in municipal politics in the city of Peterborough. Most importantly, there is the whole issue of planning: orderly planning and how we use existing space better; how planning can prevent gridlock down the road; and planning that encourages the infilling of existing spaces.

For someone who is new to the Legislature, you sometimes get overwhelmed. The issues of education and health care come up quite frequently as the number one and two priorities, but certainly something that follows behind those is the whole issue of planning, particularly in the areas that have been identified through this bill: the regional municipalities of Durham, Halton, Peel and York and the cities of Hamilton and Toronto. It's certainly an area of Ontario that faces a considerable amount of pressure in terms of potential development.

Some years ago, I had a chance to be in the Niagara Peninsula to actually tour a winery down there: Pillitteri Estates, a small but very successful operation. What struck me as I was touring that operation were the pressures that operation and similar operations face down through that whole area in terms of subdivision development, other agricultural activities that go on in that area, and the need to have some orderly development there.

My friend across the aisle talks about Liberal relationships with developers. It's interesting that if you put in place a clear set of guidelines and requisites of how they are to operate, there's no real problem, because they want orderly development to take place for the health of the economy—

The Acting Speaker: Thank you very much. The member from Timmins-James Bay has two minutes to reply.

Mr Bisson: I want to thank the members across the way for their comments. I want to repeat what my good friend from Trinity-Spadina has said: I remember well the promises that were made. I remember the promise made by the Liberals leading up to the last election. And the promise was what? That there would be no development whatsoever on the Oak Ridges moraine. Mr McGuinty, then the leader of the official opposition, the Liberal Party of Ontario, said he was going to stop the development of the Oak Ridges moraine.

I was at debates with Tories and Liberals where I would point out, "The Liberals—don't trust them. At the end of the day, they're so close to developers." Remember 1985 to 1990, and the closeness, the snugness. They were actually glued to some of the developers. In fact, there were many scandals. Remember the Peterson scandals over the money that was coming from developers at Liberal fundraisers? Let's not go there because that's unfair. It's a different group of Liberals.

Hon Sandra Pupatello (Minister of Community and Social Services, minister responsible for women's issues): Public auto insurance.

Mr Bisson: Oh, no, but they broke the promise. My question is, can they be very different?

I just have to say, you made the promise prior to the election, you made the promise during the election. You were very clear that you were going to stop the development of the Oak Ridges moraine.

Hon Ms Pupatello: Public auto insurance, free tuition, social contract.

Mr Marchese: Sandra remembers. She was there.

Mr Bisson: Sandra was there. I remember that my good friend Sandra Pupatello, the now minister of something, was apoplectic. I remember her getting up in the House, and she was one of the ones—

Mr Marchese: She was there, feisty and pugilistic.

Mr Bisson: She was one of the feistier ones, I agree. But they forgot the promise. Something happened on October 2. They got elected and they said, "Did we make a promise to the people of Ontario on the Oak Ridges moraine? How are we going to fix this?"

Interjections.

Mr Bisson: Mr Caplan was there too. I remember well my good backgammon friend. We never got a chance to play yet. Basically they promised they would have none, and rather than 6,200 or 6,300 housing units approved, they did 6,000. Vote for change? I don't see much change here.

The Acting Speaker: Further debate?

Ms Laurel C. Broten (Etobicoke-Lakeshore): I'm pleased to rise today and speak in support of the proposed Greenbelt Protection Act, 2003. This is an important piece of legislation, and I'm pleased to share my time today with the member for Guelph-Wellington.

In this legislation, we are taking these important first steps to contain sprawl, to manage growth responsibly and to create a permanent greenbelt. Why are we doing that? We're doing that to enhance the quality of life for all Ontarians and for those people who live in my own

community of Etobicoke-Lakeshore. And as captured in the preamble of the bill, we're doing this because the government of Ontario recognizes that in order to protect environmentally sensitive land and farmland and contain urban sprawl, there's an immediate need to study an area in the part of Ontario known as the Golden Horseshoe.

The government also recognizes that clear limits must be set on development in order to protect this valuable green resource as a greenbelt, for the long term, for future generations.

