



Legislative Assembly
of Ontario

First Session, 38th Parliament

Assemblée législative
de l'Ontario

Première session, 38^e législature

**Official Report
of Debates
(Hansard)**

**Journal
des débats
(Hansard)**

Tuesday 11 May 2004

Mardi 11 mai 2004

Speaker
Honourable Alvin Curling

Président
L'honorable Alvin Curling

Clerk
Claude L. DesRosiers

Greffier
Claude L. DesRosiers

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Tuesday 11 May 2004

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Mardi 11 mai 2004

The House met at 1330.

Prayers.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

WATER QUALITY

Mr Garfield Dunlop (Simcoe North): I am pleased to rise this afternoon to discuss the lack of response from the Minister of the Environment on regulation 170/03. Arenas, community halls, churches and fairgrounds often are the hub of activity and the gathering places for citizens of rural Ontario. In almost all cases, these facilities are operated solely by volunteers. Although the Minister of the Environment tries to blame the previous government, she has now had seven months to make corrections—seven months, and no action.

This is an attempt to ignore rural and northern Ontario. We know that the McGuinty Liberal cabinet is dominated by GTA and large urban members. They obviously care little about the citizens of rural Ontario. The Premier has allowed rural Ontario little or no voice at the cabinet table. Community halls and churches need assistance now. They do not need another so-called moratorium or so-called expert advisory panel. They need financial assistance.

Minister Dombrowsky was quick to react to David Ramsay's threat, so she and McGuinty drafted the Adams Mine Lake Act, now referred to as the Leona lake act.

The citizens of rural Ontario are taxpayers. They contribute to the economy of our great province. They also deserve clean and fresh water. One of Dalton McGuinty's platform promises went under the headline of "We will make water in rural communities safer," on page 14 of *Growing Strong Rural Communities*.

Rural Ontario depends on community halls and churches to sustain a quality of life. The McGuinty Liberals must make an announcement on funding to allow churches and community halls to have safe and clean water.

GASOLINE PRICES

Mr Bruce Crozier (Essex): I rise today on a matter very important to the day-to-day lives of many of my constituents and people across Ontario. Today I will be introducing a bill entitled the Gasoline Consumer Protection Act, 2004. This bill requires gasoline retailers across the province to give at least 72 hours' notice

before changing their price. For far too long, my constituents have expressed to me their outrage and frustration with the volatility of gas prices. This volatility becomes even more pronounced in the peak driving season of the summer months fast approaching. I think everyone in this House can relate to the stories of glancing at the price of gasoline while driving to work in the morning and then, when filling up on the way home, the price has gone up 10 cents or more. The people of Ontario are fed up with this sort of volatility. They want more stability and predictability before filling up at the pump.

Gasoline pricing has long bedevilled governments of all political stripes, and I want to acknowledge that this issue is extremely complex. In many respects, the hands of government are tied. A number of factors, both international and domestic, go into the price that consumers ultimately pay for gasoline. It must also be noted that, on average, Ontarians pay among the lowest gas prices in the western world.

Having said that, this bill that I will be introducing attempts to alleviate those frustrations.

KIDSABILITY CENTRE FOR CHILD DEVELOPMENT

Mr Ted Arnott (Waterloo-Wellington): Today I'm following up on the recent comments of the member for Kitchener-Waterloo in support of the KidsAbility Centre for Child Development. Earlier this year I met with staff from KidsAbility, and today I raise their concerns as Conservative advocate for children and youth services.

During the election, the Liberals sold themselves as the compassionate choice. They cared more, they claimed. In the hundreds of promises they made, they committed to doing a better job of managing provincial finances, setting priorities and allocating resources to funding partners who provide important services. But unless the government acts soon, underfunding of KidsAbility will be living proof that the Liberals are failing to meet the higher standard of compassion they claimed they would establish.

The House has already been informed that funding for KidsAbility doubled under the Conservative government. However, unless the funding crisis that KidsAbility is facing is addressed by the government, the number of children on the waiting list who need treatment could increase to 1,335 children, according to a recent report in the K-W Record.

If the government is callous and ignores the legitimate funding needs of KidsAbility and treatment centres like it

across the province, then children with cerebral palsy, spina bifida, muscular dystrophy, Down syndrome and communication disorders will pay the price. This should be unacceptable to all in this House. These kids truly can't wait. If the coming budget doesn't address their needs, the government will demonstrate not a compassionate heart, but a heart as cold as ice.

TOURISM

Mr Bill Mauro (Thunder Bay-Atikokan): The warming weather and greening grass assure us that summer is on the way. Within my riding of Thunder Bay-Atikokan, the arrival of summer brings a flurry of events and exhibits for residents and tourists alike.

Soon we will see the opening of the walleye fishing season. Tourist resorts welcome visitors from across Canada and the United States who have waited all winter to get their boats back into the water to safely enjoy our many lakes and rivers. May 15 is also opening day at Fort William Historical Park, the world's largest fur-trading post. Fort William serves 100,000 visitors each year through its many activities and special events.

There are many other exciting things to see and do throughout the riding. Kakabeka Falls Provincial Park and Quetico Provincial Park are beautiful locations for camping. The White Otter Castle is a exceptional day trip by canoe. Ouimet Canyon and Eagle Canyon suspension bridge provide serene hiking trails surrounded by a variety of wildlife and rare plants. The area is host to many events, including the Dragon Boat Race Festival, Children's Festival, Blues Festival and Fringe Festival in Thunder Bay, and the Bass Classic, Canada Day Canoe Parade and Lions Spring Carnival in Atikokan.

Tourism is an integral economic activity providing hundreds of jobs and millions of dollars to our communities each year. To the North of Superior Tourism Association, the chambers of commerce and each and every business and community group that contributes to tourism activity in Thunder Bay-Atikokan, I want to thank you for your efforts and wish you all a very successful year.

1340

COLLECTIVE BARGAINING

Mr Peter Kormos (Niagara Centre): At 4 o'clock this morning, the negotiating team of CEP local 87-M, the media workers at the Toronto Sun, wrapped up some around-the-clock bargaining, striking a deal, hard and tough won, at the bargaining table that the negotiating committee will unanimously recommend to their membership for ratification this Thursday.

New Democrats here at Queen's Park want to congratulate those media workers. It's been a tough, hard struggle, with a tough boss, but at the end of the day, the workers and their union will have won. That's how it's done.

The members of CEP local 87-M, the unionized media workers at the Toronto Sun, are setting a standard and

demonstrating to other media workers across Ontario—low paid, understaffed and certainly underappreciated in any number of newspaper chains—that you can fight back and win. You fight back with the union. You fight back with union solidarity. You fight back by standing shoulder-to-shoulder, arm-in-arm with your sisters and brothers in your local and across the labour movement.

That's how you win these struggles for fairness in the workplace, for justice in the workplace, for better wages, better salaries, better pensions and more job security. It's never wrong to fight for any of those things. It's a fight not only for these workers, but by them for their children as well.

WIKWEMIKONG ANISHINABE ASSOCIATION FOR COMMUNITY LIVING

Mr Michael A. Brown (Algoma-Manitoulin): As we approach Community Living Day, which we all know is tomorrow, May 12, I would like to acknowledge the important and valuable contribution that the Wikwemikong Anishinabe Association for Community Living makes to northern Ontario, in our First Nation community on Manitoulin Island. I want to emphasize that there is a need for services for individuals with developmental disabilities to not only continue but to be increased and expanded in the north.

The Wikwemikong Anishinabe Association for Community Living is the only one of its kind on Manitoulin that provides unique and vital services and programs that not only preserve the native language and culture but also address the needs of First Nations people with developmental disabilities in the best possible way.

Jeannette Assinewai, who is the program director at Wikwemikong, and her team have integrated traditional native practices such as smudging ceremonies, which occur every morning, into their program structure. In addition, the Wikwemikong Anishinabe Association for Community Living bases their program on the teachings of the medicine wheel and provides services in the native language of Odawa.

However, not all First Nations communities are able to access a traditional approach to community living. It is not only on Manitoulin that the need exists for an increase in community living services that acknowledge traditional native culture and incorporate these customs into program structures, but this need exists across the entire province.

Community living programs provide a vital service to individuals with developmental disabilities. It is vital that our government recognize the vital need for community living organizations to be provided with the funding and support they need to ensure the people of the north are able to have their needs met within their own communities.

SCUGOG CHRISTIAN SCHOOL

Mr John O'Toole (Durham): I rise in the House to pay tribute to the staff, students, parents and friends of

the Scugog Christian School community on the completion of their new school addition.

This really is about community building. This is a school community of about 40 families who committed themselves to raising \$220,000 to build a new gymnasium, plus new classrooms to accommodate the music program, library and other resources. Additional support came from local business in the form of donations, such as bricks, windows and insulation. Volunteer labour built much of the new addition, with a group of about 10 volunteers on-site each day. They received no government funding.

Last Friday evening, May 7, I was pleased to join community leaders such as Scugog mayor Marilyn Pearce for the official opening. Highlights included singing by students and banners the students created to thank the many volunteers. Scott Jeffery, of Jeffery Homes, was the evening's master of ceremonies. He also was a member of the building committee. The dedication was offered by Rev Rob Elkington. Fred Spoelstra brought greetings from the local Christian school community known as the "Group of Seven." I would like to commend the board chair, Ron Bruinsma, principal Tony DeKoter and the many volunteers who made this community dream come true.

This is an outstanding example of what can be accomplished when friends and neighbours work together as a community of faith. I am confident that everyone here will want to wish the Scugog Christian School community continued success and blessings for the students and their families in the many years to come.

CANADIAN MEN'S HOCKEY TEAM

Mr Lorenzo Berardinetti (Scarborough Southwest): I rise in the House today to congratulate Team Canada's gold medal performance at the 2004 world championships. Every player and all the support staff should be very proud of their accomplishment in what was a hard-fought international tournament held in the Czech Republic.

Within a span of 16 days this team came together as a unified force. Each and every player was brought in after a disappointing season in which their teams did not make the NHL playoffs or experienced an early first-round exit. Further, this team had to adjust to an emergency coaching change right before the tournament began.

Through all this adversity the team excelled, and last Sunday Team Canada managed to come back from a 3-1 deficit to defeat Team Sweden 5-3 and win the 2004 world championship.

In particular, I would like the House to recognize the efforts of Team Canada's Ontario-born players, Steve Staios of Hamilton, Matt Cooke of Belleville and Justin Williams of Cobourg, for representing our province and our country and for a job well done.

NURSING WEEK

Ms Laurie Scott (Haliburton-Victoria-Brock): I'm happy today to acknowledge, on behalf of our party's caucus, that the week of May 10 to May 16 is Nursing Week in Ontario. This year's theme is, "Honouring Nurses. A Team of Dedicated Professionals."

The Ontario Nurses' Association has a variety of activities scheduled for this week across the province, which will help to highlight the importance of the nursing profession.

Ontario's 49,000 front-line registered nurses should be justifiably proud of the vital contribution they make daily and the support given to all our friends and loved ones who are unfortunate enough to have to encounter our health care system.

President Linda Haslam-Stroud said it best: "This week Ontario nurses honour their professionalism, caring, dedication and commitment. They have much to celebrate. They are valued and trusted by the public, and they are confident of their contributions to the health and well-being of Ontarians."

As I have stated in this House many times before, I have been a registered nurse in Ontario for over 20 years. I've had many personal experiences that confirm to me the importance of recognizing the valuable contribution all nurses make. I have been honoured to work with some of the most dedicated and selfless people in any profession. I hope that through vehicles like Nursing Week, the Ontario public can gain a much better understanding of these professionals and the vital role they play.

The Ontario Nurses' Association and our caucus will continue to remind this government of the commitments they made to Ontario nurses during the election campaign. They promised to hire 8,000 more nurses, to increase the percentage of full-time nurses working in the system to 70% and to continue the work of the previous government in funding more positions for nurse practitioners. It is my sincere hope, on behalf of Ontario nurses and indeed all Ontarians, that over the course of this government's mandate those are promises they indeed keep.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

GASOLINE CONSUMER PROTECTION ACT, 2004

LOI DE 2004

SUR LA PROTECTION DES CONSOMMATEURS D'ESSENCE

Mr Crozier moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 80, An Act to provide information to consumers respecting the price of gasoline and the ownership of gasoline retailers and to require certain additional information from major oil companies / Projet de loi 80, Loi visant à fournir des renseignements aux consomma-

teurs en ce qui concerne le prix de l'essence et les propriétaires des détaillants d'essence et exigeant certains renseignements supplémentaires de la part des grosses sociétés pétrolières.

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

Mr Bruce Crozier (Essex): This bill, if passed, requires every gasoline retailer to advertise a change in the price of gasoline at the retailer's gas station at least 72 hours before changing the price.

The bill also requires gasoline retailers to indicate on their price signs what portion of the price is dedicated to tax.

The bill requires gasoline retailers who are affiliated with major gasoline retailers to indicate their affiliation on signs at their gas stations and on the receipts issued at their gas stations.

Finally, the bill requires large oil companies that produce, refine and market gasoline to file segmented earning reports with the Minister of Consumer and Business Services annually.

1350

Mr John R. Baird (Nepean-Carleton): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: I'd like to ask the government if they'd like to deal with Mr Crozier's bill right now.

Interjections.

The Speaker: Order. Motions?

MOTIONS

CONSIDERATION OF BILL 68

Hon Dwight Duncan (Minister of Energy, Government House Leader): I seek unanimous consent to immediately call the orders for second and third reading of Bill 68, An Act to amend the repeal date of the Edible Oil Products Act, and, further, to allow the motion for second reading to be moved by a member of the official opposition and the motion for third reading to be moved by a member from the third party, the question to be put on the motions without debate or amendment and that any bells shall be limited to five minutes.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): The government House leader requires unanimous consent for this motion. Agreed.

EDIBLE OIL PRODUCTS REPEAL DATE AMENDMENT ACT, 2004

LOI DE 2004

MODIFIANT LA DATE D'ABROGATION DE LA LOI SUR LES PRODUITS OLÉAGINEUX COMESTIBLES

Mr Hardeman, on behalf of Mr Peters, moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 68, An Act to amend the repeal date of the Edible Oil Products Act / Projet de loi 68, Loi modifiant la date

d'abrogation de la Loi sur les produits oléagineux comestibles.

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

Mr Ernie Hardeman (Oxford): The Conservative Party strongly supports this change to the Edible Oil Products Act on behalf of the dairy farmers who are present today in the gallery.

EDIBLE OIL PRODUCTS REPEAL DATE AMENDMENT ACT, 2004

LOI DE 2004

MODIFIANT LA DATE D'ABROGATION DE LA LOI SUR LES PRODUITS OLÉAGINEUX COMESTIBLES

Mr Hampton, on behalf of Mr Peters, moved third reading of the following bill:

Bill 68, An Act to amend the repeal date of the Edible Oil Products Act / Projet de loi 68, Loi modifiant la date d'abrogation de la Loi sur les produits oléagineux comestibles.

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

Be it resolved that the bill do now pass and be entitled as in the motion.

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

LONG-TERM CARE

Hon George Smitherman (Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): Mr Speaker, I'm pleased to rise in the House today to advise you that I have received the written report by Monique Smith, the MPP for Nipissing and my parliamentary assistant, on recommended changes to long-term care in Ontario.

On behalf of all Ontarians, I would like to thank her for the work that she has done, and I'd like to thank the people of Nipissing for freeing her up from her local responsibilities to travel to all corners of the province to make unannounced visits and the like for long-term care.

Mr John R. Baird (Nepean-Carleton): She's scaring seniors, visiting unannounced.

Hon Mr Smitherman: You're scaring us all.

Monique's report, Commitment to Care: A Plan for Long-Term Care in Ontario, is the result of our government's review of the province's long-term-care system. It is an amazing accomplishment and it represents a real labour of love. Her report answers the question of how we can make long-term-care homes true homes for our loved ones, homes where our parents, relatives and friends are safe and enjoy a real sense of community.

More than 70,000 people live in long-term-care homes in Ontario, and our aging population will drive that

number much higher in the future. That is why I would like to recognize as well the work of the Honourable John Gerretsen, the minister responsible for seniors. What is clear is that all seniors across this province need to know that they have no greater champion in their corner than your minister responsible for seniors.

I am humbled by the responsibility given to me by the Premier as Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. I'm energized by the responsibility of helping to transform our health care system. It is, after all, our system. It belongs to 12 million of us.

Our system has in some measure been falling short when it comes to protecting seniors. When I was appointed Minister of Health six months ago, I hit the ground running. Last year's high-profile media reports of shocking incidents of neglect, poor care and physical and psychological abuse lifted the veil on problems that have been for too long ignored in our province. The McGuinty government made a real commitment to deal swiftly and forcefully with this issue. I called for a revolution, because that's what is required, and a revolution in long-term care is now underway in Ontario.

I appointed Monique Smith to conduct a top-to-bottom review of long-term care, to get at the cultural issues affecting the quality of care and to recommend practical actions to strengthen long-term-care services. Since then, she has made unannounced visits to homes across this province, as have I. She met directly with people living in the homes; she met with their families, caregivers, health professionals, operators and administrators; she met with seniors' groups, union representatives, academics, gerontologists and others active in the long-term-care community to hear their views about improving our system.

Monique visited many homes that are delivering excellent, safe, professional, compassionate quality care that one could really recommend to a loved one. Others proved to produce disheartening results, with poor quality of care—not the standard that we expect in this province and certainly not the standard that we will achieve in this province. The only standard for long-term care in Ontario is a high standard.

This report reflects our commitment to a revolution in long-term care and was the initial step in the McGuinty government's plan to address the needs of people living in long-term-care homes. Our system needs to do a better job of protecting our most vulnerable citizens: our seniors in long-term-care facilities. All too often, our long-term-care homes and, more importantly, the mothers, fathers, sons and daughters in them have been forgotten or neglected. This shouldn't be a revolutionary concept, but, sad to say, it is. There are so many hard-working, dedicated, skilled and compassionate front-line heroes caring for our seniors, our parents, our neighbours, day in and day out, but we as a society have let these caring and courageous nurses, personal support workers, dieticians and so many others do all the work for us.

Caring for our seniors and getting the community involved in long-term care is about more than work; it's

about heart. That is why the McGuinty government is going to fix it once and fix it for all: for all of us and for our mothers and fathers. This report serves as a blueprint, a starting point for action. This revolution is about meaningful change for seniors and their families, about starting with a plan of action. It starts with taking decisive actions to create a community culture in long-term care, to toughen enforcement and make long-term care more accountable.

Monique Smith's report, *Commitment to Care*, confirmed that many homes provide safe, compassionate quality care. It also revealed, however, that other facilities provide poor quality care, and this is simply not acceptable. The McGuinty government is responding to Monique Smith's report with a comprehensive strategy of reform that will take place starting now.

Today I want to tell you about the actions we are taking. Cultural change is a responsibility that we share, as a government, as long-term-care providers and as community members. The actions we are taking will change the culture of long-term care by increasing resident, family and community involvement, making homes more accountable to Ontarians and toughening inspection and enforcement. As part of the plan, we will create a culture of community in our long-term-care homes. We will mandate that all long-term-care facilities establish a family council. We're giving a stronger voice to residents by supporting and strengthening resident councils in every home. Our government, I'm proud to say, will reinstate the policy of allowing couples to live together in a home even if their levels of care are different.

We bring zero tolerance for abuse and neglect to the residents of long-term-care facilities. That is why our plan will dramatically toughen inspection processes for long-term-care facilities and create tools to ensure that high standards are enforced. We've already started. Since the beginning of January, all inspections of long-term-care facilities are unannounced and they will remain that way. This is giving us a much more accurate picture of residents' care and enabling us to deal with violations more effectively. We will begin targeted surprise inspections throughout the year for homes that have a poor track record. This will allow us to concentrate our resources on dealing with homes with demonstrated problems and serious violations.

1400

We will separate the compliance and inspection functions. Currently the ministry compliance officers play a dual role of compliance and inspection. We believe that inspectors need to have a distinct role and the ability to apply tougher penalties to non-compliant homes.

We will crack down on elder abuse by making it mandatory for staff to report suspected abuse, and in legislation we will offer whistle-blower protection to ensure that those workers have all of the freedom and support necessary to call in any claim of suspected abuse.

We're going to move to make our long-term-care system more accountable to protect the health and safety of residents. Facilities will be more accountable, and

long-term-care homes must be answerable to the people who live there and to the communities they serve.

We will establish a third-party advocate who will play a watchdog role on behalf of residents and families regarding inspection and compliance.

Last January, we announced a toll-free action line that has subsequently dealt with 1,700 calls and resulted in almost 500 specific inspections. The action line remains, but because we believe the public has the right to have all of the best information available, we will now launch a public Web site. When it's complete, it will be the most comprehensive public report on long-term care in all of Canada.

Within four months, Ontarians will be able to go on-line and find a profile of every home in Ontario, the number, types and rates of complaint for each home, a satisfaction survey to be filled out by residents and their families, and accreditation information on every home. Within a year we'll add to that a compliance record for every home, the number of violations in a home's most recent annual review, and staffing information, including number of staff per resident and their training.

This Web site will allow people to compare long-term-care homes and track performance of Ontario facilities over time.

We know that not everyone can go on-line, so we'll make hard copies of those same reports available in a variety of different settings. In addition, we will mandate that all homes publicly post the complaints process and the inspectors' reports in highly visible and accessible locations.

Because we believe that rewarding good behaviour and supporting best practices is as important as taking a hard line against poor performers, we will recognize superior homes by applying a gold standard that can be achieved by any home that demonstrates, over three years in a row, a superior performance. These homes would be inspected every two years instead of annually.

The revolution underway in long-term care is about cultural change, and there's no question that we need greater stability and resources to complement those changes. I've said on many occasions that this is necessary. I'm pleased to be able to report today that as part of the plan we are announcing, our government will invest \$531 million on an annual basis in long-term care. This annualized investment includes \$191 million to significantly increase staffing and standards of personal care in existing long-term-care beds. This investment will allow homes to hire 2,000 new staff. This will include at least 600 new full-time nurses, RNs and RPNs, in addition to personal support workers, activity coordinators, dietitians, therapists and nurse practitioners.