Our government also recognizes that we need good planning for environmentally sensitive and agricultural lands, to ensure sustainable development that will benefit all of us, in my own community of Etobicoke-Lakeshore and all of the residents of the Golden Horseshoe area. These are among the reasons this government is moving proactively on this legislation.

There's been lots of talk over the years about the need to protect greenbelt in the city of Toronto, in the Golden Horseshoe, in communities like my own. This is the first time a government takes these important steps. There was talk about this in 1976, when the provincial government proposed setting aside a 5,200-acre parkway belt, two to 30 kilometres wide, parallel to Highway 7. It didn't happen, because of the lack of political will and because the provincial government did not initiate a firm protection plan for these lands.

We're doing this today and we're not alone in knowing the importance of protecting this land and of stopping sprawl. We're joined in the knowledge that important community organizations, such as the David Suzuki Foundation, are supporting the need to stop urban sprawl.

Recently, last October, the David Suzuki Foundation released a proposal, a plan, that said we need to stop the ever-expanding sprawl of Canadian cities. It is one of the issues that must be addressed. It's responsible for increased air pollution, for rising obesity rates and for loss of agricultural land. David Suzuki himself said, "The time to address this critical issue is now.... The more cities sprawl outward, the more we damage the environment and our health." David Suzuki is knowledgeable about these issues. I am pleased that someone of his calibre agrees with the fact that we need to stop sprawling communities.

Many studies have been set out that have talked about the correlations between sprawl, health and environmental problems. Those are important issues for our government that we are proud to move on at this time.

Other community groups, such as the Sierra Club of Canada, have talked about the fact that suburban sprawl development is hazardous to Ontario taxpayers' pocket-books and to the environment. Costs, according to the Sierra club, are \$70 billion, or more than \$14,000 per person, as sprawling housing development continues over the next 25 years in the greater Toronto area.

According to them, "Sprawl is costing us billions, destroying ecosystems, and increasing smog. It's time to smarten up." I am very proud to be part of a government

that is smartening up, that for the first time ever is taking action to make sure we reduce smog, that we reduce gridlock, that we really deal with the expansion of the area in the Golden Horseshoe.

As many of you will know, the region of Ontario known as the Golden Horseshoe is growing by 115,000 people every year. Within 15 years it will be the third-largest urban region in North America, after New York and Los Angeles. This phenomenal growth, as exciting as it is, has presented some difficult issues for us: tough economic issues, environmental issues and quality-of-life challenges for millions of people who live and work in the region.

Many of those are my constituents. I'm one of those individuals myself who, over the last number of years, has commented on the reduced quality of life in the city of Toronto as the result of smog, as a result of gridlock, as a result of our lost agricultural lands in the surrounding communities. These are important first steps and ones that I'm proud to support today.

We all know, members of this government know, that we can't thrive as a province if goods and services are stuck in gridlock, that our families can't thrive if they're stuck on the highway and are not home with their kids, or if there are no green spaces left to enjoy. As a result, our government is determined to enhance the quality of life for people in the Golden Horseshoe by containing sprawl and encouraging environmental protection.

This commitment starts with the protection of a greenbelt where hundreds and thousands of acres of environmentally sensitive land and farmland will be protected for future generations. We're proposing that we move on a new initiative of managed growth.

Managing the growth in the city of Toronto, in my own very fast-growing community of Etobicoke-Lakeshore, is one that I often hear about when I'm having an opportunity to speak to the people in my own riding. They talk to me about the fact that they want to ensure that we have an orderly planning system, that our growth is managed, that we infill those important, already developed spaces, and that planning policies that have been put in place with thought and process are maintained by the OMB. Those are important initiatives for managing growth in our province. We need to encourage quality of life and we need to ensure real environmental protection as well.

1730

You might ask, why does an urban member for a riding such as Etobicoke-Lakeshore speak so extensively about something that will protect the greenbelt? There's not, I have to say, a lot of this greenbelt area in my community of Etobicoke-Lakeshore, but it is a community that at its heart really focuses on the environment. On the lakefront, where we are, we're cognizant of the quality of air in our community. We look across Lake Ontario at the Lakeview generating facility, whose closure we look forward to in 2005 for the quality of air in our own community. We're a community that straddles the Gardiner and we see individuals and the traffic coming

through our community each and every day. So for a community like Etobicoke-Lakeshore, reducing sprawl means increasing density in our city and focusing businesses and residential living within the GTA.