With this increased funding, all homes will be required to achieve specific high standards of care. Our government is moving to reinstate the requirement that a registered nurse be on duty in every long-term-care facility every minute of every day in each and every year. This new investment in staffing will enable us to create and enforce minimum standards of personal care that are

currently not being provided in all long-term-care homes. We will be establishing a minimum care standard to ensure that residents receive, at a bare minimum, two baths a week, or more, depending upon their personal care needs.

This annual investment also includes \$340 million to expand the number of long-term-care beds in communities all across this province; that way, more seniors will be able to live in their communities.

Change in the culture and quality of care in long-term care will require us to modernize the laws that govern long-term care, and later this year we will be introducing legislation to make sure that all types of homes are subject to the same high standards of care, enforcement and penalties.

I want to thank everyone who contributed to Monique Smith's report for their openness, for their ideas and for their commitment to long-term care. By working together, we will ensure that all Ontario seniors live in dignity, with the highest possible quality of life. Together, we will build a healthier Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Responses?

Mrs Elizabeth Witmer (Kitchener-Waterloo): Certainly the announcement this morning brought back some fond memories for myself. In 1998, we chose the same wonderful long-term-care facility to make our announcement. At that point in time we announced a very historic investment of \$1.2 billion in order to build 20,000 more long-term-care beds. That was after coming to the realization that no beds had been built in the province of Ontario for 10 years before that time. What we were doing was making sure that when hospital beds had been closed—and 10,000 had been closed during the time of the NDP and the Liberals—we were setting up a continuum of care that started with prevention, primary care, hospitals, and then long-term care and community care. I'm pleased today that this government is continuing to build on that strong foundation of putting in place that continuum of care, providing for the needs of our elderly and our vulnerable citizens.

I do want to congratulate the minister and the parliamentary assistant. I think the report that has been undertaken in order to provide for support and care of our seniors—the strategy—goes a long way to doing what is necessary, and I do offer my congratulations to them.

However, it's amazing what a difference a day can make. It's amazing what a difference an opposition motion threat can make. Last week, we called upon the government to live up to their campaign promise and immediately increase long-term-care funding and stop the clawback of property tax reimbursements. Well, guess what? That opposition day motion is tomorrow and, lo and behold, on Sunday the minister hastily gathered together the long-term-care sector, who had been asking for meetings and finally got one. They were informed that despite the fact that they had been told there would be clawbacks in the property tax reimbursements of 2003, the government was no longer going to do that.

So we thank the government for responding to the motion, and we appreciate their compassion in this

regard. However, I will tell you that the announcement today still does not respond to the promise that was made by the Premier.

The Premier committed to invest an additional \$6,000 on behalf of the residents in long-term-care facilities. As you well know, the money today, \$340 million, simply goes to make operational the annualized funding for the new beds that have opened since mid-2003 and 2004. It was money that would always have flowed to those facilities in the first place. There is an additional \$191 million, but that's not quite the \$6,000 per resident; you're still about \$250 million short.

The other thing we are not sure of is when this money actually is going to flow to the facilities. What is the timeline? When will this additional staff actually be hired? I also noticed that in the plan of action, it says that the residents are going to receive two baths a week. I would just remind the minister that your Premier, in 2003, promised the seniors three baths a week. So you've got a little way to go.

I have to congratulate the people in the long-term-care sector. They did their own survey of residents and families. They got responses, and the number one priority for people in the long-term-care sector was overwhelming demand for more staff and more funding. That had 18,000 votes.

The announcement today still does not provide for the annual case mix increased adjustment of 1.4%, so I hope the minister will make that amount of additional funding available. I also hope the clawback that he was intending for 2003 is not included in the \$191 million. I hope that will be additional funding.

1410

Ms Shelley Martel (Nickel Belt): I'm pleased to respond on behalf of the New Democratic Party. I'm sure the minister and the government won't be surprised that I have a bit of a different take on this announcement than the member for Kitchener-Waterloo.

Look, I would have been happy if, in the announcement today, the government had just lived up to the promises it made to residents and their families during the election campaign. I would have been happy if the government would have done just that. Let me give three examples where that didn't happen today.

First of all with respect to funding, this government promised during the election campaign that they would invest 6,000 new dollars per resident per facility—\$6,000 per resident per facility. What did we get today? We got an announcement of \$2,700 per resident—less than half of what was promised. More importantly, there was no commitment by the minister today that the sector, the families or the residents are going to see that balance of \$3,300 any time soon. There was no commitment made by the minister for the balance of the \$3,300 that was promised by this government. Why don't you live up to that very specific commitment?

Secondly, during the election campaign the government promised it would cancel the fee hike that was imposed by the former government on residents in long-term-care facilities. Did we hear anything about that at

the announcement today? No, not a word, not a peep. That is money that those who live on fixed incomes in long-term-care facilities should have in their pockets, because we know that so many of them are on fixed incomes, can barely afford to make ends meet and certainly don't have much money in the pocket after to buy a few amenities here and there. The government said not a word about cancelling the fee hike imposed by the Conservatives that the Liberals promised they were going to roll back.

Thirdly, the government had nothing to say about standards of hands-on nursing care per resident. The Liberals made it very clear in their election platform that they were going to bring back standards of hands-on care for residents living in long-term-care facilities. The government today talked about baths—didn't say when that's going to go into effect. The government talked about having a full-time RN in a facility 24/7—again, didn't say when that's going to happen. But the government was silent on the critical issue of how much hands-on care each resident in a facility should receive. Ontario has the dubious distinction of having fewer hours of hands-on care now than Mississippi. What a distinction. That's shameful.

If it really wanted to, this government could go to cabinet tomorrow and pass a regulation to implement a certain standard of hands-on nursing care. Why won't the government do that? Why won't the minister go to cabinet tomorrow and pass the regulation on bathing or pass the regulation on full-time RNs 24/7?

I say to the government, we don't have to wait till the fall for legislative changes, which is what the minister talked about today. You can pass those regulations by order-in-council at cabinet on a Wednesday morning. If you really care about the quality of care being provided to residents, why don't you do that tomorrow morning so that Ontario doesn't continue to have the dubious distinction of having fewer hours of hands-on care for the frail and elderly than Mississippi?

I heard the minister talk this morning about elder abuse and how there was going to be mandatory reporting of abuse to the ministry and how there was going to be whistle-blower protection. I say to the minister, if you're interested in dealing with elder abuse, you can pass Bill 47 today, the private member's bill that stands in the name of our leader, Howard Hampton, a private member's bill that creates a positive duty on all of those who work in facilities to report any allegations of abuse and for the minister to have the power to follow up on that abuse. It follows as a positive duty that is already on teachers and nurses and child care workers to report abuse of children to the CAS. The government could pass second and third reading of that private member's bill today, because it would very clearly meet the goal of protecting seniors from abuse that the minister outlined in his statement today. I encourage the minister to do that today if he's serious about seniors abuse.

In closing, let me say that I would have been happy if the government had just lived up to the election promises it made to residents and to the families of those who live

in long-term-care facilities. Unfortunately, the announcement didn't do that.

Ms Marilyn Churley (Toronto-Danforth): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: I would like to ask for unanimous consent to pass private member's notice of motion 18, proposing that fees collected from water-taking activities be designated to municipalities and property owners to aid them in complying with provincial water quality regulations.

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

ANSWERS TO WRITTEN QUESTIONS

Ms Shelley Martel (Nickel Belt): On a point of order, Mr Speaker, for a brief moment, please: On March 22, I tabled four order paper questions to the Ministries of Education, Health and Long-Term Care, Children and Youth Services and the Attorney General regarding all the costs that have been incurred by the ministries to date for the autism court cases involving Deskin-Weinberg and other families. Also on that day I sent in an additional order paper question to the Attorney General asking for all the costs that have been incurred by his ministry to date for the ministry's intervention at the Ontario Human Rights Tribunal in the case of Luke Burrows, who is also an autistic child.

Those responses were due last Wednesday. I have not received any of them and I am looking for your assistance to try and get responses to what I believe to be very serious questions.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): In response to the member for Nickel Belt, I've checked into it. All those answers were tabled today except for the one from the Ministry of Children and Youth Services. I will then ask the minister to respond as soon as possible to the question from the member for Nickel Belt.

Ms Martel: On a point of order, Mr Speaker: If I might, I was advised they would be both tabled and delivered to my office. As I stand here, I tell you that I have not received any of the five responses.

The Speaker: I understand that they have been tabled and I hope they will be there when you get back to your office.

1420

ORAL QUESTIONS

TAXATION

Mr Ernie Eves (Leader of the Opposition): I have a question for the Premier. Do you consider an increase in retail sales tax a tax on working families in Ontario?

Hon Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs): I think I know what the leader of the official opposition is getting at. He has this abiding interest in the details of the budget, which I can well appreciate. Obviously I cannot provide those details at this point in time. We will be doing that a week from today. But I can say that as a symbol of one of our areas

of greatest priority, I'm very proud of the announcement made today by Minister Smitherman with respect to the investments we're making in long-term care, ably assisted by Monique Smith and the outstanding work she has done.

I know there is a real interest here in terms of where we are going to go. That's an indication of where we're going.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Supplementary.

Mr John R. Baird (Nepean-Carleton): Premier, you were able to answer all those questions when you were trolling for votes before last October's provincial election. You put ads on TV and spent millions of dollars where you looked into the eyes of working families right across Ontario and promised that you wouldn't raise their taxes. Your promise was simple, your promise was clear and it was an unambiguous commitment.

Premier, you don't have to pay for the time here today. This is free time. You can speak to the entire province right here, right now. Why don't you stand in your place, set the record straight and clear up any confusion before this issue spirals out of control as other trial balloons have? I ask you to do one simple thing: Would you stand in your place and just repeat the commitment that you made to the people of Ontario not to raise their taxes?

Hon Mr McGuinty: There is no confusion now on a very important matter, and that is that the people of Ontario had been burdened with, saddled with, at least a \$5.6-billion deficit. We're going to do our very best to address that burden. We're going to do it in a responsible way. We're going to do it in a way that also gives effect to our priorities, which are Ontarians' top priorities: health care and education.

Mr Baird: Premier, your refusal to answer a direct, simple, straightforward question speaks volumes about you and the integrity of commitments that you make to the people of Ontario. This non-answer reminds me of Chuck Guité appearing before the public accounts committee in Ottawa. But at least Chuck Guité has a defence, I say to the Premier.

The people of Ontario are quickly coming to the conclusion that you were prepared to say anything to get elected. If you break your promise not to raise the retail sales tax, how can we believe anything you ever say again?

Hon Mr McGuinty: In order to ensure that the kinds of shenanigans the people of Ontario have had to contend with—that is, they got the word of the previous government that there was no deficit and they found out there was a \$5.6-billion deficit—never happen again and that that kind of thing cannot be perpetrated once again on the people of Ontario, we're going to change the law in Ontario. We're going to make sure there is transparency, openness and accountability before the election so that what happened before doesn't happen again.

ONTARIO BUDGET

Mr Ernie Eves (Leader of the Opposition): Premier, this morning you told reporters that you don't have time

to visit Hamilton East voters in the by-election you called on April 14. You said you were too busy working on the budget with the finance minister. This morning we were told by the Canadian Taxpayers Federation that you have refused to meet with them about that very budget. Exactly eight months ago today, September 11, 2003, you made a big production out of meeting with them and signing your taxpayer protection pledge. How is it that you can't find time to meet with them now?

Hon Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Inter-governmental Affairs): We have devoted more time and more energy to meeting with Ontarians on the matter of their budget than ever before. The Minister of Finance has the principal responsibility to meet with people who have specific interests. He in fact has, I say to the member opposite, met with representatives of the Canadian Taxpayers Federation.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Supplementary.

Mr John R. Baird (Nepean-Carleton): In the leaders' debate during last fall's election, on September 23, I want to tell you what you told the voters of Ontario. You said, "We will not raise taxes one cent on Ontario families. Families will pay the same in taxes under a McGuinty government as they are under the present Conservative government." What did you mean when you said that?

Interjections.

Hon Mr McGuinty: I'm listening. I'm being entertained, Speaker. I'm enjoying the entertainment.

I understand how disappointed Ontarians are with the turn of events and to have discovered that the state of their government finances was not in fact as was represented. As I said a moment ago, we will ensure that never happens again, so everybody going into an election campaign, whether it's somebody in opposition, a representative of the government or the public at large, has an accurate accounting of the state of government finances. We will ensure that that kind of misrepresentation never happens again.

Mr Baird: Premier, I know what working families thought you meant. They thought "not one penny out of their pockets" meant you wouldn't dig your hand even deeper into their pockets. That's what they thought. What working families now think is that when you promise not to raise taxes by one penny, you really mean you want to raise taxes by \$2 billion with your retail sales tax increase.

Interjections.

The Speaker: Order. I would regard what the member from Nepean-Carleton did is deliberately put forward a prop and then completely disregard the Speaker when he got up. I would ask him to conform to the decorum of the House. I ask your support on that. New question.

HEALTH CARE

Mr Howard Hampton (Kenora-Rainy River): My question is for the Premier. The Ontario Chiropractic

Association is worried that you are about to delist some or all of the services they provide in the upcoming budget. Chiropractors believe you are about to cut those services, forcing 1.2 million Ontarians to pay out of their own pockets for those health care services. You have said that choosing change meant more health care, not less. One of your backbenchers, the member for York West, called the delisting of health care services "a continuous attack on our purse and those of seniors." Premier, will you commit today that your government will not delist any chiropractic services?

Hon Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Inter-governmental Affairs): I thank the leader of the NDP for the question, but again this is an inquiry with respect to specific details in the upcoming budget, and I will not provide those.

The member does raise the issue of our interest in and concern for seniors. Again, it takes me back to the wonderful announcement that was made today calling for a very significant investment in long-term care. As a result of this investment, seniors who are residents in long-term-care centres—and there are close to 70,000—are going to get at least two baths per week. There will be a registered nurse on duty at all times. We'll be hiring 2,000 more staff, including 600 more nurses. We're going to crack down by way of more unannounced inspections. We're going to take a genuine interest in the welfare of Ontario seniors by means of this announcement we've made today. We're proud of that.

Mr Hampton: Premier, this is a question about health care services. What you choose to do in the budget next week is something you can talk about then. This is about health care services. It's about 1.2 million patients. What they're worried about is that, in your negotiations with the doctors, you will choose to cut services offered by chiropractors and others in order to finance a pay raise for doctors. That's robbing Peter to pay Paul, and it hurts people and results in higher costs elsewhere in the system, because I know what will happen: People who can't access a chiropractor will show up at the hospital emergency ward.

Premier, it's about health care services, something you are so willing to talk about, and the question is simply this: Will you state categorically today that there will be no cuts, no delisting of chiropractic services in Ontario by your government?

1430

Hon Mr McGuinty: The member's just going to have to wait for the budget. But I can tell you this: We are absolutely determined to make the essential investments in our health care system. More than just a matter of money, we're determined to get real results.

The minister has put forward a very progressive plan that speaks to reducing wait times for things like cardiac care, cancer care, MRIs and CTs. We've got a plan to invest in more nurses, to bring primary-care reform, as a reality, to Ontario—something that the others have talked about for years on end. That's where we're going, and that too will be reflected in our budget.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): New question.

Mr Hampton: To the Premier: The people of Ontario didn't vote for more cuts to health care. Whether you distribute those cuts to health care on the chiropractic side or whether it's on the physiotherapy side or the optometry side, people didn't vote for that.

The optometrists are also concerned. They were here on March 31, demonstrating. They are also concerned that you are going to delist a number of their services. Will you state today that you will not delist or cut any of the health care services provided by optometrists?

Hon Mr McGuinty: The same answer applies. I'm not going to provide details with respect to the budget. The member talks about cuts—we just announced today a \$531-million investment in long-term care. If the members opposite are looking for a telltale sign in terms of where we're going, then that speaks volumes about our commitment to health care.

Mr Hampton: You have floated a lot of trial balloons over the last six months. Most of them have been, shall we say, public relations disasters. Let me tell you, no one in this province—no one in this province—heard you say, before the election or during the election, that important health care services, like being able to have your eyes tested, might be delisted; that having access to a physiotherapist, if you're a senior or if you're somebody who is disabled, might be cut; that having access to a chiropractor because you have severe back pain, those services might be cut. No one heard those things.

So I'm saying to you today, this is not about the budget. You and your Minister of Finance can spin your stories next week about the budget. This is about health care services. You had lots to say over the last four or five years. You had lots to say during the election campaign. Stand up and tell the people of Ontario today that you are not going to delist the health care services of chiropractors, of physiotherapists, of optometrists, that there aren't going to be any cuts to those services. Will you do that now?

Hon Mr McGuinty: I can assure the members opposite, and the people of Ontario, that we're going to throw our weight behind health care in the province of Ontario—not into tax cuts, but behind health care. We're going to do what is necessary to transform our system of health care, medicare, into one that is suited to the beginning of the 21st century.

We're going to deliver real results. We're going to reduce wait times. We're going to bring more nurses and more doctors on to the job in the province of Ontario. We are committed to health care. Again, I say, I appreciate the questions raised by the member opposite, but our budget will clearly reflect our commitment to health care. We look forward so much to bringing that into this House a week from today.

TAXATION

Mr Jim Flaherty (Whitby-Ajax): My question is for the Premier. It's about his promise not to raise taxes, to

hold the line on taxes in Ontario. Every January, people in Whitby and Ajax, and towns and cities and rural areas all across this province, get up and go to work. They work all through the winter months: January, February, March, into the spring: April, May, June, up to June 28th, for the governments of Ontario and Canada and for our municipal governments. The people of Ontario, the average families which this Premier used to talk about when he was the Leader of the Opposition, when he cared about "working families," as he used to say—these working families work almost six months for government.

This Premier has already increased personal income taxes—the largest single tax hike in the history of the province of Ontario—after promising that he would not raise taxes and would hold the line on taxes. Now there are rumours about increasing the retail sales tax, which is regressive.

Will you first of all admit that the tax burden is until June 28, that you understand it and that you will not increase the overall tax burden on working families?

Hon Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs): I appreciate the question. Let me tell you that working families, by way of a message that they are sending to the government today—do you know what they are saying? They are saying, "Can you do something to improve the quality of education that my kids get in their public schools?" And we are going to do that.

They're also saying, "Can you make sure that we can invest in health care and transform medicare so that it meets our 21st century needs?" That is what they are saying. And they're saying something else as well. They don't begrudge the fact that they have to pay taxes. As somebody once said, that's the price of living in a civilized society. They're also saying, "Can you make sure, for the first time in a long time, that we start to give care to our most vulnerable?" That is something else we intend to address.

Mr Flaherty: The working families of Ontario are already taxed to the max. In fact, in 2003—and these are all the taxes that this government and the government of Canada are imposing—the average family, with two people working and an income of \$81,437: income tax, more than \$13,000; sales tax, more than \$6,000; liquor, tobacco, amusement taxes, more than \$2,000; auto insurance taxes, more than \$1,000; social security and pensions, more than \$8,000. Do you know what it adds up to? It adds up to just over \$39,000 on an income of \$80,500, with both partners working. That is 48.5%, until the end of June. Are you saying that you are going to insist the people who work in this province work into July for your government, that they pay more than half of their income to the government of Ontario?

Hon Mr McGuinty: There's no secret here in terms of what the member's solution is to the challenges of the day. He would say, "Here is some money; now send the kids to the private schools." He would give up on public education, and we won't do that. He would say, "There's

no hope for medicare, so let's allow more privatization to our health care system." We are not going to give up on medicare. He would say to the vulnerable, "They are on their own; too damned bad about them." We won't say that. We're here for the vulnerable as well.

This is an important and interesting contrast in terms of the approach brought by that member and representatives of this government. We believe in public services, and that is the kind of investment we will be making in the upcoming budget.

SERVICES FOR THE DISABLED

Mr Ernie Parsons (Prince Edward-Hastings): My question is to the Minister of Citizenship. During my previous role as critic for persons with disabilities I had the opportunity to meet hundreds of Ontarians with disabilities. Without exception, they had excellent advice for me. However, when asked about the existing ODA, the best they could say was, "Well, it's better than nothing." That is not much of an endorsement, is it? And that is not my question.

What they did say to me consistently was that they had very little opportunity to provide input into the drafting of the ODA, and when they did get the opportunity to speak, they weren't listened to and their input wasn't acted upon. Would you describe for us the process that you are using to receive input from Ontarians with disabilities?

Hon Marie Bountrogianni (Minister of Children and Youth Services, Minister of Citizenship and Immigration): I'd like to thank the honourable member for the question and his commitment and his work in this field over the years while critic.

I'd like to reiterate for this House that the McGuinty government is committed to strengthening the Ontarians with Disabilities Act by the fall of 2004.

To meet this end, my parliamentary assistant, the member from Bramalea-Gore-Malton-Springdale, Dr Kuldeep Kular, and I had consultations across the province, and I would like to take this opportunity to thank Dr Kular for the vast amount of effort he put into this.

What we heard in these consultations was the need for a common planning process, the need for a strengthened accountability framework, the extension of the ODA to organizations in the private sector and the need for an effective public awareness and education program. We are analyzing all of the data we heard from literally thousands of people, including a Webcast, for the first time, of 2,000 students. Once we analyze this data, we will come forward with a proposal for an act by the fall of 2004.

1440

Mr Parsons: The current act focuses very heavily on visible disabilities. However, there are invisible disabilities such as mental illness or acquired brain injury, that are just as real. Can you assure Ontarians that the

new ODA will include and support all disabilities equally?

Hon Mrs Bountrogianni: I know that for both professional and personal reasons my colleague has a passion for and interest in this that we all respect in this House. My answer is yes, we will be taking invisible disabilities just as seriously as visible disabilities.

ONTARIO DRUG BENEFIT PROGRAM

Mr Frank Klees (Oak Ridges): My question is to the Premier. Over the last few days, we in this House have challenged you to assure seniors in our province that in your budget you will not do what a number of your backbenchers have suggested may happen; that is, that chiropractic services will be delisted and many of the other services seniors need from day to day will cost them more. There was a great deal of discussion through the course of your consultations that seniors would have to pay much more for drugs, which of course they can't afford. Can you stand in your place today and confirm what one of your backbenchers said yesterday, that in fact the upcoming budget will not result in higher costs to seniors for their drugs? Would you confirm that that will not happen in this province?

Hon Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs): Curiosity is running rampant over there, and I guess it's somewhat understandable when it comes to the contents of the budget.

Again, with respect to our commitment to seniors, I don't think anything speaks more powerfully and more eloquently than the announcement we made today.

Here is something that was put out by the Registered Nurses Association of Ontario, and I'm sure the member opposite will be interested in hearing this: "We wholeheartedly applaud Premier McGuinty and Minister Smitherman for their clear commitment to older persons," said Joan Lesmond, president of the Registered Nurses Association of Ontario." Notwithstanding the reluctance on the part of our colleagues opposite, there are some people who feel we've done something good today in Ontario for seniors.

Mr Klees: Seniors across the province are watching this, and they're seeing a Premier who has broken a multitude of promises and who cannot answer a straight question. The question was very specific, and it had to do with Ontario drug benefits for seniors. Why won't the Premier simply confirm what one of his backbenchers said very publicly, that in fact the upcoming budget will not call on seniors to pay more for their drugs? We have stood in this place for the last number of weeks and challenged the government to back down on charging seniors more for their drugs. We would like to claim victory here today. Will you confirm for us that you, as Premier, will ensure that the upcoming budget will not call on seniors to pay more for their drugs? It's a very specific question, Premier. Show the people of Ontario that you can answer one question.

Hon Mr McGuinty: The member opposite well recognizes that it would be entirely inappropriate for us to tell the public, through him, where we stand with respect to specific budgetary matters. But I can say that I anticipate seniors will very much appreciate the commitment made to them through our budget.

IMMIGRANT SERVICES

Mr Tony Ruprecht (Davenport): I have a question for the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration. Ontario is a province that attracts a large number of immigrants. In fact, nearly 60% of all Canada's immigrants settle in Ontario, with a large proportion of those settling especially in Toronto. Surprisingly, Ontario is the only province in this country that does not have an immigration agreement with the federal government. The consequence of this is that Ontario receives the lowest per-capita federal spending on settlement and adult language training services in the country.

We brought this to the attention of the minister previously when we were in opposition. Now you are the minister. What are you going to do to change this to help new Canadians to succeed in today's Ontario?

Hon Marie Bountrogianni (Minister of Children and Youth Services, Minister of Citizenship and Immigration): I would like to thank my colleague for the question. As he mentioned, yes, we are the only province without an immigration agreement in this country. It seems like the former Tory government was not interested in an immigration agreement with the federal government.

Within the last seven months of taking office we did more than you dreamed of doing in the eight sorry years you were in government. We just wrote a letter of intent that will include municipalities in the devising of the funding formula. We have an acknowledgment from the federal government that Ontario does need more money. This is a very important and cutting-edge development, because municipalities do bear a lot of the responsibility with respect to new Canadians, and they will be part of the negotiations for the first time in Canadian history. I anticipate that the rest of the country will follow our model in the months to come.

Mr Ruprecht: This is really great news. As you know, Toronto is home to a significant number of new Canadians. Many of them have gained educational and professional credentials in other countries, but unfortunately, some of these credentials are not recognized when they arrive in Canada. Well-trained and experienced individuals end up taking low-skilled jobs just to make ends meet because it is too difficult, or they don't know how, to get their credentials recognized. Our economy needs internationally trained professionals in order to thrive and to provide the goods and services that the people of this province need as we move into the 21st century. This is an important issue for downtown Toronto communities but also for small towns and cities across the province. Minister, what is our government doing to

help new Canadians to practise their chosen trades and professions in this, their chosen province?

Hon Mrs Bountrogianni: My colleague the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities is the lead for this part of the process, and I refer to her.

Hon Mary Anne V. Chambers (Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities): I'm happy to respond to the question from the member for Davenport. I have already met with several of the 38 regulatory bodies that work with the professions that we're talking about here. In fact, I've written to all of them and met with most of them. We have information documents done on 18 or 19 of those professions now. We are making incredible headway in that regard. We have already provided the first quarterly report on our progress in that regard. In January we announced \$4 million in funding for bridging programs for accreditation. So we are making excellent progress and we have a one-year target for a report card which will demonstrate the progress being made in that regard.

GASOLINE PRICES

Ms Shelley Martel (Nickel Belt): I have a question to the Minister of Northern Development and Mines. On May 2, 2001, you tabled a private member's bill rolling back and freezing gas prices for up to 150 days. You said at the time that you were standing up for consumers. You know how much northerners depend on their vehicles. You know how much high gas prices really hit northerners. You know that gas prices are at a record high and we need a solution now. That's why we have reintroduced your bill to freeze and roll back gas prices. So my question to you is simply this: Will you and your colleagues pass Bill 74, second and third reading, today?

Hon Rick Bartolucci (Minister of Northern Development and Mines): The simple answer to the question is no. We believe that you should bring your bill forward for full and open debate. That's what happens around this place. I think that's very important.

1450

While we wait for you to bring your bill forward, I as Minister of Northern Development and Mines have met with the Canadian petroleum products industry to talk about the severe impact that negative prices have in northern Ontario, that the volatility of prices has an effect in northern Ontario. I think it's very important to act responsibly as a northern minister. That's why I invited the petroleum products industry into my office to discuss that.

I would like to ask the former government if they did—the answer would be no—and if the previous NDP government did. The answer would be no as well.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Supplementary.

Mr Gilles Bisson (Timmins-James Bay): Minister, speak or consult. It's your bill. That's the one we brought back. You drafted the bill. You consulted within your caucus. You know full well what's in it. All we did was

reprint your bill. Don't talk to me about having to consult.

You introduced the bill back then. You thought it was a good bill. We, as New Democrats, supported it. The Tories voted against it. This is your chance to shine. You brought the bill forward. We reintroduced it. Talk is cheap. Stop the consultation. Will you pass it for second and third reading now to provide security in prices for people not only in northern Ontario but across this province?

Hon Mr Bartolucci: The reality is, the process in this place is that you introduce bills and bring them forward for discussion. We all know that's what happens. I look forward to them bringing that bill forward to have full and open debate.

But let's talk a little bit about sincerity. I think that's what this is all about. The third party stands up and talks about increasing hospital beds, yet when they were in government they cut hospital beds by 8,000.

Let's talk about sincerity with doctor shortages. They stand up here and say we need more doctors, yet when they were in government they cut medical spaces by 10%.

This is a party that today pretends they care about gas prices. The last time the provincial portion of the gas tax was increased was in 1992, under that government.

There is no sincerity over there. Let's allow the process to unfold.

TAXATION

Mr John R. Baird (Nepean-Carleton): My question is to the Premier. Canadians from coast to coast are becoming cynical about politicians and the promises they make before election day. Voter turnout is in decline right across the country because voters don't think their votes matter.

Premier, before election day you promised not to raise taxes by one cent—not by one cent. But today you won't rule out raising provincial income tax rates and you won't say no to a 9% or 10% PST. If it was good enough to promise before election day that you wouldn't raise taxes, why can't you get up and just promise not to raise them today? Why can't you just say no to your finance minister, who seems to be on a spending spree and wanting to raise taxes? Will you just stand in your place and say no to a 9% or 10% PST?

Hon Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs): We have a much more positive outlook on the world, as you might expect. We look forward to saying yes to smaller classes in the early years; yes to lead teachers in our elementary schools with special skills in numeracy and literacy. We look forward to saying yes to higher student achievement. We look forward to saying yes to shorter waits for cancer care and cardiac care. We look forward to saying yes to more nurses and more doctors. We look forward to saying yes to the vulnerable who have waited far too long when it comes to having their basic needs met. Those are the kinds of things we look forward to saying yes to.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Supplementary.

Mr Jim Wilson (Simcoe-Grey): I just want to follow up on the question my colleague asked about the breeding of cynicism in this province, Premier. I wonder if you're feeling at all bad about it.

Today alone your northern minister got up—he had every answer when he was in opposition about gas prices in northern Ontario and across the province, and you refused to even pass the legislation he brought forward at that time. Northerners today have a reason to be cynical. Obviously, today you say you're going to put money into long-term care for our seniors, but in February you took away tens of millions of dollars by eliminating the property tax rebate in our nursing homes.

I've got another one for you: You don't pay your bills to municipalities. The Town of the Blue Mountains is owed \$360,000 for last year's policing costs under the CRF program. You're not paying your bills. You promised to pay your bills. You're going to bring a budget out next Tuesday. Would you end the cynicism, at least among municipalities today, since you won't help people who pay for gasoline and you won't help seniors? Would you at least end the cynicism among municipalities and pay your bloody bills from last year before you bring the budget out this year?

Interjections.

The Speaker: Order. Could I ask the House's indulgence to give me a moment for us to calm down a little bit.

Hon Mr McGuinty: I appreciate the member's commitment and determination. I can understand why he's so frustrated because of the unpaid bills left behind by the previous government. It's not just a matter of a \$5.6-billion deficit. It's a matter of the unpaid bills with respect to our hospitals, the unpaid bills with respect to our children's aid societies, the unpaid bills with respect to our colleges, and now the member brings to our attention—and we're grateful for this information—yet another unpaid bill left behind by the previous government, something else that we're going to have to clean up. I can tell you, we're working as hard as we can to clean up all those unpaid bills left behind by the previous government.

ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH AND SAFETY EDUCATION PROGRAM

Ms Caroline Di Cocco (Sarnia-Lambton): My question is for the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities. Minister, Sarnia-Lambton is well on its way to becoming a model community that is both pro-environment and pro-business. Lambton College in my riding has been a leader in this unique effort to better prepare its students to be both responsible industry leaders, highly trained employees and good citizens. To that end, Lambton College has been laying the groundwork for some time for better educational opportunities in the field of environmental health and safety and sustainable development. Minister, can you tell us what progress has been made on this front?

Hon Mary Anne V. Chambers (Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities): I'd like to thank the member from Sarnia-Lambton for this question. I'm really pleased to say that Lambton College has brought forward and received approval for a new program in environmental health and safety. It will be a four-year degree program which will qualify students for a bachelor of applied technology in environmental health and safety. The first batch of students will be admitted in September 2005, 48 students to start.

I think this is a perfect example of what our locally based thinking can do for our province. Here is a college in Sarnia bringing forward environment-related programs which will be very helpful to their area. Another example of this could be our institutions in northern Ontario coming forward with forestry-type programs. It just goes to show you that our province is not simply run from Queen's Park.

Ms Di Cocco: I'm proud of the work that Lambton College has done to attain this program, and this is excellent news for the students of Lambton College and for Sarnia-Lambton. Minister, can you tell us what types of employment opportunities will be available to the graduates of this program?

Hon Mrs Chambers: The graduates of this program could be educators in environmental issues. They could be consultants or industrial hygienists. They could be involved in a variety of environment-related practices. They could also work with our government to ensure that the work the Minister of the Environment and her ministry are working on will be successful and will benefit all of the people of Ontario.

1500

BY-ELECTION IN HAMILTON EAST

Mr Tim Hudak (Erie-Lincoln): A question for the Premier: The member for Nepean-Carlton, Mr Baird, and I have a friendly bet. He says you don't have the courage to go and campaign in Hamilton East. I want to give you the benefit of the doubt. He says you don't have the guts to go door to door in Hamilton East. I think you're going to knock on at least one, maybe two doors. Premier, don't let me down. Will you visit Hamilton East, even just once, before the vote?

Hon Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs): I will take that as a plea for more research money on the part of the opposition. I'll speak to the Minister of Finance about that directly.

I can say that we are very proud of the effort being made by Ralph Agostino, our candidate in Hamilton East. He has been leading an outstanding effort. We very much look forward to the results of the by-election and have every confidence in the people living in that riding to make the best decision.

Mr Hudak: The Premier may be proud of his local candidate, but he certainly is not very proud of you. I looked through each of his brochures, and not a single picture of Dalton McGuinty in any of those local

brochures. In fact, the last time the Premier was in Hamilton East was the day he dropped the writ. He's been the invisible man in Hamilton ever since. Everybody else in the assembly has been down to Hamilton except for the Premier. But I think I know why. It's because Dalton McGuinty is the albatross around Ralph Agostino's neck.

If you don't have the courage to go door to door, this is what you would hear from the people of Hamilton East: "Premier, you've broken your promises. You said one thing before the election, and once you got the keys to the big office, you said something completely different. You're asking us, cynically, to vote just five days before the budget of tax hikes, big deficits and broken promises." I'll ask you again, Premier: There are just over 50 hours left before the vote. Will you knock on at least one door in Hamilton East?

Hon Mr McGuinty: This is the first time I've learned my picture is not on the pamphlet. I must say I've been cut to the quick. I'm not sure—I'm deeply hurt. As I say, I'm proud of the effort being led by Ralph Agostino and the team he has assembled, the people there on the ground. I know they've been working feverishly and furiously to get the support of the people of Hamilton East. I know he's very much committed to serving the people in that riding and earning the privilege of representing them in the upcoming by-election. We're proud of that effort, and again, I very much look forward to the results coming up.

LONG-TERM CARE

Mr Dave Levac (Brant): My question is for the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. We all know that some senior citizens who live in our province's long-term-care facilities are some of the most vulnerable and fragile citizens in this society. Today you announced our government's strategy to protect those very dear people. In my riding and ridings across the province, that is great news. Can you explain for us again how much money is going to be spent on this particular initiative you've introduced, and more importantly, how will it be allocated across the province?

Hon George Smitherman (Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): I think it's fair to say that all members of the House and all Ontarians were shocked to see what I saw reported by the media, which was conditions of abuse and neglect in our long-term-care facilities. The actions we've taken today based on the report by the member for Nipissing re-establish as a priority the provision of services in long-term care: \$531 million, \$340 million for the expansion of beds in long-term care on an annualized basis and \$191 million to enhance by 2,000 the number of people working in support of our frail seniors in long-term-care facilities. That's 600 nurses as a minimum, dieticians, nurse practitioners and a variety of others who will be deployed to enhance the quality of life for those people living out their final days.

We deliver on the promise of revolution, to ensure that people have the opportunity to live out their final days

with all the dignity and respect a province like Ontario ought to provide.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Supplementary?

Mr Mike Colle (Eglinton-Lawrence): I have a supplementary to the same minister. The high standards you reference are only as good as your ability to enforce them. Nurses are on the front line of health care delivery in long-term-care facilities and are in the best position to report violations of the standards. Minister, what will you do to ensure that nurses and other health care workers can be protected by proper whistle-blower legislation?

Hon Mr Smitherman: One of the things the member from Nipissing found as she did her work in discussion with union representatives, as an example, was that on the issue of mandatory reporting of abuse, workers require the protections necessary.

I'm very pleased to say that our reforms announced today include a commitment to bring forward the necessary legislation to provide whistle-blower protection. On that point, here's what the registered nurses of Ontario had to say: "Whistle-blower protection is an important safety valve in the health care system that ensures nurses and other health care workers can report suspicion or evidence of elder abuse without fear of reprisals from employers." On that basis, it's well said by the RAO. That's why we've committed to it. We think it's an essential element of the protections necessary for our seniors as they live out their final days with all the dignity and respect that a province like Ontario ought to deliver. We haven't, on a consistent enough basis, done that. But I assure you that with the reforms we introduced today, we will.

TFO

M. Gilles Bisson (Timmins-Baie James): Ma question est au premier ministre. Vous savez que dans la dernière élection il y a eu des engagements par votre parti demandant que TFO ait son propre CA autonome, séparé des anglophones. Justement, dans votre plate-forme électorale vous avez dit :

« Un gouvernement McGuinty posera des gestes concrets en vue de favoriser le développement de la collectivité francophone par le biais des initiatives suivantes :

« En donnant à TFO son autonomie par la création de son propre conseil d'administration dont tous les membres parlent français. »

Quand est-ce qu'on peut attendre que vous allez garder cet engagement?

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

Hon Mary Anne V. Chambers (Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities): One day I hope to be able to respond to you in French.

Let me tell you what we are doing so far with TVO/TFO. The board is 13 members strong and currently has three francophone members. As a first step we are filling the next three vacancies, two of which are available right now, and another one will become avail-

able next month, with francophone members. This will bring the composition of the board to six francophone members and seven anglophone members, and we will continue to work with this organization to make sure that our francophone Ontarians are very well represented by TVO/TFO.

M. Bisson: Ce n'est pas votre engagement, la promesse que vous avez faite. C'était très clair dans la dernière élection. Dans votre plate-forme électorale vous avez dit que vous étiez pour avoir un conseil d'administration séparé, autonome pour les francophones. Là, on apprend qu'on va peut-être avoir une autre personne qui va siéger sur le CA en totalité de TFO/TVO.

Quand le GITE vous avait écrit une lettre, vous avez dit une deuxième fois que oui, vous alliez assurer—que vous étiez pour avoir une administration et pour avoir un CA francophone autonome pour les francophones. Pourquoi ne pas garder votre engagement? Vous avez dit très clairement, « Autonomie pour TFO. » Vous n'avez pas dit, « Avoir une autre personne sur le CA. » Est-ce que c'est encore une autre promesse électorale qui a été brisée?

Hon Mrs Chambers: I'm happy to tell the member that we are going in the right direction. We are indeed working toward that commitment, and I'm very pleased that we have already, so very quickly, taken steps to make sure that Ontario's francophone population is very well represented in their educational programs.

These francophone board members will continue to work hard toward representing the interests of francophone Ontarians. We are getting there, and I'm very pleased with the progress we have made so far. We do have a four-year mandate.

1510

PREMIER'S ANNOUNCEMENT

Mr Robert W. Runciman (Leeds-Grenville): My question is for the Premier. We were just advised that your office has asked the provincial television networks for free time next week for you to appear on province-wide TV—before the budget apparently—to make an announcement of "historic significance." I wonder if you could ensure that that is a legitimate request, that you have made exactly that request, and elaborate on why you would not be making an announcement of historic significance in this chamber.

Hon Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs): I can say that my office may very well have made some inquiries, but nothing has been finalized, and nothing has been concluded.

Mr Runciman: If the Premier is contemplating making an announcement of historic significance before the budget, I'd ask him how that squares with the rhetoric we've heard from his party and his government with respect to a democratic deficit. We all, hopefully, believe in this place that the members who come here are representing the constituents throughout the province.

Will you show the appropriate respect for this chamber so that any announcement of historic signifi-

cance will take place in this chamber? If, indeed, you're going to be making an announcement before the public at large through the various TV networks, following the announcement in the chamber, will you also join that request so that the members, the leaders of the two opposition parties, will have equal time?

Hon Mr McGuinty: This is just too rich. To get this kind of criticism from a member of the previous government, which had the temerity, the audacity, to break with parliamentary tradition going back hundreds of years, to be the first government ever to introduce a budget outside these hallowed halls, is just a bit too rich. I can tell you this much: We will respect the traditions of this Legislature, and we will introduce the budget inside this building.

FOREST FIREFIGHTING

Mr Bill Mauro (Thunder Bay-Atikokan): My question is for the Minister of Natural Resources. There was a fire management strategy prepared 15 years ago. Why, on Friday, did you introduce a new forest management strategy? What are the benefits of that strategy?

Hon David Ramsay (Minister of Natural Resources): I thank the member for the excellent question and his interest in forest management, especially in northwestern Ontario. As the member said, the previous fire management strategy was designed 15 years ago. This strategy really has to reflect today's changing demands on our forest uses in our plans, which are very complex, more complex than they were 15 years ago.

This strategy is consistent with our commitment that was made under the Ontario forest accord to increase levels of fire protection in the developing forest areas. This new management strategy is an important step forward in taking a more balanced approach to forest fires. It will continue to focus on protecting human health, property and natural resources against the threats of wildfire.

Mr Mauro: You mentioned the Northern Boreal Initiative and the six new management zones. How will this new strategy address the Northern Boreal Initiative?

Hon David Ramsay: This is a very important part about this. As I think many members would know, we are working on a northern boreal strategy that is basically working in partnership with our First Nations north of 51, in developing the future harvesting of resources in that area. As we work and develop in that area, we're going to have to have more intensive fire protection of that resource, as these communities are going to become dependent upon that for a revenue stream. We are gradually increasing fire protection as we move north, so that we protect the future revenue resources of our aboriginal peoples.

WATER QUALITY

Ms Laurie Scott (Haliburton-Victoria-Brock): Today my question is for the Minister of the Environ-

ment. This past weekend, your colleagues attended the Ontario Small Urban Municipalities Conference. While they were there, they announced to residents of Walters Falls that there would be a six-month moratorium on regulation 170. Minister Smitherman was quoted on Friday as saying, "We recognize there's a challenge in the regulations, and that's why Minister Dombrowsky indicated that the regulations that affect them are on hold for six months." Yesterday in the House, the Minister of the Environment stated, "We most definitely are prepared to deal with regulation 170."

Small businesses, campgrounds, community halls and churches have been trying for months to get you to listen to their concerns. Their concerns have been raised repeatedly by both opposition parties in the Legislature. This matter has been pre-announced to death. Would the minister please confirm today that the government is going to listen to the people and is imposing a six-month moratorium effective today?

Hon Leona Dombrowsky (Minister of the Environment): I've had the opportunity on numerous occasions in this House to address the issue of regulation 170. As recently as yesterday I explained to the members of the assembly that I would be making an announcement this week with regard to that particular regulation.

I know that there is a great anxiety and people across the province are very anxious for the ministry's response to this, but I would suggest that it is a very complex issue. This government intends to take the time to consult with the people we need to, to ensure that we get this right this time, something that the previous government did not take the time to do.

It strikes me as very strange that members from the previous government stand in this House regularly to press for an answer, and it was because they were in such a rush in the previous administration that they didn't get this regulation right the first time.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Supplementary.

Mr Ernie Hardeman (Oxford): Minister, the announcement of a six-month moratorium on regulation 170 by two of your cabinet colleagues was not made by accident. I can't believe two cabinet ministers would misspeak at the same conference at the same time to members of the media.

A moratorium on this regulation would save rural churches and halls the unnecessary anxiety of rushing to meet regulations that may not apply to them in the end, and it would allow your ministry to stop enforcing the regulation until the changes were made.