Urban density is a good thing because it's responsible living. Urban density is a good thing for Etobicoke-Lakeshore because it increases the green area that's accessible to people living in urban environments, and it manages the supply of our usable land and demand for urban growth in an effective manner. It increases the opportunity for redevelopment. That's something that my own community of Etobicoke-Lakeshore can be very proud of: the extensive redevelopment that has happened on already developed land in our community. It decreases traffic and congestion. Again, the more folks live in the community of Etobicoke-Lakeshore and live closer to the centre of the city and use the already existing traffic infrastructure that's in place, the better it is for our air and the better it is for our traffic.

The future of Ontario holds two choices: We can continue with urban sprawl and continue to destroy our green places—our forests, our lakes, our environment—or we can embrace urban density through greenbelt protection. We can understand that how we live within our means in our environment does not require the further destruction of green spaces. Etobicoke-Lakeshore will be affected by the Greenbelt Protection Act. Etobicoke-Lakeshore is an example of a community that has thrived and is dealing well with the issue of urban density. And we're working together to increase the number of people living in our community without compromising our natural environment in Etobicoke-Lakeshore or beyond our boundaries. It's a community that I'm proud to represent. It's one that's full of promise and opportunity and it's one that will benefit from the Greenbelt Protection Act. The people in my own community who are able to spend time on our lakeshore and enjoy the lands that we've been able to protect along the lakefront know that spending time in our urban community does not mean that we forsake the greenbelts from which we all benefit. It's a piece of legislation that I'm very proud to support and I look forward to its passage.

The Acting Speaker: The member for Etobicoke-Lakeshore has indicated her preference to share her time with her colleague the member for Guelph-Wellington.

Mrs Liz Sandals (Guelph-Wellington): I'm pleased to speak this afternoon in support of Bill 27. The Greenbelt Protection Act will curb urban sprawl and allow us to manage growth within the Golden Horseshoe area of southern Ontario. Why do we need to do this? There are a number of things. The population of central Ontario has grown tremendously in the past decade or so. In fact, in the Golden Horseshoe area the population increases by 115,000 people every year. By the year 2001, the central Ontario population had reached 7.5 million people. Within 25 years, we expect that will be 11 million people. That's an additional 3.5 million people in central Ontario. We cannot manage that population growth if we

do not pay attention to how we manage growth responsibly in the Golden Horseshoe area. What we know is happening now: Anybody who drives out along the 401 east or west, anybody who drives up north on the 400, knows that as you move out, area that used to be farmland is now houses. I know that when I drive up the 400 north of Toronto, I can look at what used to be family farms in Vaughan township, where both of my parents originally came from. What used to be farms that I pointed to when I was a kid and said, "This relative lives here and that relative lives there," are now subdivisions. The farmland is gone and the houses are moving out.

We know the GTA is going to continue to grow, but we have to figure out how to make that happen responsibly. We have a huge problem with gridlock. Certainly anyone who comes from the Guelph-Wellington area, from my area in Guelph, knows that we seem to be getting further from Toronto. If you tackle getting from Guelph to Toronto in the morning rush hour, it takes an extra hour above what it took a decade ago. People are spending two extra hours a day just trying to get into the city to work. We have to manage growth. We cannot allow this to simply move on in uncontrolled urban sprawl.

And it isn't just houses growing like Topsy and traffic jams becoming almost a constant state of affairs; it's where those houses are going. Those houses are going on land that we need to protect. They're going on farmland, and we cannot sustain that forever.

Only 5% of Canada's land base is classified as prime agricultural land. Of that prime agricultural land, 50% is in Ontario. But only 12% of Ontario's land base is prime agricultural land, and a lot of that land is in the Golden Horseshoe.

I was speaking to a farm family just north of Brampton recently, a family that has been farming north of Brampton for generations. They have a thriving dairy operation, but when they look the next concession over, there are houses. The houses are marching out to take over the farmland. We can't allow that to go on forever.