Minister, as you have just stated, you are going to make an announcement this week. Why would you not make that announcement today and say there is a six-month moratorium, so these people in the churches and halls will no longer have to live with this anxiety? They can quit prancing around and start looking after the needs of their community, as opposed to waiting for your regulation changes to be made, so they can get on with

their business. Minister, why don't you make that announcement today if you know what it's going to be?

Hon Mrs Dombrowsky: If the honourable member knew what was needed in rural Ontario, why didn't you do it when you crafted the regulation?

What I have committed to this Legislature is that there will be an announcement this week. What I will also be able to commit when we make the announcement is that it will have had a fulsome review. We will have had an opportunity to consider totally what the stakeholders have contributed to this debate, this very important issue. When we come forward, I can assure the members of this Legislature and the people of Ontario that it will provide both a short-term and a long-term plan on how to ensure that water in the province of Ontario is protected.

ROAD SAFETY

Mr Pat Hoy (Chatham-Kent Essex): My question is for the Minister of Transportation. You introduced a bill that talks about the measures it will take to protect Ontario's youth. I think this is an important initiative. I think we can all welcome your commitment, at first reading, to seek to reduce the number of children injured or killed on our roads. But can you, Minister, please tell me what sort of scale of problem we are dealing with here and why you believe that extending the law on booster seats and children's car seats is the right way to move forward?

Hon Harinder S. Takhar (Minister of Transportation): First of all, I want to thank my colleague for asking the question, but I also want to thank him for the work he has done in this area.

The bill that I introduced in the Legislature is based on very concrete research. In the last five years, about 700 children were killed on the roads, and death on the highway is the leading cause of death of kids between the ages of one and nine. The research shows that booster seats can reduce the likelihood of death and injury by about 75%.

1520

NOTICE OF DISSATISFACTION

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Pursuant to standing order 37(a), the member for Simcoe North has given notice of his dissatisfaction with the answer to his question given by the Minister of Transportation yesterday concerning consultation with police services. This matter will be debated this afternoon.

Mr Gilles Bisson (Timmins-James Bay): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: I would ask for unanimous consent right now to be able to move my Bill 74, Keep Your Promises at the Pump Act, Mr Bartolucci, and that it be passed today, second and third reading, by unanimous consent.

The Speaker: Do we have unanimous consent for the motion by the member from Timmins-James Bay? No.

PETITIONS

PROPERTY TAXATION

Mr Jim Brownell (Stormont-Dundas-Charlottenburgh): I have a petition signed by about 900 constituents from Glengarry county, and on which I've affixed my signature.

"To the Parliament of Ontario:

"Whereas Glengarry county property holders are now under extreme financial stress due to soaring property assessments;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Parliament of Ontario to act immediately to remedy this dire situation as follows:

"(1) that Glengarry ratepayers living on fixed incomes have their property assessments reviewed and pegged to the annual rate of inflation; and

"(2) that all other Glengarry ratepayers have their property assessments capped at 3.5% per annum."

HIGHWAY 407

Mr John O'Toole (Durham): "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

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

"Whereas the province of Ontario is meeting the challenge of traffic congestion in the greater Toronto area by improvements to our highway network and by" providing public transit;

"Whereas the construction of Highway 407 eastward into Durham region, across Clarington to Highway 35/115, would improve the flow of traffic in Durham region and throughout the GTA;

"Whereas citizens and municipalities of Durham region have faced uncertainty over the final alignment of the proposed 407 highway for many years and are entitled to a timely resolution of this matter;

"Whereas CAAC, the Clarington agricultural advisory committee, has expressed concerns and advocates for final construction completion of Highway 407 through Clarington, connecting 35/115;

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

"That the Parliament of Ontario take steps to fast-track the extension of Highway 407 eastward into the regional municipality of Durham and that this commitment include the extension of Highway 407 through Clarington to connect with Highway 35/115, while ensuring that all the necessary environmental assessments and public consultations are followed," as they should be.

I'm pleased to sign this in support of this petition presented by Mr Bert Werry.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Ms Shelley Martel (Nickel Belt): I have a petition addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario. It reads as follows:

“Whereas the Sudbury Regional Hospital is a regional referral centre, serving patients from across northeastern Ontario;

“Whereas the burden of raising money to pay the local share of the hospital reconstruction costs has fallen primarily on to local residents;

“Whereas city council and local residents have already committed more money to the project than we were required to;

“Whereas imposing a private mortgage scheme on the hospital to pay more costs at the local level would be disastrous for patients, hospital programs and staff;

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

“We call on the Liberal government to fund 85% of the capital costs of reconstruction at the Sudbury Regional Hospital.”

I agree with the petitioners and I sign my name to this petition.

GO TRANSIT SERVICE

Mr Bob Delaney (Mississauga West): I have petition from another group of weary commuters in Mississauga, and it reads as follows:

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the city of Mississauga has, within a generation, grown from a linked collection of suburban and farming communities into Canada’s sixth-largest city, and tens of thousands of people daily need to commute into and out of Mississauga in order to do business, educate themselves and their families and enjoy culture and recreation; and

“Whereas gridlock on all roads leading into and out of Mississauga makes peak period road commuting impractical, and commuter rail service on the Milton GO line is restricted to morning and afternoon service into and out of Toronto; and

“Whereas residents of western Mississauga need to ‘commute to commute,’ driving along traffic-clogged roads to get to overflowing parking lots at the Meadowvale, Streetsville and Erindale GO train stations;

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

“That the government of Ontario, through the Ministry of Transportation and highways, instruct GO Transit to allocate sufficient resources from its 2004-05 capital budget to proceed immediately with the acquisition of land and construction of a new GO train station, called Lisgar, at Tenth Line and the rail tracks, to alleviate the parking congestion, and provide better access to GO train service on the Milton line for residents of western Mississauga.”

As one of those residents, I’m pleased to affix my signature.

ONTARIO DRUG BENEFIT PROGRAM

Mr Jim Wilson (Simcoe-Grey): A petition addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the McGuinty Liberals by no means campaigned on raising the rates associated with the Ontario drug benefit program; and

“Whereas the majority of seniors, many of whom live on a fixed income, cannot meet the expense of higher costs for essential medication; and

“Whereas seniors in Simcoe-Grey and across Ontario should never have to make the choice between eating and filling a prescription;

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

“To cancel any plans to raise costs for prescription drugs for our seniors and to embark on making vital medication more affordable for all Ontarians.”

I’ve signed that petition.

PRIMARY CARE

Mr Jeff Leal (Peterborough): “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the community of Peterborough is suffering a crisis in terms of accessibility to health care, brought on by a severe and growing shortage of family physicians; and

“Whereas the community of Peterborough has demonstrated extraordinarily strong local leadership in developing a proposal for primary care reform, which is very innovative and will provide access to primary care for a growing list of more than 20,000 residents in our community without a family physician; and

“Whereas this proposal has been endorsed by the county of Peterborough, the city of Peterborough, the Peterborough County Medical Society, the Peterborough Community Access Centre, the Peterborough Regional Health Centre, and the Peterborough County-City Health Unit;

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

“To work with representatives of the local community to ensure that all residents of Peterborough have access to an appropriate primary care provider through the timely implementation of the proposed integrated primary care model, as this model provides appropriate and equitable compensation for family physicians while incorporating sufficient interdisciplinary health care providers, community linkages and appropriate administrative, infrastructure and information technology supports to enable health professionals to enjoy a more realistic, healthy work-life balance.”

I will sign this petition.

MOTORCYCLE INSURANCE

Ms Laurie Scott (Haliburton-Victoria-Brock): “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas tens of thousands of responsible motorcyclists are being hit with huge increases in insurance or are being denied coverage because of the type of vehicle they ride;

“Whereas the premiums for the mandatory insurance coverage for motorcyclists have increased on average over 40% in the past two years;

“Whereas many responsible riders can no longer afford to insure their motorcycles due to high insurance costs;

“Whereas sales of motorcycles in Ontario have dropped over 7% year-to-date this year, a figure attributed directly to the increase in insurance rates; and

“Whereas many businesses and individuals in the motorcycle industry are suffering due to the loss of sales and decreased employment high insurance rates are causing;

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

“Please amend the insurance regulations to make motorcycle insurance more affordable and to ensure motorcyclists are treated fairly and equitably by insurance companies, brokers and agents.”

It's signed by many people from my riding.

IMMIGRANTS' SKILLS

Mr John Wilkinson (Perth-Middlesex): A petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas Ontario enjoys the continuing benefit 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 their professions, trades and occupations for which they have been trained in their country of origin; and

“Whereas Ontario, its businesses, 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 the other institutions and agencies of and within the government of Ontario, undertake specific and proactive measures to work with the bodies regulating access to Ontario's professions, 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 Canada into the Canadian workforce.”

I proudly affix my signature.

1530

OPTOMETRISTS

Mr Jerry J. Ouellette (Oshawa): I have a petition that reads as follows:

“Whereas the last funding agreement between the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care and the Ontario Association of Optometrists expired March 31, 2000; and

“Whereas the optometric fees for OHIP-insured services remain unchanged since 1989; and

“Whereas the lack of any fee increase for 15 years has created a crisis situation for optometrists; and

“Whereas fees for OHIP services do not provide for fair or reasonable compensation for the professional services of optometrists in that they no longer cover the costs of providing eye examinations; and

“Whereas it is in the best interests of patients and the government to have a new funding agreement for insured services that will ensure the most vulnerable members of society are able to receive the eye care they need;

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

“That the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care resume negotiations immediately with the OAO and appoint a mediator to help with the negotiation process in order to ensure that optometrists can continue to provide quality eye care services to patients in Ontario.”

I affix my name in agreement.

ONTARIO BUDGET

Ms Laurel C. Broten (Etobicoke-Lakeshore): “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“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 agree with the petition and I am signing my name to it.

TTC RIGHT-OF-WAY

Mr Tony Ruprecht (Davenport): I have a petition that will affect every resident who lives near the St Clair Avenue area in Toronto.

“To the Parliament of Ontario and Minister of the Environment:

“Against a dedicated TTC right-of-way on St Clair Avenue West;

“Whereas an environmental assessment is underway on St Clair Avenue West to study potential transit improvements, including the possibility of installing a dedicated TTC right-of-way;

“Whereas the consultation process so far has been in bad faith, top-down and rushed, which has disappointed and angered the local community almost entirely, and not been up to any acceptable public standards;

“Whereas comments by the chair and the members of the Toronto Transit Commission have made it clear that there is a predetermined outcome to the environmental assessment process, regardless of the objections of the local community;

“Whereas a dedicated right-of-way would force significantly more traffic on to our local streets;

“Whereas safety must be a high priority for any alternative selected and, according to the ambulance and fire department staff, they don’t like to work with rights-of-way;

“Whereas a right-of-way would lead to the reduction or elimination of on-street parking on St Clair Avenue West;

“Whereas the right-of-way will have substantial negative economic effects on local businesses;

“Whereas there is no guarantee that a dedicated right-of-way will improve transit service substantially, as the number of streetcars serving the street will actually be reduced;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, strongly urge the Minister of the Environment to order a full environmental assessment on St Clair Avenue West, one that genuinely consults and takes into consideration the views and opinions of the local community.”

Since I agree, I affix my signature to this petition.

TAXATION

Mr Jim Wilson (Simcoe-Grey): I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

“Whereas every day, 1.5 million Ontarians, including seniors, health care workers and students, purchase a basic meal that costs less than \$4; and

“Whereas a new 8% tax on such meals will disadvantage low-income Ontarians; and

“Whereas adding a tax for the first time on a glass of milk, a salad, a bowl of soup or a cup of coffee will affect a total of 1.5 million Ontarians each and every day in restaurants and cafeterias across the province;

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

“Do not impose a new 8% tax on basic meals under \$4.”

I agree with that petition, and I have signed it.

ONTARIO BUDGET

Mr Lorenzo Berardinetti (Scarborough Southwest): I have a petition 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 agree with the petition, and I affix my signature to it.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

GOVERNMENT
ADVERTISING ACT, 2003LOI DE 2003 SUR
LA PUBLICITÉ GOUVERNEMENTALE

Resuming the debate adjourned on May 6, 2004, on the motion for second reading of Bill 25, An Act respecting government advertising / Projet de loi 25, Loi concernant la publicité gouvernementale.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): The member from Oshawa has the floor.

Mr Jerry J. Ouellette (Oshawa): Thank you, Mr Speaker. I’ll continue where I left off. As mentioned before, I’m sharing my time with the member for Haliburton-Victoria-Brock.

When we were discussing this last Thursday, I spoke about the difficulties of bringing a writer in from the United States and the impact it would have, and the fact that it takes about three years for that impact to be seen within our community. In this particular bill, the concern I was expressing at the time was turning over authority to the deputy minister. If that individual doesn’t believe it’s warranted or can be of assistance, then it may not be of benefit.

I also wanted to mention one of the aspects under subsection 6(1)1, where it specifically states the standards that an item is required to meet: “To inform the

public of current or proposed government policies....” I have some concern under that section that essentially it doesn’t change what’s taking place. Later, it goes on to talk about: “To promote Ontario or any part of Ontario as a good place to live, work, invest, study or visit.” How does that affect or change what’s taking place?

Mind you, I will admit that in accordance with what they’ve said in subsection 6(1)3, on promoting a positive image, where it talks about the “voice or image of a member of the executive council or a member of the assembly” not being shown in any of that. When I had the privilege and honour to work as a minister, I very much remembered when I was in my youth and how that ministry stood out in my mind, and what took place in time and how I used to receive those fishing regulations every year. The minister’s message used to be in there and I looked forward to that every year as a young kid. I thought, “Someday, that would be a nice thing to do.” I don’t recall who it was, but I do recall Lyn McLeod’s comments in there later, or Vince Kerrio’s and a number of other people, and what they had to say about their ministry and how they intended to move forward and the things they wanted to do.

I was somewhat concerned or felt it was lacking within the new regulations, whether it was the parks guides or the fishing guides or the hunting guides, when they came out, that there was no direction or understanding put forward. I kind of felt that, as a minister, you have a certain pride within your ministry, and you take that pride, no matter which party you represent, and try to represent the best interests of all people. Yes, we have different opinions on how to move forward, but that was an opportunity for those ministers to say what they wanted to do, and it’s now lacking in that aspect.

Also, I spoke about the positive impact. What was taking place was that advertising was being allowed outside the province of Ontario. The difficulty with that is, what happens if the ads show up back in Ontario? If you’re trying to promote Ontario and the great things that we have to offer here—and the people—but what happens when you get into the CRTC regulations, when the ads all of a sudden, on a Buffalo station, show up being advertised in Ontario? Those are some of the ways that you could kind of work on that.

I know that my colleague the member from Haliburton-Victoria-Brock is anxiously waiting, so I will turn the floor over to her.

1540

Ms Laurie Scott (Haliburton-Victoria-Brock): I’d like to thank my colleague from Oshawa for his comments on the bill. I’m happy to have the opportunity to speak to Bill 25 and join the debate on that, the Government Advertising Act, 2003. I am a new member of the Legislature, so I hope I can add some productive comments on the observations that I’ve seen since I’ve been here, and before.

The government’s motive for introducing the legislation is perceived indiscretions of the past government with regard to government advertising. Many people and

organizations have waded into this debate over the course of the past number of years as to what is perceived to be partisan and what is not. Far be it from me to take this House’s time in reviewing all the many and varied advertising products that we’ve all seen before I was elected and since I’ve been elected, but this is a mutual concern.

As an example, I don’t think anyone in the House would be critical of the past government when it spent taxpayers’ money on advertising for precautions: the West Nile virus, the flu shots, anti-smoking campaigns, or the Telehealth advertisements, which were certainly needed to be public out there and to inform people of these various topics. Everyone in this House, and indeed all of the constituents, don’t object to this past form of advertising. I don’t think they would object today or in the future, because that form of government advertising is certainly acceptable and needed.

The truth of the matter is that the vast majority of the monies spent by the past government were spent on public information campaigns about the many different issues of the day. The past government received very few complaints from the public about the partisan nature of the advertisements. It often seemed that the only complaints registered were from the members of the opposition or from their supporters.

The current government, upon taking office, has also made some changes to make government publications reflect, for example, their political party colours on many of their publications, including on their own government’s letterhead. We’ve all heard in the House, from a number of speakers, about the changing of the government job publication *Topical*. As we know the story, the masthead of the publication was changed to Liberal red. Then the publication was subsequently changed back to a different colour—to green.

It does show that everyone, all ministers, have to be cautious and vigilant when it comes to making sure their publications are not seen to be too partisan. *Topical* is news and information about the Ontario public service. It’s published by the Management Board Secretariat, Minister Phillips. I would like you to see the recent issue of *Topical* that featured the heading, “Government Leads by Example to Reduce Energy Consumption.” It also showed a nice picture of the Management Board Chair, Gerry Phillips, on the cover.

Does this satisfy the standards that are set out in the legislation? We must lead by example, but I don’t believe that the publication has met the standards, in at least two ways. The legislation sets out, “It must not include the name, voice or image of a member of the executive council or a member of the assembly.” It further sets out that, “It must not be partisan.” Obviously it fails that, because we have a picture of the Chair of Management Board. Right there, we seem to have an example of where the publication would fail to satisfy that standard.

I don’t know how to assess what “partisan” is or how it’s going to be defined in the legislation. It’s going to be subjective, and I guess the auditor or someone else is

going to be making those calls. There's certainly going to have to be a balancing act involved in what is called "partisan" and what is not. Maybe the guidelines should be: Does it promote government policies, or is it in the public interest? So it's going to be up to the auditor to make that decision, when and if the legislation is passed.

When you're putting a picture of a member of the executive council when the primary objective of the item is to foster a positive impression of the governing party, and you know that this item is paid for by the government, certainly that has to be covered by this legislation. I hope this type of practice is going to stop once this legislation is passed.

The statute deals with the partisan political interests of the governing party, whether it's advertising, printed material or messaging. It does not deal with specific advertising that attacks the opposition. That is something that certainly should be covered under any amendments.

The government is already advertising in local community newspapers, trumpeting the new water regulations, which have been discussed many times in this Legislature. Under the past government, these ads would have been seen as partisan, because they are touting what a great job the government thinks it's doing on water regulations and the environment. Those of us in the Legislature who represent rural ridings can attest that the jury is still out on whether or not these water regulations, as they are currently enforced, are indeed something this government should be trumpeting. I'm hopeful that soon, as the minister explained today, there will be changes to the drinking water standards in our community halls, our churches and our municipalities that are reasonable.

I know in the past there was the issue of the highway signs that were put up during the last government's term. These signs, I will say, as has also been said before, were not put up for partisan reasons. They were put up because most Ontarians were not aware the federal government gave no financial support to the province of Ontario for road construction. I hope that changes, and that the federal government does become involved in some road construction improvements that are much needed. I hope they can persuade their federal cousins to become involved in that. They were put up to inform the taxpayer as to which level of government actually put money into the construction and repair of our province's roads.

The current government has several ministry publications going out already with the pictures of new ministers on their covers. Under Bill 25 this would certainly be a violation. I appreciate that the bill is not law yet, but I must remind the government that they are introducing this. This is part of what they have campaigned on, and yet they have already sent out publications with their ministers' pictures on them. I hope it's going to be explicit in the bill that it's going to ban the photographs of members of the executive council in government publications but at the same time allow some of these publications to be distributed by various ministries.

There's also a slight flaw in Bill 25 in the lack of a definition of the word "advertising." My colleague from

Barrie-Simcoe-Bradford said the other day that there is no definition of the word "advertising." Then the application of the law is going to be subjective.

Also, the role of the Advertising Commissioner is not well defined in terms of the process of appointment and the terms of reference of the position. With no appeal from the decision of the auditor, there's no recourse should the opposition disagree with this decision. That should also be looked at.

The bill is also short-sighted when it refers to what's included and excluded with regard to television advertising. It allows images of the Premier and others when the advertising deals with the promotion of Ontario abroad. That's fine on the surface; however, in this day and age, with over 300 channels being beamed across the world, it's a bit naïve to assume that none of that partisan advertising will reach hundreds of thousands of Ontarians.

In summary—and I know my time is running out—there may have been a perceived need for this bill by members of the government while they were in opposition, but I would submit that the substance of the bill, like that of so many other government bills, is lacking. The vast majority of government advertising that existed under the previous government, and that continues to exist under this government, will not fall under the bill. There are currently publications that have been distributed by this government that violate this bill, and I mentioned a few of them before. Back to definitions: There's definitely the need for a definition of the word "advertisement." The subjectiveness of that, and the ability of the government to allow partisan advertisements in foreign jurisdictions, which obviously will be seen by millions of Ontarians, is a glaring error.

I understand the motivation of the Chair of Management Board, who is certainly an honourable member, when he introduced the bill, but it unfortunately leaves many questions unanswered. We look forward to discussing possible amendments to this bill as time goes on.

The Speaker: Questions and comments?

1550

Mr Rosario Marchese (Trinity-Spadina): I just want to congratulate both the member from Oshawa and the member from this long riding of Haliburton-Victoria-Brock. There are just too many names attached to these long ridings.

But they made a specific point as well, and many other points, when they made reference to the Trillium Foundation and how that conflicts with one of the aspects of the bill, which says, in paragraph 3, "must not include the name, voice or image of a member of the executive council or a member of the assembly." This Trillium Foundation newsletter obviously includes pictures—I presume very smiley pictures; I haven't yet had a chance to see it—of various folks: the Minister of Children and Youth Services, Ms Bountrogianni; the Minister of Health figures strongly in there as well; I believe the Premier is in there; and many other members, including the member from Guelph-Wellington, were in that particular newsletter.

I just don't know whether or not that contradicts any aspects of Bill 25. The Minister of Labour probably says, "No, I don't think so." But that's the point of these bills. The minister introduces these bills and they say, "We're going to end the abuse of advertising," and it's just a show. The Minister of Labour knows that. It's just a game they play with the Ontario public. The real goal of the bill is to simply allow the public to believe that excessive government advertising is gone. That's what the game is all about. There's nothing real or substantive about how they're going to do it, because they're not. There are so many loopholes that allow for this not to happen that they think they're simply going to get away with it.

So I congratulate both members for that point of view and other points they made.

Mr Richard Patten (Ottawa Centre): I'd like to comment on my friend, who is new to the House, from Haliburton-Victoria-Brock, and also on my theatrical friend from Trinity-Spadina. The examples the member for Haliburton-Victoria-Brock mentioned are totally legitimate: a program to encourage people to quit smoking; a program that informs people of a new service. But that's not what we're talking about. This resulted in a tremendous reaction, where people were beginning to resent the fact that millions of dollars were going out the door in terms of surveys with the Premier's face on them and special little booklets about what's new in education, where they would talk about the government's program, with no real redeeming value in terms of anything new that somebody could do, but just information about the government's point of view on things.

The member from Trinity-Spadina says, "Come on, what is all this? This is just window dressing," or one thing or another. I think deep down he knows it's somewhat more substantive than that. Indeed, we are talking about self-promotion versus good government sharing information, promoting good health, good safety, as it says in the bill. Indeed, there may be examples right now where some agencies are doing some things that, once this bill does pass, they will be prohibited from doing. But you'll notice that there aren't any of the flagrant violations of normal courtesy and of normal respect for the resources of government in order to help address the issues of the populace.

Mr Wayne Arthurs (Pickering-Ajax-Uxbridge): I appreciated the comments from the member opposite from Haliburton-Victoria-Brock. We keep raising the same issues, on occasion, during debate over matters of concern. One of them has been the matter of Topical, which is an in-house newsletter for OPS staff, some 60-odd-thousand in the province of Ontario. It's a newsletter, to folks who work for us in the province, to provide them with information. It's not paid advertising to a public body out there in some fashion. It's an in-house work.

The colour scheme became a matter of comment. In reality, if one looks at the history over the past year, you'll find that for each edition the colour scheme

changed. It has been a red colour, a blue colour, a green colour and an orange colour. It changes on a regular basis and will continue to do that. To use the time to draw attention to a particular colour and a particular edition of a newsletter that's for the purpose of sharing information with OPS staff is not in the context of the bill and paid advertising. Paid advertising is speaking to matters such as advertising on billboards with the Premier's face on it. It's speaking to newspapers and magazines in which we see a member of cabinet predominantly displayed, advertising some element of provincial business. It's intended for print material that goes out as bulk mail to hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of households across Ontario—unsolicited mail arriving on the doorstep whose function is to promote the Premier or a cabinet minister. We've seen ample examples of that. It's clearly an effort to get hold of the partisan advertising that has occurred in the past—

The Speaker: Thank you. Questions and comments?
Interjections.

Ms Scott: Haliburton-Victoria-Brock.

The Speaker: I know it's Haliburton-Victoria-Brock, but you had the debate itself. It's questions and comments, but if the member from Perth-Middlesex would like to take the two minutes, he can do so.

Mr John Wilkinson (Perth-Middlesex): Thank you very much, Mr Speaker.

I'm pleased to speak to Bill 25 yet again because there's a fundamental question we in all parties have to ask ourselves. We in the government are in favour of this bill. I hear comments from the opposition, but the fundamental question is, are you prepared to state in this House that you are opposed to Bill 25, and that if in the future you form a government, you're in favour of repealing this Bill 25 and going to the good people of Ontario and saying: "We want it the old way. We want to go back to the days when a government could take the taxpayers' money and spend it to shamelessly promote the agenda of the government. We want to be able to put the Premier's picture on these ads. We want to put his or her name on them. We want to get the cabinet ministers on these documents. We want to go to people and ask them innocuous questions like, 'Tell us how we're doing'?"

I have never heard an opposition party in this debate stand up and say, "Yes, we are opposed to the bill, and if we ever form the government, we're going to repeal this repugnant piece of legislation." The reason they won't do that is because, I think we all agree in this place, the line was crossed by the previous administration as to what is good public policy. It is not in the best interests of the taxpayers and the good people of Ontario to have governments taking taxpayers' money and shamelessly promoting themselves. There will always be people who will debate whether the bill goes far enough, but this is something that is historic in democracy in the world. There is no other government saying that they're going to do this to themselves: restrict themselves and future governments to this shameless abuse of taxpayers' money.

I challenge the opposition parties yet again to stand up and tell us that somehow they feel this is wrong, and if they ever form a government, they would repeal it.

The Acting Speaker (Mr Ted Arnott): The member for Victoria-Haliburton-Brock has two minutes to reply.

Interjection.

Ms Scott: The name is going to change again soon, so it's all right.

I'd like to thank my colleague from Oshawa and the member for Trinity-Spadina for highlighting the loopholes that we are trying to point out in Bill 25. That is what we're trying to say: Bill 25 has been presented to us. There are some problems with it. Again, we go back to the definition—the decision on what's partisan and what's not partisan. There does have to be accountability to the taxpayers for how this money is spent, which my colleague from Perth-Middlesex has mentioned.

The member for Pickering-Ajax-Uxbridge mentioned Topical and the colours and if it was not a big concern that they go back and forth. All of a sudden it was red, it went back to green, so they must have been watching or were concerned about that matter.

We're certainly going to watch Bill 25. We've made suggestions on some amendments that need to be looked at because there are loopholes. We all want to spend taxpayers' money cautiously, but we want some definitions. Let's decide what's partisan and not partisan, and let's see what the auditor comes up with. Thank you very much for the chance to comment.

1600

The Acting Speaker: Further debate.

Mr Marchese: I'm happy to have this opportunity to speak to Bill 25 as well. Look, I agree with my NDP colleagues—Mr Kormos, in particular, who has spoken to this and who said that, in his view and mine, Bill 25 will not end government excesses or government advertising. It simply won't end.

The Liberal government will pretend that somehow they will end all of the abuses of the previous government, but Liberals will simply not engage in any excesses because, as you all know, Liberals are a totally different breed of politician. The Tories, of course, were evil and Liberals are not, and therefore, because Liberals have good intentions—good citizens watching this debate, it's 4 o'clock, and welcome—automatically, inherently in the argument, anything they do around advertising is OK, would not be negative unduly, would not be excessive unduly. It would simply be OK, because when Liberals do it, it's not bad.

It was simply enough prior to the election to attack Tories, because that's what people wanted to hear. You would believe Liberals when they say, "Ah, but in the future when Liberals are in office, they would not engage in any excesses of an advertising kind." You would think the people would believe that.

In the same way, prior to the election, McGuinty and the folks in that Liberal caucus said, "Oh, my God, we could have in our hands about \$650 million if we simply ended advertising"—excessive advertising presumably,

bad Tory advertising—"and got rid of all those expensive Tory consultants." You remember that?

Mr Khalil Ramal (London-Fanshawe): I do. That's all Bill 25 is trying to do.

Mr Marchese: Exactly, and Bill 25 is a part of that.

It was a very interesting thing. When a number of individuals commented on the fact that Ontario taxpayers shelled out nearly \$1,000 a day to Ottawa South MP John Manley—remember, John Manley was a member of Parliament and taxpayers were dishing out money to pay this guy to be a consultant as they were reviewing Hydro One and Ontario Power Generation. They were also dishing out taxpayers' money to two other heads of a provincial committee set up to solve the woes of Ontario Power Generation. Manley, former federal Tory energy minister Jake Epp, who has since been appointed OPG chairman, and former Scotiabank chief Peter Godsoe were each paid \$75,000 for completing the study for a publicly owned power firm. God bless. Good money if you can get it. These are people who have already a lot of pecunia in their pockets and in their bankbooks, and yet the Liberals hired a lot of these guys, people like Peter Donolo, another Liberal consultant, and John Manley, who's already getting a hefty sum of money, 140,000 bucks at the federal level, and he's consulting—suckling at the public trough doing this study. That's OK with Liberals, even though prior to the election they harangued, excoriated, the Tories for hiring expensive consultants who were simply taking taxpayers' money out of their pockets and giving it away to their friends. When Liberals do it with their friends, that's OK.

To hear Mr Dwight Duncan say, "It nets out to under \$1,000 a day, so we think it's reasonable, given the scope and timelines they had"—he goes on further to add another quote that says the following: "We said we're going to make better use and less use of them," meaning consultants, and he says, "McGuinty never said that he would eliminate all consultants." Prior to the election we were led to believe all consultants would simply disappear.

When Liberals hire consultants, you've got Dwight Duncan saying, "No, we didn't say that. We said we would make better use and less use of them." Do you understand what I'm saying? When Liberals hire consultants, that's OK because their intentions are good, but if Tories hire consultants, they're bad because they're essentially evil and up to no good. That's the political game the Liberals play that I resent.

In the same way the Minister of Education says there is going to be a moratorium on school closures, and then when boards announce there are going to be 44 schools that will close, he says, "We didn't say no school would close." I'm sorry, but you said there would be a moratorium on school closures.

You understand, the Liberal definition of things is always suspect and it is always ever so fluid. It depends very much what they say prior to the election and very much what they do after the election.

So the 600 million bucks they were going to save on consultants and advertising, I am telling you, dear

viewers of this political program, is not going to happen. Yes, they might spend less than the \$600 million the Tories spent, but it's not saying much. If you listen to Liberals, you would think all advertising and all consultants would disappear, and when you catch them at their game, they say, "No, we didn't say that." It's similar to this game they're playing with the advertising issue.

I understand that folks like the members from Ottawa Centre and Pickering-Ajax-Uxbridge are going to say what they want to say. The newsletter that people were speaking to I'm assuming is the Management Board Secretariat, this magazine they put out. As far as I know, 80,000 copies have been printed and dished out. We're not talking about a couple of newsletters here, we're talking about, as far as I know, 80,000 copies that were printed. The member from Pickering-Ajax-Uxbridge argues, "It's an in-house newsletter. It's not going anywhere important; it's just going to our workers. Because it's going to our workers, it cannot be inherently negative or bad or positive with a positive spin on government, because it's *entre nous*."

If John Baird makes a very interesting case and says—

Mr Shafiq Qadri (Etobicoke North): Unlikely.

Mr Marchese: But you've got to give credit where it's due, because he saw the newsletter. I had been meaning to see it before making this debate. He said the colour has been changed to a Liberal red. Now the member from Pickering-Ajax-Uxbridge might make light of the issue of the colour, but he will understand, and any politician of this place might understand—or, as lawyers say, ought to understand—that the colour is symbolical.

It means something, doesn't it, John? It means something, right? John is pretending he's not listening. John and the good doctor might argue it just means the colour of blood. Sorry, Johnny. I'm sorry, member John Wilkinson from Perth-Middlesex. When people use the colour and the colour is red and it comes from the Liberal Party, it's a symbol. It doesn't matter whether you're sending it out or *entre nous* internally, it's a symbol. It's saying the Liberal Party is here, the Liberal Party is communicating with you, right?

Hon Jim Watson (Minister of Consumer and Business Services): Hear, hear.

Mr Marchese: The Minister of Labour knows it and he's cheering me on. Obviously he's going to have his two minutes to put a disclaimer or possibly refute the arguments I'm making. I'm looking forward to the lawyer making a case against the case I'm making, which is that when you change the colour to red, which is symbolically Liberal red, it means something. I'm waiting for him to make a case that it doesn't, that it means perhaps blood, that it signifies blood, or passion perhaps, or the colour of red roses. I'm looking forward to your case, Monsieur le ministre. I'm telling you, psychology is powerful.

Interjection.

Mr Marchese: The member from Ottawa Centre, he's going to speak again, because you see, he likes the

entertainment of the opposition members, and he's going to stand up and use substantive, reasonable, quiet, very—that kind of argument. I'm looking forward to another two minutes from you, the member from Ottawa Centre, to tell me why the colour red isn't symbolic of the Liberal red colours but something else, please. And please, don't be theatrical when you stand because the public just wouldn't stand for it.

Interjection.

Mr Marchese: That's right. The member from Perth says that since he's got theatre here, we can afford to have members who are less theatrical, a little boring, perhaps, now and then. But please, don't offend the Liberal members in that way.

1610

I'm saying to you, member from Pickering-Ajax-Uxbridge, it doesn't matter where it goes. I argue that the Liberal red is psychologically an important message that you're sending to those who work within the system and to anyone else who sees it. That's the case I make. The subtleties are important. It isn't just a matter of saying, "We the Conservative Party are doing such a great job," and it doesn't matter what it is, versus, "We the Liberal Party," with a subtle colour message. Just the colour in itself is a message, member from Ottawa Centre.

I argue with you that you have to be careful in terms of how you do your own politics, that it's all political. For Liberals to claim that somehow you would be less political is a farce. It's farcical. You did it before with Peterson and you'll do it again with McGuinty, except you're playing a game and pretending you simply are not going to do what Harris and Eves have done. I'm sorry, that's not enough for people like me who have been around for a while.

You can play the game with some people who don't know any better. There are a whole lot of people who just want to believe you, and a whole lot of people who want to believe that it's different. But when you've been around this place, the nuance is what changes; the colour changes from blue to red, but although the substance and the nuance might vary, the message is the same.

That's what burns me a little bit when I hear Liberals in debate say, "Oh, the \$600 million of waste that we've had with consultants and advertising." You lead the public to believe that somehow you are different. Liberals, especially, are not; Liberals are especially clever at playing the game.

Liberals obviously will use another measure that my colleague Peter Kormos, the member from Niagara Centre, has made mention of. He talked about the Mack truck exemption. That exemption would allow the government to be able to advertise, run TV ads in Buffalo and Rochester, New York, and have those messages come through our channels here in Ontario because people watch American television. They can do that, you see. At the moment, the Liberal government can do that and they can get away with it. They don't want to close that loophole because then it would defeat the purpose of allowing them to do what the Tories used to do that

Liberals condemned and are unwilling to change in this bill to make sure that that kind of Mack truck exemption would not happen.

They're not going to do it. They're not going to do it because they don't want to do it. They're not going to do it because they don't want any special enforcement. They're not going to do it because they do want loopholes, because they want to do what Tories did, but in a different, subtle, Liberal sort of way. That's what this is about, and that's what makes people like me irritated by Liberal politicians.

I was thinking about another issue today. I understand Monsieur McGuinty was asking three major networks to cover the budget for free under the guise that this budget has I think what's called "historical significance." How a budget on May 18 that will do nothing but whack Ontario citizens with many user fees—on possibly alcohol again; yes, on possibly more tobacco; yes, on birth certificates, death certificates, marriage certificates and driver's licence plate renewals—how a budget like that can whack Ontario citizens, those who can least afford to pay, and make it appear—as Mr McGuinty tries to get free advertising from three major networks—under the guise of historical significance, beats me. This budget has nothing but bad news coming out of it. Because there will be no new revenues, we are stuck with having to do less. Because of the Tory income tax cuts that have taken away anywhere from \$11 billion to \$13 billion, and because you have refused to tax individuals over \$100,000, from whom we could get a couple of billion dollars to pay for social programs that we desperately need, cuts that were made under the Tories that we need to restore, and because you refused to raise income taxes, we have got a problem. The budget that will come to us next week is going to hurt a lot of citizens, and a whole lot of taxpayers are going to be unhappy with that budget, I'm telling you.

This Premier wanted to go to the networks and get free advertising. Imagine. He didn't get it, evidently. He must be a very unhappy puppy. But he's going to find another way to pay for the advertising of that historical, significant speech that Sorbara will deliver on May 18. He's going to have to find a way to find a couple of dollars, the pecunia that it takes to advertise this budget that is not going to be a pretty budget, that's going to hurt a lot of people. They're going to have to put on the right spin to reach a whole lot of millions of Ontarians, to make it appear that they're going to get the best budget they've ever seen. And unless they put in money to advertise the politics of their budget that will, in many ways, contradict the essence of this bill, he's going to have a problem. So of course he's going to have to find the money, public money, taxpayers' money, to advertise his budget speech. Of course he's got to do that, because if he doesn't do that, who will advertise for him? His ministries will do it. His MPPs will do it, all taxpayers' money, and he will do it coming under the aegis of the fine kind of nuance of this particular bill.

Paragraph 6(1)5 of the bill especially allows the government to get away with virtually anything they want to

do. Number 5 says, "must not be a primary objective ... to foster a positive impression of the governing party or a negative impression of a person or entity who is critical of the government." The words are that it must not have as "a primary objective ... to foster a positive impression of the government party or a negative impression of a person or entity who is critical of the government." Within that section the government is allowed to do literally anything they want, because they will always argue that it will not be the primary purpose or primary objective of anything they publish to negatively reflect on the NDP or to positively advertise the Liberal Party and whatever it is they're doing.

Next week you will see a flurry of advertising, and it will all be done ever so subtly, so as not to contradict Bill 25. But the effect will be the same. What matters is the effect of a particular way of advertising, not whether or not you are contradicting the essence of Bill 25. And so you understand, they will always argue that it's not the primary objective of anything they do to reflect positively on themselves or negatively on us, and they're not going to fix that loophole.

1620

This bill is a nice little bill that the member for Perth-Middlesex says, "Ah, if you really think it's so bad, do you have the guts to vote against it?" But it's a nothing bill. Please, member from Perth, you make us feel like the earth is moving under your feet because of this bill. It's a nothing of a bill.

Mr Wilkinson: We'll repeal it if you force us to.

Mr Marchese: "Repeal it."

Mr Wilkinson: Will you?

Mr Marchese: The point, member from Perth, is not whether you're going to repeal it, but whether this does what you said it would do before the election. That's the essence of the argument I'm making.

The Acting Speaker: Questions and comments.

Mr Bob Delaney (Mississauga West): I welcome the opportunity to comment on Bill 25. I've had the privilege of spending more than two decades in corporate and consulting communications and marketing roles. As a result, I'm especially pleased with Bill 25 because of the clarity it provides to the creative types and to the media planners who are retained by governments of all stripes. Suppliers want to please their clients. Staff want to please their bosses.

With the passage of Bill 25, however, well-meaning staff and suppliers won't be able to look at an old Tory-style ad or a brochure and try to emulate its message or its tone or its look. Those in the agency business with Ontario government clients know now what will and will not reflect well on their government clients. It may start with a well-meaning piece of art, or a storyboard corrected early in the game, when the account executive's proposal is amended by a ministry manager who may say, "I'm sorry, we can't do that, people. We're just not allowed to showcase the minister any more, no matter what was done in the past and no matter where they're doing it now."

You could, in this scope, call Bill 25 the creative clarity act because it sets out the ground rules for the writers, the artists, the media planners and the others in the creative cycle. I contrast that with what went before. No matter what we may think—and we don't think well of the degree of self-promotional advertising—there was no law against it. There was nothing to tell a creative type, "You can't do that," but there is now. There was nothing to prevent, in the past, a creative type saying, "Let's do it this way," because now the law says you can't do that. It allows the creative people to focus on the business and the message of governing, and not of promoting the party that's in government, whether it's meant deliberately or whether it's meant accidentally.

We had always intended to change this practice of self-promotional advertising anyway. This way, Bill 25 puts it in black and white.

Mr Jim Wilson (Simcoe-Grey): I'm happy to respond briefly to the comments made by the member for Trinity-Spadina. In terms of Bill 25, the Government Advertising Act, I see the act as a cynical piece of legislation that's designed to fool the people of Ontario that somehow government advertising, if it's at all of a partisan nature, will be banned. Nothing could be further from the truth. There's nothing in this act that bans advertising. It simply allows the Provincial Auditor to prepare an annual report or special reports from time to time on his opinion on whether or not a piece of advertising is actually partisan in nature.

I think the member for Trinity-Spadina was bang-on in his criticism of the act. I couldn't figure out, as I normally can't figure out from NDP members, whether they're going to vote for this bill or not. I certainly am not. I don't know what my caucus colleagues are doing and I don't care. It's a cynical piece of crap that should never have been introduced in this House. There are many things that need to be done. Chiropractors are screaming out right—

Interjections.

Mr Wilson: It's "crap." The Speaker has already ruled 100 times that that word is acceptable in the English language. Go look it up.

Hon Sandra Pupatello (Minister of Community and Social Services, minister responsible for women's issues): Be more creative.

Mr Wilson: If you want to quibble about words, you should quibble about your lack of keeping any promises in government.

Mr Wilkinson: On a point of order, Mr Speaker: Is CRAP the Conservative Reform Alliance Party?

The Acting Speaker: That is not a point of order. I'll return to the member from Simcoe-Grey.

Mr Wilson: No, but it wasn't bad. I commend you for that. That's not bad, actually.

Anyway, it's not very good legislation. It's cynical. How you can tell the people of Ontario that this bans advertising is beyond me. There's not a lawyer in the world who will tell you it does. The title of the act doesn't even pretend to ban advertising, but I remember a specific

campaign promise that said they were going to ban political advertising. This act doesn't do it.

I commend the member for Trinity-Spadina for pointing out, in part, some of the faults in the act, and I'd like to know how he's going to vote on it.

The Acting Speaker: Further questions and comments.

Mr Gilles Bisson (Timmins-James Bay): Business first. I would like to introduce somebody who's sitting here in the gallery. This is Leonard Edwards, who's the father of Jordan Edwards, who is a legislative page here. He's down visiting. I'd like to say hello to him, and welcome.

But I want to say in regard to this particular legislation, I guess you've got to take this for what it is. On face value, this is not a bill that we, as New Democrats, oppose. If the government was serious that it wants to ban government advertising, I think that's fair. The question is, what does the legislation really do, and what concrete steps are we going to take, by way of policy, to deal with this whole issue? For example, we know that today the Premier, as was said, is now looking out there, trying to book some air time to get on television in order to be able to pre-sell his budget. Do we consider something like that to be government advertising? Is that the proper way to do things? If the government says, by way of policy, they don't want to do government advertising, that's fine, but what do we do with the real need on the part of governments, caucuses and members to be able to communicate with their constituents? For example, in this Legislature some years ago, members had a greater latitude and ability to communicate directly with their constituents by way of what we used to call mailings—I think we called them "householders" at the time—as well as being able to do direct mail. Is that a more appropriate use and way of being able to communicate with people out there? Should caucuses and governments, through their caucus budgets, have the ability to do this kind of endeavour?

To me, the issue is that when a government has the full weight and measure of the government finances, as the Tories did while they were in office, to advertise at huge costs to the taxpayer is unfair for a couple of reasons. First of all, was it money well spent? Second, was this really partisan advertising? Third, if you did it, don't you have to do it on some sort of an equal playing field with other parties, so that people are able to present both sides of the argument that a matter of policy might or might not be before us in the Legislature, or before the province, for that matter?