If you drive down the Niagara Peninsula, what used to be vineyards, what used to be orchards, is more and more being overtaken by houses. We can't allow that to go on forever. We have to figure out a way to protect our best agricultural land.

And it isn't just agricultural land; it's environmentally sensitive land. One of the things I hear at home is a concern about water quality and water quantity. If we don't protect our environmentally sensitive land, we're not going to have clean, safe, abundant water. Ontario has always prided itself on the availability of water. But if we don't pay attention, that's not going to be the situation anymore.

What are we proposing to do? We want to develop a balanced approach to growth in the Golden Horseshoe area. To that end, we have instituted a moratorium on urban growth on rural land within a greenbelt study area.

What I want to be absolutely clear about is that we have not stopped development. On any land within the

greenbelt protection area that is already zoned for urban development, the urban development process will be allowed to go ahead. It would appear that there is about a 10- or 15-year supply of land already zoned for single-family urban development and about a 20-year supply of land already zoned for development of intensive housing uses; that is, apartments and condos. We have a lot of that already planned.

What we are protecting is land that is zoned as rural, as agricultural. During the moratorium, we are not going to allow any more rural or agricultural land to succumb to urban development. What we're going to do during this time period is study how we can best do a number of things.

1740

To that end, we have put in place a Greenbelt Task Force. The Greenbelt Task Force is balanced. It represents municipalities, developers and environmentalists, the whole spectrum of people who have an interest in this issue. The task force has been asked to make recommendations in a number of areas. First of all, they've been asked to recommend how we can set up a permanent greenbelt around the Niagara Escarpment, to the north of Peel and out through the Oak Ridges moraine territory, because we understand that it is important to protect a greenbelt around the Golden Horseshoe area. We need to protect our natural heritage systems, we need to protect our water resources, we need to protect environmentally sensitive land, and we're going to study how we can set up a permanent greenbelt.

We've also asked how we can protect prime agricultural land. What are the areas of prime agricultural land that we must absolutely protect from urban development? So that's the second area in which the task force has been asked to make recommendations. We've also asked the task force about recreational land because, if you have 11 million people living in the Golden Horseshoe area, it's important that those people have a way to get outside into green space, into recreational land, so we want to know how to protect that.

Finally, though, and equally importantly, we will be identifying the land which is best suited for development. We want to know how we can concentrate urban growth. How can we redevelop brown fields? Those are important things because it costs us all as taxpayers; sprawl costs everybody. If we can concentrate urban growth, we can reduce the cost of servicing new land; we can reduce the cost of road construction; we can take better advantage of urban transit; we can reduce the costs of urban policing and fire protection; and we can reduce the cost of things like garbage pickup by having more concentrated urban areas. What we want to find from this process is a balanced approach to growth. We cannot continue urban sprawl. We must find a way to do this sensibly.

Now, I come from Guelph-Wellington, which is just outside the greenbelt study area, and you might think that this may not concern my constituents, but it does. My constituents talk to me about, "OK, if you protect land

inside the greenbelt, what's going to happen to the land just outside the greenbelt?" So my constituents are very anxious to be part of the discussion, and that's good because the Greenbelt Task Force has been asked to consult with a whole variety of people, and my constituents can have an opportunity to become part of that discussion.

It is important to all of us as Ontarians that we can continue to have economic development, that we can continue to have growth, but we must find a way to do that in a responsible way. I'm pleased to support this bill because that's what it's going to provide.

The Acting Speaker: Questions and comments?

Mr Bisson: I just want to say that I listened to the comments made by both members. I guess, as I said in my own speech, I agree generally with the principle that the government is taking, by way of this bill. That is, clearly what's needed is a better regime when it comes to how we do planning in the province of Ontario.