The Acting Speaker: One last question and comment.

Ms Laurel C. Broten (Etobicoke-Lakeshore): I'm pleased to respond to the member for Trinity-Spadina and also to take a moment and respond to the member for Simcoe-Grey. I want to talk about the fact that our government is serious about banning partisan political advertising. That is something that we heard non-stop as we spoke to people in our communities.

Having a chance to communicate directly with the people of Ontario, whether the Premier is having a

chance to speak to people and tell them his vision of education or health care or is speaking directly to the citizens of this province, is about governing. That's not about political advertising; that's about governing. That's about sharing your vision for a province with the people of that province, who are your partners, and delivering that type of vision.

To say that this legislation is cynical is, I find, disrespectful; it's disrespectful to the people of this province, and it's disrespectful to this forum and this Legislature, where we're to have legitimate debate about what the purpose of legislation is.

I think the member from Simcoe-Grey probably hasn't read the legislation, because, as a lawyer, I have read the legislation. I do know that there is a definition of what "partisan" is. Certainly, the party that formed the government previous to us crossed that line many, many, many times. This government is not going to cross the line. We're going to communicate directly to the people of this province when it is legitimate to do so. If you want to advertise in a partisan way, that will not be paid for by the taxpayers.

Respect for the Legislature, in terms of the way we have decorum in this forum, is important and crucial. I think it's lost on the member for Simcoe-Grey. The fact that we have respect for taxpayers' dollars is also something that was perhaps forgotten by the previous government. I'm very proud to be part of a government that is going to ban partisan political advertising, shows respect for the forum in which we all represent our communities and also shows respect for taxpayers' dollars.

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

Mr Marchese: First of all, I want to agree with the member from Simcoe-Grey when he said this is a cynical piece, because it is and it's very apparent. Secondly, he says you're not going to get rid of partisan government advertising. He's right. It's true that it's not gone; it's here with us. In the same way that you have Tory pork-barrelling, you're going to have Liberal pork-barrelling. It's just that the colour changes. Nothing changes except the colour. But in this respect, he's very right.

I suppose the member from Etobicoke-Lakeshore would argue that when the newsletter from Management Board changes from one colour and it goes to red, that isn't partisan, that's simply changing the colour. My point is this: Partisan politics comes in many ways. Sometimes it is obvious, coarse and blatantly politically bad. Sometimes it's just so subtle, ever so subtle. But it exists. The Liberal government is going to do much the same as the Tories, perhaps not as blatantly excessive and open, but it will be there.

When the member from Mississauga West, who identifies himself as a former corporate communications kind of CEO type—I worry when he stands up and says, "I was a former corporate communications director type and I think this bill is great." You understand what I'm saying? I worry. Then he proceeds to say, "This should

be called the clarity act." Oh, yeah? My point is this: Communications directors are in the business, good doctor, of doing the following: (1) packaging a message; (2) obfuscating the message; (3) manipulating the message; (4) dissembling. You follow the drift of my argument? That's what people do. That's what communications is all about and corporate communications is no different.

1630

The Acting Speaker: Further debate?

Ms Caroline Di Cocco (Sarnia-Lambton): I'm pleased to stand to speak to Bill 25. Bill 25 is in essence a strong set of rules that were not in place that have come about because of the former administration and how many times they crossed the line when it came to what was put into what they considered as government advertising.

There is a great distinction between what is partisan and what is government advertising. The former administration crossed that line over and over again, so much so that we heard the people of Ontario often tell us, "What is this stuff we're getting at home? It isn't talking to us about the services; it's promoting how good a job the Conservatives are doing in government." But it was paid for by all taxpayers in this province, and that's wrong and we're changing that. What this bill does, first of all, is that we are taking a new and better direction by introducing accountability, transparency and fiscal responsibility across the board. This is another example of that.

We also made this commitment to eliminate the waste of taxpayers' dollars. Do you know what? That's what partisan advertising has been. We've seen it. The previous government, believe it or not, had a \$10-million slush fund just for this kind of householder. That is an incredible cost. We have today announced \$191 million in long-term care. The hundreds of millions of dollars that were spent unnecessarily could have gone, over the last eight years, for thousands of nurses in our long-term care. No, it went to partisan advertising.

Bill 25 also has a capacity, has an oversight. The Office of the Provincial Auditor is going to review government advertising in advance.

The member from Trinity-Spadina is theatrical in his comments. I have to say that when there is a loss, there is a sense of denial of the loss, and then there is anger. What I hear from the opposition party is not constructive debate about this legislation; what I hear is anger. All I hear is this notion—and it's not even about holding the government to account. All they do is rant with this anger. I would like to know if the third party is going to vote against this legislation, just as the opposition will vote, because for the first time in any government there are going to be rules and standards as to what is acceptable.

All I know is this: This legislation says that the advertisement the government is going to send out to inform the public has to meet standards, and "must be a reasonable means...

“To inform the public of current or proposed government policies, programs or services....

“To inform the public of their rights and responsibilities....

“To encourage or discourage specific social behaviour, in the public interest.

“To promote Ontario or any part of Ontario as a good place to live, work, invest, study or visit.

“It must include a statement that the item is paid for by the government of Ontario.

“It must not include the name, voice or image of a member of the executive council or a member of the Assembly.”

I know the member from Trinity-Spadina is tremendously frustrated because they actually did not gain new seats in Ontario. He sits there in this, I would say, quasi-pathetic approach to debating legislation in a manner that is actually quite perplexing. I thought the member from Trinity-Spadina was an intelligent person, and I expect he would have at least some capacity to evaluate the need for this kind of legislation, considering what they also spoke about when the previous administration was constantly sending out partisan advertising paid for publicly. I heard him rail against that when he was in the third party and the last administration was in power. I distinctly remember him saying this had to stop.

We're putting in rules, clear, reasonable, I would say, standards of what constitutes partisan advertising, what rules have to be followed when the government sets out advertising. It is important to note that this is unique. There is no other administration in Canada that would put these kinds of constraints on itself.

I understand the role of the opposition. It's to hold the government to account. But sometimes the theatrics in this place and the quality of debate that comes from the opposition is disturbing, because the substantive aspects of debating this type of legislation—again, it surprises me, because this is an important step forward to more accountability in how government does its business.

We do bring a new era of government to Ontario. Whether the member believes this or not is irrelevant, because it is a fact. What we're going to do is bring forward these types of legislation because it's about better governance and better policies. It's about the public interest.

Interjection.

Ms Di Cocco: No, it's about the public interest, and that's the intent in which this is brought forward. Why would we bring forward legislation that would be restrictive when it comes to partisan advertising? It's because the public clearly said—and we know—it's wrong.

We have a role and an opportunity here to present a better view of government to the public by acting on this type of legislation and by suggesting that the people of Ontario deserve better than they received in the past. They deserve better than the misspending of taxpayers' dollars through, if you will, using public dollars as a way to promote a government to get re-elected. In 1999, if you take a look at some of the third party comments—for

instance, the National Post's former Queen's Park columnist, John Ibbitson, said in 1999: “The Tories have spent a good \$30 million or so over the past two years on advertising never seen before in this province from a government.” Because, you see, there is a trust in governing. There is a trust inherent by the people who elect a government. And it's a shame that we have to actually bring this type of legislation forward, because the former administration lost the trust in how they conducted business.

Again, this acceleration of using taxpayers' dollars in this way was shameful. As I said, the people of Ontario deserve better. They sent a signal on October 2, 2003, and said, “We want better from the people who govern us. We want somebody who is going to protect taxpayers' dollars in a way that is significant.” And this legislation does that. I see the member for Trinity-Spadina there writhing in agony. I don't know if he's taken drama lessons, but it appears that he has.

Anyway, I want to continue. Actually, I'm sharing my time with the member for London-Fanshawe, and I would yield the floor to the member for London-Fanshawe to continue the debate.

1640

Mr Ramal: I have the pleasure, always, to rise in this place to speak and represent the people of London-Fanshawe. Today I'm rising in support and to speak again, after we spoke about it in detail on April 26. I listened with great interest to what all people on every side of the House said about this bill, and today, also, I was listening with great interest to my colleague the member for Sarnia-Lambton, who spoke very well about this bill and explained to all members who were in opposition to this bill.

This bill is about strengthening our democracy and making the government more accountable, transparent, and fiscally responsible. That's why I'm supporting this bill. I'm continuing to support this bill to send a clear message to all the people of this province that we are working on behalf of them, to spend their hard-earned tax dollars in the right way and in the right direction.

I listened to my friend here from Trinity-Spadina, for almost 22 minutes, explain his position and why he's against this bill—actually, as a matter of fact, I don't know whether he's against it or with it. I couldn't get any sense of direction from his talk, whether he is with the bill or against the bill. Regardless, I listened to him carefully, and he went in different directions and talked about a lot of things.

I would agree with what my colleague the member for Sarnia-Lambton said about his anger. Yes, he's angry, I guess. They're angry. They're frustrated because they're not an official party. And they try their best. They canvass every day in Hamilton East. They're taking all their members, whoever they have, of the few they have in this province, to Hamilton East.

Mr Patten: Six members.

Mr Ramal: All six members, including the leader of the NDP, in Hamilton trying to win the seat in order to be an official party—

Interjection.

Mr Ramal: We're working hard to represent the people who elected us and sent us to this place.

Anyway, I wish the member for Haliburton-Victoria-Brock was here for a few minutes. I would like to answer her, because what she said—

Interjection.

Mr Ramal: I'll do it anyway. She's probably listening to me from her office, or somebody will tell her.

Interjection.

Mr Ramal: Of course. Maybe they're interested in this topic.

She spoke about advertising and why the past government was trying to spend money on advertising. I always drive on the highway from London to Toronto. I got upset when I saw a big, huge board saying, "Taxpayers at work," and underneath it, "Mike Harris," as if Mike Harris, from his own personal money, paid to construct all the highways. He forgot he was representing the province of Ontario, who was looking after this highway, not the past Premier of this province.

We don't mind at all sending a message to the people of this province to create some kind of awareness about health care, education, social programs etc. In order to create awareness, we don't mind spending money in that direction. That's exactly what the minister was talking about a few minutes ago: the householder, the newsletter on West Nile, SARS, health, nurses etc.

I would also tell the member for Trinity-Spadina that we are not going to spend money foolishly in order to promote ourselves, our Premier or our ministries; never, ever. We're not going to go down the path of the past government because we know the result. What happened to them on October 2? They're out. They're out because they mismanaged the money of this province, the taxpayers' money, the money entrusted to be spent on education, health care and social programs. Where did they spend it? Promoting themselves.

I believe the member from Simcoe-Grey was upset—because "Give me an example of where we spent the money." He forgot. They printed millions of glossy booklets or pamphlets that went to every household in this province to promote themselves. Who paid for that advertisement? Guess who paid for it? They paid for it with taxpayers' money, not the party's.

Interjection.

Mr Ramal: Yes, we got one at my house—my friend, my brother and my sister. Every household in this province got a message, and not just one, not just a householder, not just a calendar, not just an advertisement—several. Whatever they moved, they sent a glossy one. Every week we used to get one. From where? Who paid for it? The taxpayers' money.

As my colleague from Sarnia-Lambton said a few minutes ago, they put aside about \$30 million just to spend on a householder. This householder used to go with grocery advertisements and went into the garbage. What a waste of taxpayers' money. We would rather see this money spent on ODSP, Ontario Works, hospitals,

housing and poor people, vulnerable people. That's what we're trying to do.

Today we are debating a bill that is important to all of us. This bill is about commitment to this province, commitment to the people of this province. Whatever we promise, we are going to implement regardless of the deficit we inherited, which is about \$5.6 billion. Our Premier, our government, our people in this government are trying hard day and night to deliver a great budget to look after all of Ontario.

Mr Marchese: Have you seen it?

Mr Ramal: I haven't seen it but I have a sense, because I believe in the direction of this government.

I also want to tell the member from Trinity-Spadina that our people don't have to buy advertisements from TV, radio or any medium in this province. I want to give you an example. I'm a member; I'm not a minister and I'm not the Premier of this province. I've been approached by so many different media to comment about the budget. Don't you expect the media voluntarily also to go to the Premier looking to question, looking for input, looking for information for the media? So it is normal. We don't have to pay anyone. The media are coming to us to see what we are doing because everybody in this province is interested in learning about the positive change our government is trying to direct in this province.

Mr Peter Fonseca (Mississauga East): They can come here, not Magna.

Mr Ramal: Of course this budget is going to be delivered from this place, as we used to do it, not from a private place owned by a friend of the ex-Premier. We believe that the people's assets and the government's assets are supposed to be debated here. We're supposed to deliver the budget here. We should talk to the media and everything from this place because this is what we're elected for and that's why we're here. We were sent on October 2 to sit in this place to defend the people's positions, the people's rights and the people's interests. That's why we're here.

So, Mr Speaker, as I said to you, I always have the honour and the privilege to stand up in this place and defend all of these bills that are trying to enhance this province, enhance democracy and trying to at least use our taxpayers' dollars in the right way, not spending foolishly, not in a partisan way—of course not a partisan way, because we believe in being non-partisan. Since we are elected to be here, we're non-partisan. We're not like some other people, just to go left and right in order to spend money—

Mr Marchese: The Liberals don't go anywhere, not to the left, not to the right.

1650

Mr Ramal: No. We have our direction. We found our direction, from day one until now, and the people of this province will see it. We're here to deliver service; we're not here just to continue our cynicism. We're not here to mismanage the money of this province. We are on the right track, and I believe Tuesday of next week, May 18,

is going to be a great day for all the people of this province. They are going to hear good news, and the budget is going to be delivered from this place. We're going to hear all of these comments, but we're confident we are going in the right direction—

The Acting Speaker: Thank you very much for your comments. We have time for questions and comments now.

Mr Garfield Dunlop (Simcoe North): I'm really pleased to be able to make a few comments on the speech from the member for London-Fanshawe.

It's interesting. You talked about thinking you're on the right track. We're going to see on Thursday if you're on the right track or not—in Hamilton East. That's the riding where there's a by-election coming up, and we'll see if you're on the right track. We'll see the people of Hamilton East decide whether you're on the right track or not.

I think that will decide the direction in which the government is going. I understand the Premier is afraid to go into that riding because he knows he's going to lose it. It's interesting that these people actually think they're on the right track.

Mr Lou Rinaldi (Northumberland): What are you talking about, Garfield?

Mr Dunlop: He said the government was on the right track, and I'm telling you the voters of Hamilton East will decide. Our party will have a difficult time with that riding, because we haven't had that seat for, like, 75 years. We've got a great candidate down there. I understand all the parties have great candidates. But if the Liberals are on the right track, they'll win by the same percentage of votes that they won by in October. And we'll see. That will be a very special day in this House if you actually win that, and win it by the same percentage of seats. Then you'll know the people have confidence in you, in the fact that you're on the right track—because that's what he kept referring to, “the right track.”

I look forward to Thursday. I look forward to your coming back here next Monday and explaining whether you were on the right track or not, because when the Premier is afraid to go into the riding—he's not afraid to go to Washington, but he's afraid to go to Hamilton—we've got a real problem in this province. And we'll see. We'll see on Thursday of this week. Let's do some hits next week and we'll comment on that next Monday, okay?

Mr Marchese: I'll tell you, I'm a bit sad with the comments the member from Sarnia-Lambton made. We used to be comrades when we were in opposition to the Conservative government. Why, she and Madame Papatello—mon amie Papatello—Monsieur Duncan, Monsieur Bradley, my God, we were this close. Like comrades, seriously.

Hon Ms Papatello: No, we were never comrades.

Mr Marchese: Never comrades? Sandra is disputing the fact that we were comrades-in-arms together. You will recall, Speaker, that Sandra Papatello, the now minister of many things, was in the front seat, right there;

Di Cocco of course was back here. She would remember how she used to rant, rage, rave and scream against the Conservative government. I guess she's forgotten about that. I don't know. I wanted to remind her that we were close once. Now you are in government, and I guess things change.

She makes the observation that New Democrats are angry for some reason that's beyond her comprehension. Can I offer a suggestion to you, member Di Cocco from Sarnia-Lambton? Some of the anger is reflected in the promises you make, which you then break. When you make the argument that this will get rid of the political partisan advertising the Tories did, and you claim to believe it, with all sincerity, people like me get a bit annoyed at that.

So I beg your pardon if you experience some anger from people like me when they don't believe you, and that government partisanship will not disappear, that it will be Liberal partisanship advertising that will take place and that that's all we're going to get. Please, pardon me, madame.

Mr Arthurs: I enjoyed the debate, particularly from the members on the government side from Sarnia-Lambton and London-Fanshawe, as well as the comments from the other side and the responses. I just want to draw attention for a moment or so to a third-party analysis, in effect, as opposed to the debate in the House.

These are comments by Queen's University's Jonathan Rose, as reported in the Toronto Star. Mr Rose specializes in political communications, so his area of knowledge and expertise rests with the matters we're debating at this point in time. He says that “the Liberals are to be applauded for finally taking action on government advertising.” He speaks very highly of what we're doing in this Legislature. I think it's appropriate that the Chair of Management Board, Mr Phillips, with his long experience here, is responsible for the crafting and bringing forward of this piece of legislation. But to go on, Mr Rose indicates that he has “argued for a long time that government advertising needs to be reviewed by some other appropriate agency or body.”

Thus the inclusion of the Provincial Auditor, and ideally subject to other legislation, the Auditor General will take responsibility for that through the establishment of an Advertising Commissioner. Thus the sense of partisanship will be removed. The third party, the independent auditor, the Auditor General, through an Advertising Commissioner, will take responsibility for reviewing materials before they go to publication, before they're on TV, before they're in the newspapers or in magazines, to ensure they're not promoting the government of the day, to make sure they're not negatively commenting on others in the community.

The approach that's being taken is a responsible one. It's clearly recognized by third-party advocates of responsible government advertising.

Mr Wilson: Although I'll have an opportunity in a few minutes to speak at greater length, I want to challenge the government members—and there's a two-

minute response coming up—to name one piece of partisan advertising that had our logo or that wasn't necessary for West Nile, SARS, an education update, a health care piece.

Hon Ms Pupatello: The health care piece, the education piece.

Mr Wilson: Well, Blabbermouth, I say to the Deputy Premier, send it over. I've spent all morning looking at our advertising and I don't see anything partisan about it at all. I don't see it as any different than any other government. I remind you there is a truth-in-advertising body out there that reviewed all the ads we put out. There was also an advertising agency in the government of Ontario that reviewed all the ads. I think this is a cynical attempt, once again, to try to create an issue where an issue is not warranted.

You've broken every rule of the standards you've set so far in this legislation. You can drive, as someone said, a Mack truck through this legislation in terms of regulations that are to come. You're still continuing the US advertising. You're still continuing to advertise on television. You're still continuing to send out householders. Every time I drive by a riding office, it's still in big Liberal red, as ours are in blue.

I have no idea what in the world you're doing other than another cynical attempt to get the taxpayers off your true agenda, which is to tax and spend the heck out of them—it's another \$3 billion you've spent since coming to office—to try to obfuscate public debate on more important matters, like I'm going to bring up in a few minutes: the medical review committee and audits there that you promised to freeze. You advertised that, so it's pertinent to this bill.

The township of Springwater, writing me about community halls: You advertised with three-quarter-page ads that have run for three months in every local newspaper, every multicultural newspaper in this province. You're doing nothing to help the community halls except spending tens of millions of dollars on advertising about drinking water regulation 170. So in the two minutes that come up, I'd like to see exactly the evidence you have, to say that we did partisan advertising.

1700

The Acting Speaker: The member for Sarnia-Lambton has two minutes to reply.

Ms Di Cocco: I thank all the members who had their two-minute questions and statements: the members from Simcoe North, Trinity-Spadina, Uxbridge and Simcoe-Grey.

I'm going to remind the people at home that this bill on curbing advertising includes in it what standards have to be followed, so that the Auditor General can take a look at them and decide whether the government is following the rules.

It says that the reason government uses advertising "must be a reasonable means...."

"To inform the public of current or proposed government policies, programs or services...."

"To inform the public of their rights and responsibilities...."

"To encourage or discourage specific social behaviour, in the public interest."

"To promote Ontario or any part of Ontario as a good place to live, work, invest, study or visit."

Why did we have to actually articulate and put these measures in place? Because we knew the unprecedented misuse of taxpayers' dollars by the previous administration required some type of standard to be put in place.

Jonathan Rose, a Queen's University political scientist, said, "What is exceptional is the scope and the amount and the issues that it is advertising," and he said that the Tories' use of advertising that blurred the line between partisanship and public information was unprecedented in Ontario.

The Acting Speaker: Further debate?

Mr Wilson: I appreciate having a few minutes to comment on Bill 25, the Government Advertising Act, 2003. As I said in some of the two-minute hits previously today, I really don't know what is the problem. You may not like the ads, you may not have liked the fact that the previous government informed the public of Ontario—you would say, in an unprecedented way; we would say, in a very straightforward, truthful and honest way.

I want to review—

Hon Ms Pupatello: Oh, Jim.

Interjection: Did you swear?

Mr Wilson: Did you swear at us?

Hon Ms Pupatello: I said, "Oh, Jim."

Mr Wilson: I don't know. I think "Jim" had four letters in it.

I've done an extensive review this morning on our advertising: We had SARS; we had 9/11; we had West Nile; we had unprecedented electricity changes; we had health care restructuring during my time as health minister; we started ON magazine, which from time to time had the Premier's picture in it or a minister's picture in it—maybe that's what they're offended by. But most of the time those publications, in fact over 95% of them, had average Ontarians in them with quotes from average Ontarians and pictures of average Ontarians from all the multicultural sectors that make up this great province.

I'm still waiting, and you could probably change my mind on this bill if you showed me one example, in the eight and a half years when I was in cabinet, that was truly a partisan advertisement. I don't remember any householders going out with the PC logo. I don't remember anything that went out the door that wasn't reviewed by committees. I don't know what you're doing.

Somebody mentioned the US TV ads where the Premier would say Ontario is open for business. We went through the most serious economic crisis that was caused by a disease outbreak in this province. You've had to pump money into Toronto tourism. You've had to pump money since coming into office into re-promoting this province. This bill doesn't deal with those US TV ads. They're exempt. You must have seen some value in those, and yet member after member gets up and says the

reason we need this bill is because Harris and Eves, mostly Harris, were on the TV screens on Air Canada trips and in planes, where they do advertising to executives who fly on business, and on US TV and radio stations.

You review, in good conscience, the content of those ads. They were necessary for economic development and jobs in this province. I make no apology for them, and you should stop making a partisan issue out of them, because that's what you're doing. They weren't partisan ads; they were informing the people of Ontario.

I personally published four publications on electricity reform in this province. By the way, you're following the same plan. You've just repackaged, under Dwight Duncan, a plan that you certainly thought was awful in opposition, and now you're welcoming the private sector. I heard comments today about the Albany Club and Tories. Where did Dwight Duncan make his announcement about electricity reform just a few weeks ago? At an exclusive Bay Street club; he never did make a statement about it in this House.

The fact of the matter is, we sent out householders, updates on education. As health minister, I introduced Telehealth, and that required fridge magnets. I'm glad I sent out fridge magnets. You might not like them, but people needed to know about Telehealth. I go into all kinds of homes, including my own family's, where a Telehealth fridge magnet is on the refrigerator. I've run into all kinds of people who are darned glad that 24-hour service is available and they don't have to fumble through the blue pages of the phone book, which are a nightmare for anybody to try to get through, particularly a senior citizen or even me since my eyesight is going. Often you can't figure out from the telephone book which ministry you're supposed to call for what.

So a little contest here: Find me a road sign, find me a magazine, find me anything that was partisan in nature that would justify using this Legislature's time on such a meaningless and cynical piece of legislation.

I had faxed to me today from a constituent—and it's not a prop—two publications, identical in content, word for word except for the front page, from the government of Ontario telling you how to protect your identification and what to do if you lose your birth certificate, your wallet, your driver's licence and all the important information. The front page was changed from blue—this is ours—to red—this is yours. The inside is exactly the same. In your list of the half billion dollars you say we spent on government advertising, you include publications like this that are in our constituency offices. You include every publication ever published by the government of Ontario, including Topical, JOBmart and Web sites that give valuable information.

I think you're full of baloney, and the fact of the matter is, you should be ashamed to have made a partisan issue of this. We all put up with it in our ridings during the all-candidates' meetings. It was an issue you created. It was an issue the media went along with you on. But the fact of the matter is, you have no evidence, you have no

ability to say with a straight face to the people of Ontario that we did partisan government advertising.

We met an unprecedented period in history and an unprecedented challenge with respect to having to communicate with the people of Ontario. Let's review our TV ads. West Nile: Could one of you right now put up your hand if you were against our West Nile TV ads? Were you against our SARS ads telling people how to protect themselves, who to contact if they were worried, the symptoms of SARS? I can't think of more valuable information. Were you opposed to having the Premier on US television, to reach our neighbouring states with which we directly compete for economic prosperity and jobs? Were you opposed to that? I see a lot of heads hanging down. Put your hands up, folks; you did during all-candidates' meetings.

You blatantly told one thing to the people of Ontario—they don't know; they see the odd ad and say, "It must be partisan because the Liberals said it was partisan and they look like they're going to win the election, so maybe they're right." Well, you were wrong, and you should apologize to the people of Ontario, because you will find yourselves perhaps in the same situation where you have to communicate.

You're already communicating, as I said earlier, the changes to the drinking water regulations. You took out three quarter-page ads. They didn't have a minister's picture; they had a picture of a faucet dripping and, I thought, very useful information.

If we did that, you would include that in our so-called half billion dollars worth of advertising. I don't think you should. It's not partisan. In fact, every one of our ads only had the Ontario government logo in it, and when the auditor pointed out that perhaps we should make sure people know this ad is not partisan, that it comes from the province of Ontario, we made sure there were disclaimers on all our ads to say, "This is brought to you by the province of Ontario as an educational update for you."

You have not changed how you do minister's announcements. You've changed the wallpaper in the back from Tory blue and white to red and white. So every time I see a minister make an announcement, I see what you would call partisan political advertising. The taxpayers paid for that backdrop. Sometimes those announcements cost thousands of dollars to set up the photo op, and you're not doing anything different—nothing different.

1710

So I think you're bold as brats, as my mother would call Liberals. Bold as brats. Cut your throat while you're smiling at us. That's what you're doing to us. It's a disgrace that you would make an issue out of an issue that didn't exist.

Road signs—I can tell you the frustration of being a northern minister where 90% of the money for the last 16 years that's gone into the upkeep, maintenance and expansion of the TransCanada Highway has been Ontario dollars. The TransCanada Highway is vital to this prov-

ince and this country. As I was growing up, I always thought there was one bloody thing the federal government could do and that was look after one highway that went from coast to coast. They don't do that. They don't give us any money. Over 90%—it's closer to 94%—of the money spent in the last 14 to 16 years on that highway, we've had to spend. What do the feds do before an election? They used to stick up these huge arterial signs, and they'd pave maybe two kilometres outside of Sudbury or two kilometres outside of Thunder Bay, and then they'd put a sign saying, "This road was brought to you by the federal Liberal government."

Now maybe this is a bit partisan, and I don't think so, but we decided that we would put up a blue sign because the Liberals had red signs under David Peterson—I was an assistant here during those years—and the NDP had green signs under Bob Rae. We thought we'd put up a blue sign, but we didn't do it till your federal Liberal cousins did it first. We didn't do it until the Macdonald-Cartier Freeway between here and Hamilton, where they paved six kilometres and we had to pave over 102 kilometres, and they put up an enormous sign so people driving by got the impression that the feds were doing the whole highway. After the expansion of Highway 11 in the north and the unprecedented \$1 billion we spent on highways in northern Ontario, the feds would come along and put a sign up. I saw it myself. I drove around the north for four years as minister and I can tell you we didn't go first on that. They did it first, and it was misleading the people of Ontario. The federal government was misleading the people of Ontario in that they'd give us a pittance amount of money and they'd take credit for the whole road. I make no bones about the fact that we did the right thing in making sure the people of Ontario knew that the road was paid for by their Ontario tax dollars, that it was their money from the province of Ontario being used for good purposes—

Mr Rinaldi: With the Premier's name on it.

Mr Wilson: With the Premier's name on it. He is the Premier of the province.

The fact of the matter is, the Premiers of this country, of all political stripes, banded together to do the most blatant advertising—and there's no way this bill stops it—that could be considered partisan in nature ever done in the history of this country. Premiers of all stripes came together to do those TV ads against the federal government, pointing out that they were paying only 14 cents to 16 cents on every dollar with respect to health care. So is every Premier in Canada, including Liberal Premiers and NDP Premiers, wrong to tell the people, in this case a public message, that the federal government needs to pay its fair share of medicare?

Since I mentioned regulation 170/03 and the advertising you did about the drinking water regulations, did you know that the money they spent on advertising in our community newspapers, something like \$3.5 million, could have gone a long way to helping every one of these community halls, the six community halls in Clearview township, which need anywhere from \$20,000 to \$60,000

to fix? Three million dollars solves a lot of problems in a riding like Simcoe-Grey. You could have spent that there, rather than telling—ordering—municipalities, through advertising, to get up with the regulations and put these new water systems in place and then not, after proclaiming the regulation—you keep saying, "We passed the regulation." You're wrong about that. Again, you're not being open with the public when you say that. I think the greatest scam you pulled off in this area is that you actually proclaimed reg 170 and then didn't pay for it. The reason it wasn't proclaimed, folks, was cabinet was still having the debate prior to the election call on how much money it would cost to update all these community halls.

Did you know that the money required in Clearview township to update the community halls to make sure they meet the drinking water regulations has meant an automatic 3% increase in municipal taxes? That's before the school board and everybody else gets their hands into your pockets for your municipal tax bill this year. That's a direct result of you guys advertising, rather than doing something about it.

All of our advertising, by the way, was because we had done something. We had done something and we wanted to tell the people of Ontario something concrete: we built a road, developed criteria around SARS or provided 1-800 numbers so people could have Telehealth 24 hours a day.

The fact of the matter is, John Brown, who is the mayor of the township of Springwater, wrote me a wonderful letter dated April 29. It says, "Re Drinking Water Regulations—Community Halls.

"At their meeting of May 3, 2004, Springwater township council received a copy of your letter"—sorry, this is actually a letter to John Gerretsen, MPP, Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, who has copied me on it. The township "received a copy of your letter dated April 16, 2004, to Simcoe-Grey MPP Jim Wilson with regard to requests for financial support" for "drinking water upgrades to community halls.

"Springwater township council would like to express its extreme disappointment in your decision to pass this matter to the Minister of the Environment. Our community halls need your support as our minister. These municipal facilities are run solely by volunteers and are operating on a user-pay basis with very small annual budgets. As these halls already rely on annual fundraising, the cost of the water system upgrades for these rural community centres exceeds their financial capabilities.

"It is Springwater township council's hope that you will reconsider your decision and meet with MPP Jim Wilson to discuss funding for municipalities."

Folks, in 14 years here I've never, ever sent a letter saying I couldn't meet with a member who sits across the way. I have never actually heard of someone being so stupid. All Gerretsen had to do was come over here and meet with me for five minutes. But, no, he goes up through the seven or nine levels of signing authority in

the ministry and he makes a big deal of sending me a letter saying, "I can't possibly find two minutes to talk to you about your community halls." If that's not dodo brains running the province, I don't know who the heck is. I mean, that's just beyond belief. I used to be more polite in this place, but you guys are really getting under my skin—I mean, to sit through all-candidates meetings, to spew out the 231 promises that you guys came up with. You had to know, if you know anything about how finances work, how the province works or how life works, you couldn't possibly keep most of those promises. I have a degree in theology. We call that some very strange things.

I'm not going to judge your souls, but I hope you can face your gods in the end because most of us on this side do what's been traditional in the province and promise to do a good job. We don't promise that autistic children over the age of six are going to get probably \$900 million to \$1 billion. I was in cabinet when we looked at that decision and we said we'd like their votes too, their parents' and friends' and families' and loved ones' votes, but the fact of the matter is that we can't go out in good conscience and promise things like that.

Back to the bill; talk about advertising. Before the election and during the election you said you would bring in a moratorium on audits by the medical review committee of the College of Physicians and Surgeons. You made a big issue of it. You got all the doctors in the province stirred up. It does relate to this bill: credibility, promises kept and promises not kept.

Hon Ms Papatello: You were probably the minister when you changed it.

Mr Wilson: I don't remember changing a thing with the MRC.

Hon Ms Papatello: You caused so much trouble in health care—

Mr Wilson: That's why there is record building in health care today to the point where we can't even find contractors.

Interjection.

Mr Wilson: The fact of the matter is, Madame Deputy Premier, you're full of crap. I come here and still put up with the fact that they say we've closed 34 hospitals. Name them. I can only think of two: Pembroke and Wellesley. In Pembroke there were two within spitting distance of each other and they came together in a corporate amalgamation.

Hon Ms Papatello: You closed two in my riding.

Mr Wilson: I did not. You're crazy. You have more emergency room capacity today, Mrs Papatello, than you had before I was health minister, and you should be sending me thank-you notes.

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker: Would the member please take his seat. The level of debate is on a downward slope. I would ask all members to respect the House with their comments. I'll return again to the member for Simcoe-Grey.

Mr Wilson: The most shameful day after the previous government, before we got in, wouldn't fund your brand new cancer care centre—and by the way, it wasn't on the capital list when I came into office. I saw the statistics in Windsor and I saw that cancer patients in Windsor needed help. You showed up on the day of my announcement and you embarrassed human beings. You slammed me for bringing in 100-and-some million dollars for a new cancer centre. You slammed me and you called me a liar on the radio station that morning.

The Acting Speaker: Could the member from Simcoe-Grey please take his seat. I would ask the member for Simcoe-Grey to keep his comments temperate. I would ask the Minister of Community and Social Services to recognize that the member for Simcoe-Grey has the floor.

Hon Ms Papatello: Absolutely; he sure does. He's got the whole floor.

The Acting Speaker: Order. I'll return to the member for Simcoe-Grey.

1720

Mr Wilson: That really hurt, honest to God. I had to answer a radio station who said, "Papatello says you're a liar." I gave the lady an answer—I have the transcript, by the way—and she said, "Oh, Sandra tells us you Tories always lie." She hung up on an open-line show and she was the moderator.

I brought in \$140 million and you did nothing but criticize me. Now you're bringing in a bogus bill on advertising that creates a non-issue in Ontario when we've got serious, serious issues to deal with. You don't know what you're doing. You don't intend to live up to your promises. You're rude—

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker: I'm going to try this again. Would the member for Simcoe-Grey please take his seat.

The member for Simcoe-Grey has a few seconds left in his remarks. I would ask him once again to keep his comments temperate. I would ask the Minister of Community and Social Services not to constantly heckle the member for Simcoe-Grey.

I will now recognize the member for Simcoe-Grey.

Mr Wilson: OK, Mr Speaker, I will summarize. But it really does get under my skin.

Again I remind the public we had SARS, 9/11 and West Nile. We had major changes in health care, education and electricity. I've yet to see one piece of evidence from the government that showed a partisan political ad.

I don't think it's wrong of you, of us, of previous governments or of all the Premiers of Canada to put their pictures in a piece of literature that's going door to door. We do it as MPPs. How the heck would anyone on the street know who you are if you didn't send them a picture in your householder once in a while? I suppose you're going to ban that soon. If you do that, it's the end of democracy and the democratic reform that you said you were on. It's the end of the democratic process as we

know it because you're just going to keep people in the dark.

The Acting Speaker: Questions and comments? The member for Timmins-James Bay.

Hon Ms Papatello: What could you say to respond to that?

Mr Bisson: That's great. She said, "What can I say after that?" I was going to say, does the member have any problems expressing his true feelings? That's my first question.

I understand a part of the comments that were made by my friend from the Conservative Party. The issue is, if you want to develop policy that says governments don't have the ability to do what they call partisan political advertising, I think you need to take a look at the whole issue of how we spend taxpayers' money, not only from government but overall as a policy of how you communicate with people.

The member raises, quite rightly, at the end of his comments that at one time in this Legislature individual members of the assembly, prior to the Tories' taking this away, had the right to communicate with their constituents by way of what we called householders. You were allowed to send three householders per year across the riding and you were allowed to do what we used to call rolling eights, the ability to communicate directly by way of franking. Members of the federal House have unlimited mailing privileges and have the ability to do householders.

To me, the broader question is that it's not so much what the government can advertise and what political parties can advertise. There are ways of doing that. Why don't the Liberals, the NDP and Conservatives pay for their own advertising in that way? But I think we, as members, have a real need to communicate directly with our constituents.

One of the things I would welcome is, if the government wants to get into debate about how we advertise overall, to put that into the mix and say, should individual members of the assembly have the right to communicate with their constituents with regard to the work he or she is doing here at the assembly?

If the bill itself, as I said before, really did what the government purports it's going to do, it would be a good thing, I guess, but you'd have to look at the other, broader issues.

The second issue is, I don't really feel that it actually bans advertising, the way the government puts it forward.

Hon Ms Papatello: I'm very happy to be here to add my two cents in two minutes, because what this member opposite wants to talk about and doesn't want to address is the number of wasted tax dollars over eight years that I had the honour of representing Windsor West, the millions of dollars that we wasted in advertising by that last government. In the same breath, this same government eight years ago closed two hospitals in my riding, closed two emergency rooms. Do you know what? They closed those emergency rooms before we had any capacity in our community to deal with real people.

Those were the days in Windsor when those people went down gurneys, down the ramps of the existing emergency rooms because there was no room for those ambulances to pull up. That's what happened on Ouellette Avenue, down Windsor's main street.

No one is going to stand in the House today and try to rewrite history about what a debacle that health services commission report was and what effect it had on health care in my community. No one will be in this House rewriting history. It was an unmitigated disaster and everyone who was a leader in health care knew it. Duncan Sinclair, whom that government in those years appointed, said he would resign when community services weren't delivered.

What is today's discussion about? It's about wasted government money of the past. That will not happen again under a Dalton McGuinty government. It's about millions of dollars that we will put into hospital services, into the long-term-care sector like we saw today, where we will have standards, where our elderly will be kept properly. It is about pouring money into a health system and an education system so that we will make a difference in the lives of Ontarians, not wasting taxpayers' dollars on purely partisan ads. That is what this government is about, and that is why I am proud, finally, to be on this side of the House.

Mr Dunlop: I'd like to make a few comments on the speech of my colleague from Simcoe-Grey a few minutes ago. First of all, I was interested today to note that the Minister of Health made this dramatic announcement on what he was going to do for the seniors of Ontario. I would like to compare it to what Mr Wilson did.

The fact of the matter is that the previous governments of the NDP and the Liberals—we call it the lost decade—never opened one new long-term-care bed in the province; not one bed. But when Jim Wilson, the first Minister of Health under Mike Harris, came along, that was the beginning of 20,000 new long-term-care beds in the province, and she has the gall to sit over there and yap away about nothing.

Interjection.

Mr Dunlop: You don't have a clue what you're talking about. Your Minister of Health stood there today thinking he was actually doing something for senior citizens. After the lost decade—

Interjection.

Mr Dunlop: You didn't open one new long-term-care bed.

The Acting Speaker: Order. I would ask the Minister of Community and Social Services again to respect the other members who have the floor. Member for Simcoe North.

Mr Dunlop: Thank you very much, Mr Speaker. It's disappointing to hear those pathetic comments coming out of her yap, but I'm going to tell you—

The Acting Speaker: Member for Simcoe North, I would ask you to refrain from those intemperate comments.

Mr Dunlop: I apologize for saying that. It's difficult to listen to her talking here today, heckling away.

Let me tell you what else: When Jim Wilson became the Minister of Health, the health care budget was \$17.8 billion in Ontario, and we had 1.2 million people on welfare at that point. We increased health care funding to \$28.5 billion. That's the base they have to work with today, and they've got 600,000 fewer people on welfare. That's why she's not getting many questions today, because we corrected most of the welfare issues. She's sitting over there thinking she's some kind of a hero on welfare and she's done nothing. We—

The Acting Speaker: Thank you. Take your seat. Questions and comments?

Mr Marchese: I just want to say that I am in solidarity with the member for Simcoe-Grey when he speaks about this as a cynical political piece and that partisan political advertising, government advertising, will not disappear.

I understand that Ms Papatello is a bit upset. We used to be comrades once. I know she's in government now and doesn't want to relate to the opposition parties in any way. When you're in government, you're a totally different kind of entity and you forget what you did in opposition. Now it's a totally different story.

I've got to say that I have very little faith in this government. When you consider all the broken promises they made, it's so hard. You recall the cap on hydro that they were going to impose until 2006. They get elected and that hydro cap is just gone. You remember the Minister of Education saying, "We've got a moratorium on school closures," and then a couple of weeks later, 44 schools are closing. You remember that the Oak Ridges moraine, they were going to shut her down, 6,600 units would not be built if they should be elected, and then they get elected and they say, "Oh my God, you know, it'll not be 6,600 that will be built, there will be 6,000 built, so 600, give or take—but it's better than what the Tories were getting." That's the way your Liberal buddies were discussing it.

You see, you lose faith. You get tired. You get tired of the political stuff. When they say they're going to get rid of political partisanship in advertising, does anybody really—do you guys believe it, you staffers? Do you guys really believe that? Of course, you're going to say "Yeah, yeah." It's not going to happen. It's all a political game. That's what people like me get upset about.

1730

The Acting Speaker: The member for Simcoe-Grey has two minutes to reply.

Mr Wilson: I want to thank those colleagues that supported my remarks and those colleagues that were agin me. But that's democracy and I appreciate it.

I will say to the member from Windsor West, though, that your credibility on this so-called partisan advertising bill—which, by the way, doesn't ban anything, it just allows the auditor to put a little section in his annual report about whether they were good little girls and boys about advertising in the previous 12 months. There are no

fines. There are no arrests going to be made, like Chuck Guité. Nothing like that will happen. And your messages to the people of Ontario will be about as partisan as ours, which weren't partisan at all. I never saw any logos. Sometimes there'd be a picture of a minister, usually with a community group or citizen. The fact of the matter is, you won't do anything different. You'll pass this thing. It's a cynical attempt to try and fool the people of Ontario.

This just in: The major television networks are rejecting a request from Premier Dalton McGuinty's office for free air time in advance of next week's Ontario budget. So while you tried to use stations like the CBC, which are taxpayer funded, for your message, you don't see that as partisan political advertising. You didn't ask for any free time for the opposition parties. I worked in Ottawa as a chief of staff, and in Washington, and I can tell you we always asked for equal time for the opposition parties; in fact, it's a law in the United States. You don't bother to do that, but you want to use the CBC and other taxpayer-funded stations like TVO to put out your message.

But you have this cynical piece of legislation. You should take this legislation out. You should shove it as far into file 13 as you can and you should stop telling the people of Ontario that this is an issue, when it isn't.

Secondly, I want to say with respect to the comments from the member for Windsor West that every day she was in this House she'd say we cut health care. Yet at the Empire Club two weeks ago, the Premier was saying he can't keep up with the Tories' annual increases of over 8%. He can't keep up with all the money we put into health care each and every year. Doesn't that tell you something about your credibility about health care cuts and your credibility about this piece of legislation?

The Acting Speaker: Further debate?

Mrs Donna H. Cansfield (Etobicoke Centre): I'm delighted to be able to rise today to speak about Bill 25, a bill that I believe is going to be very welcome to Ontario taxpayers, who have quite literally seen and heard their tax dollars going down the drain every time a partisan advertisement or commercial was published by the government in power.

It's fascinating to listen to the member from Simcoe-Grey, who said that he really didn't see anything partisan about the advertising the Tory government did. Well, of course not. He did it. I mean, why would he think it was partisan if he did it himself?

But interestingly enough, although he may not have felt that it was partisan, the National Post certainly did, and may I quote:

"The Tories have spent a good \$30 million or so over the past two years on advertising never seen before in this province from a government—direct, unambiguous partisan advertising, some of it bordering on attack ads, aimed at discrediting anyone who questions Conservative policy, paid for, not by the Progressive Conservative Party of Ontario, but by the government of Ontario...."