Now this bill—let's be realistic—is only dealing with what we are going to do on the Oak Ridges moraine. But what I really want to see happen over the longer term is the government bringing a bill into this House that deals with planning issues for the entire province of Ontario, because we know there are a number of problems. I know there's one coming, but I'm just saying that there are a number of issues that need to be dealt with in order to make sure that planning is done in a sane way. For example, when municipalities do simple things like reconstruct a sidewalk, we make sure that it's accessible to people with disabilities; and making sure that when we do a planning zone amendment that people have the ability to get before the Ontario Municipal Board, should they have concerns about it, and, if necessary, in certain cases, there should be some form of intervener funding. There is a whole bunch of issues that need to be dealt with.

I was interested, however, that the members who got up and spoke—and I'm sure it was just an omission and they're going to clarify that, because this is about the Oak Ridges moraine—failed to talk about the broken promise the McGuinty government made by allowing 6,000 houses to be built on the Oak Ridges moraine. I recognize that both members who got up were not members of the former Liberal caucus and probably were not aware of the promise that former caucus made. Maybe they didn't hear it, but I want to repeat it, because I think they need to understand that there was a clear promise made, and that was, "If you vote Liberal, you're going to get change. The Liberals are not going to allow 6,500 houses or 6,300 houses to be built on the Oak Ridges moraine. No houses at all will be allowed to be built on the Oak Ridges moraine." The first thing McGuinty said when he got elected was, "I'm not going to do 6,300; I'll allow 6,000." That's a broken promise, and I want to hear somebody say, "I'm sorry."

Mr Tim Hudak (Erie-Lincoln): What goes around comes around.

I have a couple of comments on the address from the two members of the government side. I think there's a

significant naïveté on this issue in a couple of respects; for example, the notion that the greenbelt will eliminate gridlock. I think quite the opposite: This will make the gridlock snake even longer along our highways. If you're going to stop any kind of housing development in the Golden Horseshoe, that development is going to have to go somewhere. Sure, the government members say there is this panacea, that we're all going to crowd into condos and high-rise apartments in downtown Toronto. A lot of my constituents would prefer a different kind of lifestyle. So no matter what initiatives the government brings forward, you're going to see housing develop outside of wherever this greenbelt is going to be, meaning that gridlock is actually going to get worse and be prolonged, unless there is a companion transportation strategy to move people, goods and services back and forth, and we've yet to see what that strategy is going to be.

Second, there's this notion that we should encourage urban density. Fair enough, but every time there is an issue of this nature, the NIMBY effect takes over. The evidence is to the contrary: Taxpayers and local residents will oppose greater density in downtown city areas because they don't want these massive skyscrapers going up in their backyard. I think there is a naïveté to suggest that people are going to embrace this notion of even denser growth of apartments and condominiums in their neighbourhoods.

Third, with respect to the fruit belt in Niagara, I appreciate everybody's enjoyment of the aesthetic pleasures of going through a vineyard or an orchard. The complaint I have is, why is that price borne exclusively by the communities in Niagara? Farmers are being land-locked; municipalities are restricted from development, from revenue sources coming in. Why shouldn't that cost be borne by taxpayers as a whole, to support those types of initiatives in Niagara?

Mrs Maria Van Bommel (Lambton-Kent-Middlesex): I would like to speak in favour of the bill. The Greenbelt Protection Act is the first step in trying to control urban sprawl. We are trying to protect farmland and environmentally sensitive areas, and we're also trying to set the template for carefully thought-out planning. The greenbelt is part of this government's larger growth management strategy. We have actually introduced Bill 26, the Strong Communities (Planning Amendment) Act, 2003, proposed legislation that will strengthen the power of municipalities to address the issues of urban sprawl.

I've also heard on two separate occasions now from the member for Simcoe North, and he talks about walking on his pension. I'm very familiar with the concept of walking on a pension in terms of land values. The member is looking at me, but in the community I live in, we refer to it as walking on our pension, and I do that every weekend when I go home. In that respect, as was said earlier, the land that is zoned for development is still going to stay in development. The issue is that we protect the farmland.

1750

When we talk about walking on our pensions, every farmer is aware that we look to the sale of our farms to

eventually be our pension plan for the future. As a farmer, I know that my farm will hold a certain value as farmland. I didn't buy it on speculation and I don't expect to sell it on speculation either. I expect that it will sell in terms of its value as farmland and nothing more than that. I don't think that the farmers in the Niagara area or in the Golden Horseshoe, or the greenbelt study area, have any concerns in that respect.

The Acting Speaker: We have time for one further question and comment.

Mr Dunlop: Again it's a pleasure to be here, and I look forward to the comments from the member for Simcoe-Grey in a few moments.

I'd like to go back to the idea of what we call walking on the pension. I know that may sound—I fully understand as well what you're saying. I understand the land is not zoned, it is in farmland in its current position, but you have to remember that there are literally thousands and thousands of farmers throughout the province who have thought that down the road their development that would be near a community would possibly be their retirement. I'm not saying that's right or wrong, but what I'm saying is that the people have thought of that along the way.

When I talk about compensation, it is that basically their land has much less value when they can't rezone it to an industrial or a commercial or a residential down the road, and that's a fact. If it could be rezoned, if on an official plan amendment it could be changed to, for example, residential, the lots would have far more value per acre. So those people are actually out in the cold now with this particular piece of legislation. They may be able to sell it to another farmer or pass it on, and I'm hoping the economy will grow strong enough so we'll be able to do that with our farmers and actually pass it from one generation to another, but that's not really what I'm seeing out there. The families of a lot of farmers I'm talking about, guys in their mid-50s and 60s, are not wanting to take over the family farm and they cannot make a good enough living for the kind of work they have to put into it. So it will be interesting to see where the bill goes with that.

I look forward to further debate from all members of this House. I think there are a lot of good things in the greenbelt bill but we also have to be very careful with things like compensation.

The Acting Speaker: In reply, the member for Guelph-Wellington.

Mrs Sandals: I would like to thank the members for Timmins-James Bay, Erie-Lincoln, Lambton-Kent-Middlesex and Simcoe North—not East—for their comments on the bill.

First of all, as my colleague from Lambton-Kent-Middlesex noted, this is not the only legislation with respect to planning. In fact, we do have a first set of amendments coming to the Planning Act. We would in fact agree with my colleague from Timmins-James Bay that there are some flaws in the Planning Act and we fully intend to address them.

However, I must comment that although the member for Timmins-James Bay tried to characterize this as being about the Oak Ridges moraine, it's about a much bigger issue than the Oak Ridges moraine. It's about all development within the Golden Horseshoe. However, what I would like to point out is that if the previous government had had this legislation in place and the balanced planning that we're looking at and the protection of environmentally sensitive areas in place, we would not repeatedly be having the Oak Ridges moraine discussion, because we would have been able to effectively protect that land.

I would also like to comment—the member from Erie-Lincoln spoke as if we were stopping all urban development within the Golden Horseshoe. That is simply not true. Anything that is already zoned for urban development will continue to be developed. In fact, at the end of this process I fully expect that there is some land that is currently zoned rural that will ultimately become urban land. What we're talking about is planning to ensure this proceeds in an orderly fashion.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you very much. Further debate on this bill?

Mr Jim Wilson (Simcoe-Grey): I'm pleased to join in this debate. I think it has been a rather good debate, sitting here for the last hour and a half. Some of the problems with respect to this greenbelt legislation have come forward. We've heard people in favour of and opposed to it. But I'm kind of angry because I am just shocked that Mr Gerretsen, the Minister of Municipal Affairs, made this announcement December 16, when I'm probably the guy in this House most affected by this legislation.

In fact, today the Toronto Star—if everyone looks at the article called from “From Farmland to City Sprawl, in One Swoop”—talks about 115,000 people coming to the Bradford West Gwillimbury area with a development that's proposed by Geranium Corp. The reason Geranium Corp, as they say in the article, has come to South Simcoe is because of this bill that we're debating here today, Bill 27. They know to stay out of the GTA now. They know to stay out of anything where this study area is taking place. So they are proposing to—my God. That's a small portion at the south end of my riding and Joe Tascona's riding. It would quintuple the population that exists there today. The proposal just went to the Bradford West Gwillimbury council. The fact of the matter is, as they say here, they have to go there because, “Welcome to South Simcoe, ground zero in the development wars.” This is the next stop after Vaughan.

I say to the member from Guelph-Wellington, who said, “People out in Guelph have to drive an extra couple of hours,” I just want to tell the government that when you're going to do this greenbelting—and I, to an extent, am in favour of greenbelting. I liked the Ottawa idea, when I worked for the Honourable Perrin Beatty in Ottawa in the mid-1980s and lived in Ottawa. But it seems to me they went about it a little differently. They actually bought up the land, did proper compensation and

set up the National Capital Commission to look after it. I don't know where you're going to get the billions to compensate farmers. But the fact of the matter is, you're driving development into the potato capital of Ontario, where I was born and raised and my family has lived over 260 years. That's Alliston. That's New Tecumseth. That's where this proposal is going, in Bond Head, the very southern tip of my riding, because the developers have all decided to move.

Now there are no jobs there. There is Honda in Alliston, where people commute two hours around. About 30% percent of their employees actually come from the Alliston area, and some come from Guelph, Orangeville, Shelburne and Toronto. But that's about it. So all you're going to do is build bigger development—no new roads or anything. I don't think the government has money for any new roads or infrastructure up there. All these people are going to continue to work in Toronto. If you live in Barrie and you drive through at 5 o'clock in the morning—by the way, if I want to get to a meeting now at 8:30 in the morning here at Queen's Park, I have to make sure I leave my house in Wasaga Beach, where I've lived for the last nine years, at 10 after five in the morning. So I understand it.

But there are no jobs in Wasaga Beach. There are companies that have just moved out of Barrie, so unless you're going to force companies to locate to Barrie, everyone's still going to be driving into Toronto. Gridlock's going to get worse, because the plans that all three stripes of government have had for the past 20 years to expand Highway 400 to 12 lanes and put in some commuter lanes haven't happened, because nobody has really had the money. Maybe your government will find the money, maybe you'll toll-road it, whatever. But the fact of the matter is, everyone still has to go down the 400. They still have to work in Toronto. Gridlock will get worse.

I do want to talk for the last minute here today about compensation. It seems to me this legislation is the cart before the horse. When we want to build new highways—I'm building a new piece in my riding right now, between Stayner and Collingwood—you go around and talk to the property owners. You don't bring the legislation in first. You go around and talk to property owners. You make agreements with them. You buy up the land. You don't, before you start that process, give draconian powers to the minister, which this does. This obliterates local planning. It ignores municipal councils. It's anti-democratic. I think you're going to have a lot of problems with it.

I don't think that all of us on this side of the House are going to disagree with you. As Garfield Dunlop from Simcoe North said just a minute ago, there are some good parts and some bad parts. I thought, honestly, that our greenbelting was the Oak Ridges moraine. The foundation is there to help compensate and look after things that are undone in that deal yet, because it's an unfinished project. You might be biting off more than you can chew with this greenbelting right now. The lawsuits

will probably start long before you get your study finished—from farmers, from businesses and from people who are fearful of having their lands confiscated, or may very well get their lands confiscated.

The Acting Speaker: It being 6 o'clock, this House now stands adjourned until tomorrow at 1:30 in the afternoon.

The House adjourned at 1800.

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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.

Continued from overleaf

TABLE DES MATIÈRES

Mardi 13 avril 2004

PREMIÈRE LECTURE

Loi de 2004 modifiant la Loi sur les normes d'emploi (congé familial pour raison médicale), projet de loi 56, <i>M. Bentley</i>	
Adoptée	1435
Loi de 2004 modifiant la Loi sur l'assurance-santé, projet de loi 57, <i>M^{me} Witmer</i>	
Adoptée	1436

DÉCLARATIONS MINISTÉRIELLES ET RÉPONSES

Congé familial pour raison médicale	
M. Bentley	1436

DEUXIÈME LECTURE

Loi de 2003 sur l'engagement d'assurer l'avenir de l'assurance-santé, projet de loi 8, <i>M. Smitherman</i>	
M. Bisson	1452
M ^{me} Broten	1458
Vote différé	1463
Loi de 2003 sur la protection de la ceinture de verdure, projet de loi 27, <i>M. Gerretsen</i>	
Débat présumé ajourné	1474