"Starting in 1997 but accelerating rapidly in the past five months, the Conservatives have taken to the air-

waves with ads of unprecedented partisanship. There have been education ads attacking teachers for not working hard enough, ads celebrating workfare, ads defending hospital closures.

“Each campaign cost millions, more than even the cash-laden Progressive Conservative Party can afford. So the Tories simply stuck a trillium at the end, announced the ad was ‘a message from the government of Ontario,’ and took the money from petty cash.”

And that’s the National Post.

I think the question that needs to be asked is whether it’s the ethics and principles of using taxpayers’ money to boast about yourself or the ethics and principles of using taxpayers’ dollars to communicate about the government and what the government is doing. If the idea is to make an impression and to use those monies in a partisan way, then I think it’s fundamentally wrong. If the idea is to communicate what the government is doing, then it is correct. That is why the auditor will make that decision.

I would suspect that today the people are not that gullible. The fact that partisan advertising has occurred in the past and to suggest that people just accept this is unacceptable. Most of the people that I know, when they saw the ads, simply would turn and say, “Yet again, another Tory ad”—an ad attacking the teachers, an ad boasting about themselves, an ad telling us how great they were. If you really wanted to touch the parents in a classroom about what their child was doing, you would engage a teacher, someone who knew and understood the testing process; certainly not a politician, for most of them do not understand that process.

I would also think that if partisan advertising did work, the Tory government would still be here. Maybe Mr Eves would be on this side of the House, along with Mr Harris. But it didn’t work. I think that’s partially due to the fact that people are not as gullible as folks would have you think in the past.

So partisan advertising might make the ruling party feel good about themselves, but I do believe that it really alienates and irritates taxpayers, who are experienced and wise enough to recognize that partisan advertising, and to recognize what it’s for and what it’s all about. In essence, it’s a blatant waste of money. This money could be going for so many more things that Ontarians need.

I think about the times in the school board when the children didn’t have books, or the fact that in this city alone over 66,000 children a day require some form of nutrition, and not all of them receive that nutrition. I think of the fact that we closed community schools when they could have been kept open, and we closed education centres right across this province for children who really could benefit and experience from those education centres.

We’re talking about hundreds of millions of dollars that were spent to make an impression or to attack people, not really to talk about what was happening in the government, because if they did that, it would mean they’d have to have told the truth. The truth would have been that there were not the books in the schools, that the

community schools were closed, that the playgrounds were destroyed, and that the education centres were closed.

However, there’s a lot of blame to go around. In my research, it seems that every government everywhere has succumbed to the temptation to use advertising to blow their horns. We’ve heard these debates in the Legislatures of British Columbia, Manitoba, and other provinces. We often hear it from our neighbours to the south, where partisan advertising, to say the least, is horrific, much less horrendous. I found speeches made in Hong Kong that sound similar in many respects to the debates here in this House.

I’d also like to mention that I’m going share my time with the member for Peterborough.

It seems that this is an issue in all sorts of places, not just in Ontario, but we are going resolve this through Bill 25. We all know now, from the figures of the government of Ontario advertising agency of record, the AOR, the performance report shows that the provincial government’s spending on advertising reached a historic high in Ontario by the previous government. From 1995 to 2000, the cost of government advertising was over \$234.5 million—the most spent by any government in the history of Ontario. That doesn’t even account for what was spent between the years 2000 to 2003.

This was a time when so many parts of Ontario, and Ontarians, were feeling the crunch in terms of what they needed in their health care, in their education, with their seniors and long-term care. Yet we were able to spend that money, not promoting but attacking people. It just seems so fundamentally wrong and, actually, quite immoral. We could have built some hospitals and some schools with that money. We could have taken a portion of that advertising and put it into those books that we knew were desperately needed.

1740

I know that Premier McGuinty has been trying since the 1990s to halt this waste with Bill 25, and now his efforts are more important than ever because of the deficit we face. We now need to spend our money, and we need to spend it wisely. I hear that consistently from the taxpayers I represent in Etobicoke Centre. They say to me: “We understand you have to make the decisions you have to make. We understand that we need taxes; they’re part of the structure of Ontario. But what we ask is that you spend your money and spend it well, so we can monitor and assess, and we know what’s happening to our dollars.”

As both Mr McGuinty and Mr Phillips have said repeatedly, when tax dollars are spent on self-serving advertising, it does, in fact, come out of education, health care and the environment, and quite frankly all other public services. Advertising and communications in general areas must be patrolled carefully.

If I have any qualm about this bill, it really is the chore we’re handing off to the Provincial Auditor. It’s not easy to patrol and control the various ways in which advertising can be used in partisan or non-partisan ways.

I would strongly recommend that the auditor be reassured he's going to have sufficient support to do this job, because it's going to be particularly difficult.

We know you can use lots of tricks, and lots of them have been by all parties for many years. Again, I would suggest that today people in Ontario are a little wiser, and none of this will work. They're either too sharp today or they're just a little bit too jaded. They've been there, done that and are saying, "We've had enough of this. If you're going to do advertising, then make it legitimate, make it about the issues that face Ontarians and give us the straight goods. Don't mask it with a politician at the top of the ad going on, doing something on behalf of Ontarians." Actually, if you look at the bill, it specifically states in its standards that a member of the assembly will not be a part of that advertising.

The Provincial Auditor must become expert in determining what advertising is partisan and what is not. We can't afford these long delays when necessary communication must take place, and so the study that's done by the auditor is a critical issue. If we had an emergency, for example, we must be able to ensure that emergency communications can get out to the public in a timely way and are not going to be hamstrung by the fact that the auditor has to review. So there are obviously some issues within this bill that have to be identified and worked on in terms of those standards.

I do believe, however, that our government is up to the job of making the role of the auditor a little bit easier, simply because I'm hoping that all of us will observe the letter of the law and the spirit of the bill.

Finally, I would like to say that we should see Bill 25 as part of a major effort by this government to open the doors of the government to the scrutiny of the public. As Finance Minister Greg Sorbara said when he spoke about Bill 18, such actions by this government "make the entire public sector more transparent and accountable to the people of Ontario," and Bill 25 is just another tool to make the public aware of our transparency and our accountability. This bill will work if we choose to make it work.

Mr Jeff Leal (Peterborough): It is indeed a pleasure for me to make some remarks on Bill 25, An Act respecting government advertising.

This goes back many years: I remember as a young fellow, just preceding the 1981 election in Ontario, the government of the day, Mr Davis—as a result of the OPEC oil crisis, there was a great emphasis on conservation. Remember those commercials that had a great jingle, "Preserve it, conserve it, that's why folks are doing it, to conserve electricity, gas and oil"? Experts in the area who studied advertising at that time said it was the most seductive subliminal message ever brought forward to the people of Ontario, because if you say it quickly, "Preserve it, conserve it" becomes Progressive Conservative. That was one of the determinations they made at that time. We know that Mr Davis, with all his skills, went on to a majority government in 1981.

Last summer, my wife Karan and I had the opportunity to visit the annual yard sale sponsored by the Lakefield animal shelter. Many individuals approached me on that fine summer afternoon to indicate how upset they were that their mailboxes were full of glossy pamphlets sent to them by government ministries from the then Ontario government led by Mr Eves. I recall the one I personally received from the Ministry of Energy. It had a wonderful picture of the member from Nepean-Carleton.

After the crisis that the former government brought on to itself through the ill-timed deregulation policy, the government of the day was desperate to try to convince the general public that there was a new policy that would indeed calm the water.

People knowledgeable in the field, such as Mr Bob Lake, president of the Peterborough Utilities Services, were critical because part of that initiative was Bill 210, which forced on local distribution companies two options: (1) zero rate of return, which, if followed, would have forced LDCs into bankruptcy; or (2) for profit. It didn't allow local LDCs to operate as not-for-profits to allow ordinary folks in Ontario to have a break. As a matter of fact, the energy policy described in this little leaflet here actually brought about the cancellation of a rebate program in the riding of Peterborough for those individuals who had electric water heaters.

While the general public may have been hoodwinked for a short time, experts in the field knew this policy was a bit of a Trojan Horse. This bill authorizes the auditor of Ontario, soon to be renamed the Auditor General of Ontario, to review government advertising initiatives and their content.

For the sake of discussion, I look at section 5 of the bill:

"5(1) When an item is given to the Office of the Provincial Auditor for review, the Provincial Auditor shall review it to determine whether, in his or her opinion, it meets the standards required by this act.

"(2) The decision of the Provincial Auditor" then would be "final."

Section 6:

"6(1) The following are the standards that an item is required to meet:

"1. It must be a reasonable means of achieving one or more of the following purposes:

"i. To inform the public of current or proposed government policies, programs or services available to them.

"ii. To inform the public of their rights and responsibilities under the law.

"iii. To encourage or discourage specific social behaviour, in the public interest.

"iv. To promote Ontario or any part of Ontario as a good place to live, work, invest, study or visit.

"2. It must include a statement that the item is paid for by the government of Ontario.

"3. It must not include the name, voice or image of a member of the executive council or a member of the assembly."

“4. It must not be partisan”—which is key.

“5. It must not be a primary objective of the item to foster a positive impression of the governing party or a negative impression of a person or entity who is critical of the government.” It seems to me that’s a very important section to preserve the democratic process here in Ontario.

“6. It must meet such additional standards as may be prescribed” over a period of time that the Auditor General will deem necessary.

I’m not the only one in this province who had great concerns about the precious dollars wasted by the previous government on ads. I’d like to quote from a column written by John Ibbitson in the *National Post* on January 18, 1999: “The Tories have spent a good \$30 million or so over the past two years on advertising never seen before in this province from a government—direct, unambiguous, partisan advertising, some of it bordering on attack ads, aimed at discrediting anyone who questions Conservative policy, paid for, not by the Progressive Conservative Party of Ontario, but by the government of Ontario.”

Again I quote: “Starting in 1997 but accelerating rapidly in the past five months, the Conservatives have taken to the airwaves with ads of unprecedented partisanship. There have been education ads attacking teachers for not working hard enough”—can you imagine that?—“ads celebrating workfare, ads defending hospital closures.

“Each campaign costs millions, more than even the cash-laden Progressive Conservative Party can afford. So the Tories simply stuck a trillium at the end, announced the ad was ‘a message from the government of Ontario’ and took the money from petty cash.”

I want to acknowledge that major, unforeseen crises and tragedies occur during the life of a government. Last summer, during the SARS crisis, I think it’s very important that the government of the day used the advertising vehicle to provide necessary information surrounding that particular crisis. I want to commend the previous government on reassuring Ontarians that they did their job during the SARS outbreak to provide necessary information, and certainly during the blackout last August.

1750

I want to conclude with the following observations about Bill 25:

One, I think it will enhance democratic renewal in Ontario by removing one of the built-in advantages that a sitting government has. If you believe in democracy, it is essential that the sitting government be prevented from using the massive resources of government to distort the democratic process.

Two, instead of using financial resources to pay for advertising, the money can be invested in schools, hospitals and other worthy public services.

It would be my hope that all of us in this Legislature can support Bill 25. It is an important piece of legislation for democratic renewal, provides more transparency, and it frees up financial resources to be used in priority areas.

The Acting Speaker: Questions and comments?

Mr Dunlop: I realize he left a couple of minutes on the clock over there, so I thought maybe he’d want to complete the time.

It’s great to make a few comments on it. I think—I get all the ridings mixed up—it was the member for Etobicoke-Lakeshore, her comments about, I believe it was, the \$234.5 million—I really find that so misleading to the citizens of the province of Ontario. Your colleague from Peterborough stands up and he talks about things like the SARS ads, and we talked earlier today about the Telehealth. You’re putting that all together. You’re parcelling that all together in the same \$235 million.

What really bothers you, I think, is what we would call the ON magazines. Apparently, that’s what is behind this bill, this piece of legislation, because it had a picture, usually of the Premier and the Minister of Education. I don’t know what else you’re talking about if you’re not talking about just that. What else was there? We’ve asked for the partisan ads—we’ve asked you to show a list of them. But certainly it had to be the ON magazine, because you can’t compare the SARS ads and the Telehealth ads and the ads that the Ministry of Natural Resources produced about the black bear problems we had in the province of Ontario and Ontario’s Living Legacy. I just think these are all good programs and good pieces of literature for the citizens of the province to have.

With that, I think it’s wrong to include the \$234.5 million and not just say exactly the ads you were talking about and the value of those dollars concerning those ads.

Mr Bisson: I thought the comments were actually interesting, because I think the member tried, as much as possible in a non-partisan way, to get at the crux of the issue. I think he tried to recognize in his debate that there is a legitimate need for members of the assembly, governments and opposition parties, to communicate and to put out whatever piece of information we’re trying to put out as a way of communicating.

The issue becomes, where do you draw the line? Do you say a government should have the right to advertise insofar as being able to advance its political goal? Well, that’s a pretty grey area, because, quite frankly, every political party out there is trying to advance itself as being better than the next one. Hopefully, one day, at election time, that political party will have more seats than the other one and form the government.

This is kind of a strange debate that we’re having, because I agree in principle with what the government’s trying to do. I guess I’ll support it; it wouldn’t hurt one way or another, but the bill really doesn’t deal with the nub of the issue, and that is, in my view: How do we deal with the legitimate need of government and opposition parties to communicate with the voters; how do we do that in a fiscally responsible way that recognizes our traditions of democracy so that as a democratic institution this Parliament is able to communicate with people outside? More importantly, how are individual members able to figure in all of that? I guess the government, by

way of this bill, is not wanting to deal with that, and I guess that's part of my problem with this debate: You can't deal with one in isolation of the other issues.

If the government's stated aim is that they want to ban partisan political advertising, well, that's fine, but where's the beef? This bill, in my view, doesn't do that at the end. Governments will still be able to advertise, as the Conservatives did before or any other government before that.

If the government wants to engage in a real debate, send this thing off to committee or committee of the whole and we can decide how best to do that, because I don't believe this bill does it in the first place.

Mr Pat Hoy (Chatham-Kent Essex): I'm pleased to comment on the presentations by the members from Etobicoke Centre and Peterborough. They captured the essence of what we're talking about in Bill 25. It's not a large bill—it's seven pages, translated, in both official languages—but it means so much. It means so much to the citizens of Ontario who told us, then in opposition, that the government was running wild with their ads.

It wasn't our opposition party of the day that brought this up; the people in my riding noticed it. They said, "The government has overstepped the bounds of advertising." Glossy brochures were coming into their homes on a regular basis. You could wallpaper the rooms with them. The government clearly overstepped the line. Not only did they overstep the line in regard to advertising, but they erased the line. The line wasn't there any more. So we, as promised, are going to put some parameters around advertising.

All governments advertised in the past. We've heard the statistics and the numbers of tens of millions of dollars of advertising that have gone on in the past by the third party, the official opposition and our party, but I can recall some of those ads, prior to being elected, and in the main they provided information. It may have had the minister's name on it, it may have had the Premier's name, but it was information.

But clearly the people of Ontario said that what was happening under the last regime was that blatant partisan advertising was coming into their homes in the amount of not tens of millions of dollars, but hundreds of millions of dollars. Some \$600 million was spent on advertising. The official opposition will not support this bill because it would be an admission that they were wrong.

The Acting Speaker: In response, I recognize the member for Etobicoke Centre.

Mrs Cansfield: I'd like to thank my colleagues from Peterborough and Chatham-Kent-Essex for their comments, and I would like to comment as well on the members for Simcoe North and Timmins-James Bay.

The issue of communication, I think, is a critical one. There is a role for government to play in terms of communication, and I guess it's that thin line, the edge of the wedge. In fact, that's the debate that really needs to occur. At what point does it become partisan and at what point is it not partisan?

There's no question that there is a need for a government to communicate with its people, and there's

no question that members of Parliament have a need to communicate with their constituents, but at what cost, I guess, is part of the question. The ethics and principles surrounding that type of communication are good debatable points that hopefully will happen in committee, as the member for Timmins-James Bay has indicated.

We owe it to the people of Ontario to spend their money wisely, as I said earlier. We recognize that we have to deal with this issue, so let's deal with it. Some \$600 million is a great deal of money to be spent on advertising over a period of eight years. There's no question that some of it was legitimate in terms of addressing issues around SARS and West Nile, but there's also no question that a great deal of it was unsolicited in terms of the kinds of attack ads. That should not be paid for by the people of Ontario.

I welcome the debate that will hopefully occur around the ethics and principles that should surround communications for members of Parliament and for the government as a whole. I think this is something we need to wrestle with, so that we can articulate those clearly to the electorate in Ontario so that they are as aware of the rules as we are, because we have an obligation as well as the responsibility to communicate with our electorate.

The Acting Speaker: I wish to inform the House that we've scheduled a late show for this evening. Pursuant to standing order 37, the question that this House now adjourn is deemed to have been made.

1800

ADJOURNMENT DEBATE

ROAD SAFETY

The Acting Speaker (Mr Ted Arnott): The member for Simcoe North has given notice of his dissatisfaction with the answer to his question given by the Minister of Transportation yesterday concerning consultation with police services. The member has up to five minutes to debate the matter, and the minister may reply for up to five minutes.

Mr Garfield Dunlop (Simcoe North): I'm pleased to be here, and I'm glad—

Interjections.

Mr Dunlop: I'm glad the heckling has already begun, because they obviously don't want me to do this late show, because the minister didn't, of course, answer the question.

Bill 73 is about public safety. Let me begin by talking a little bit about public safety. The question—

Interjection: What's the question?

Mr Dunlop: I asked the question yesterday; I'm referring back to it now. I'm talking about the public safety aspect. I can tell you that there's probably nobody in this House who thinks more of the public safety of children around school buses or in cars than I do. I've got a granddaughter who gets on a school bus three days a week: Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays. I've got a

daughter with three little girls. They each have separate car seats in their vehicles. I can tell you that my wife and I, when we take any of the little girls out, transfer those car seats into the—

Mr David Zimmer (Willowdale): On a point of order, Mr Speaker.

Mr Dunlop: Isn't that pathetic? He's trying to get a point of order on something about public safety when it's a public safety question. It's pathetic.

Interjections.

Mr Dunlop: Well, they don't even know what a late show's all about. That's how sad it is. They don't even know what the late show's about.

I asked the question the other day to the Minister of Transportation. I thought it was a fair question: "Did you talk to the police?" He answered, "I have talked to the police forces and they're very supportive of this legislation."

So we did a bit of homework. You know what? He never talked to any police. He certainly never talked to the Police Association of Ontario. He never talked to the Ontario Association of Chiefs of Police. At a cocktail party, he might have talked to somebody, but I think he shouldn't have come back and said, "I've talked to police," because he didn't talk to the people who represent the police officers in this province who have to enforce this piece of legislation.

It will take many, many resources of police officers' time to enforce this legislation. For example, birth certificates: We're going to have to make sure that any grandparent, or any parent, has a birth certificate in their hands of that child that they're transporting, because they'll be entitled to a fine. It's plain and simple.

Hon Christopher Bentley (Minister of Labour): These were the same arguments that were made with seat belts.

Mr Dunlop: Quit yapping away. You have no idea what you're talking about.

Second of all, height and weight: It's going to take police officers to measure the height of the children. It's going to take police officers to weigh the children. It'll take many officers. These people promised 1,000 new police officers to the citizens of Ontario in their platform. Nothing is there. There are no police officers coming. You can be guaranteed of that.

The next day I asked him the question again. This was the answer again, when I asked him, "Minister, why would you tell this House, and why would you tell Ontarians, that police were consulted on this legislation when in fact they weren't?" Last week, this was his answer. "Last week, I was at the opening of a police centre in Peel region, and there were police forces from almost all of Ontario present there. Most of them complimented me on the introduction of this legislation." They complimented him after he introduced the legislation. This minister never consulted with the police of Ontario, the very people who are going to enforce this piece of legislation. I think it's very, very disappointing that he would answer this question two days in a row—

basically he misled me. Maybe he didn't mislead his caucus, but he certainly misled me. I certainly did not believe the answer.

The Acting Speaker: I would ask the member for Simcoe North to withdraw the statement that he just made.

Mr Dunlop: OK, I will withdraw the word "misled."

The minister told me he consulted with the police services, which I would consider to be the Police Association of Ontario or the Ontario Association of Chiefs of Police. He didn't do it. He plainly and simply didn't do it, and he said to this House that he had consulted with the police. That's the problem. That's why I asked for the late show.

I'd like to see the list of people he actually consulted with. I'm asking that—

Hon Harinder S. Takhar (Minister of Transportation): I'm going to give it to you.

Mr Dunlop: Oh, you're going to give it to me. While you're there, give me the dates. Put the dates on record that you consulted with the people. Put the dates on record—not something you talked about this week, not someone you talked to as a result of my bringing up this late show; give me the answer and give me the people you consulted with prior to the legislation.

Interjection.

Mr Dunlop: Well, if you had the answer before, why didn't you give it to me last Thursday or Monday? You didn't do it. You had the opportunity, and that's why I asked for the late show, because you certainly didn't come clean with me when I asked you the question. As far as I'm concerned, this government avoids every question they can possibly answer to the citizens of Ontario. Thank you very much. Now, he can talk to himself.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you. The Minister of Transportation has an opportunity now to reply.

Hon Mr Bentley: On a point of order, Speaker—

The Acting Speaker: There are no points of order.

Hon Mr Takhar: I'm surprised that the member asked the question and then he left. I mean, that's the kind of courtesy he has for this House.

The Acting Speaker: I would ask the Minister of Transportation to refrain from talking about the presence or absence of another member. That's not something that we do around here.

Hon Mr Takhar: Let me thank the member for Simcoe North. Finally, he has some interest in safety legislation and I'm delighted about that.

As I said in the House, we had extensive discussions with the OPP on this bill, including the booster seat provisions and vehicle owner liability.

In particular, I'm grateful to Deputy Commissioner Moe Pilon from the OPP and the OPP's traffic and marine section for the tireless help and assistance provided to my ministry on a number of road user safety issues, including booster seats, improvements to school bus safety and improving the safety of young drivers.

I'm also very grateful for the support of the Peterborough city police, who recently declared support for

our improved booster seat provisions, and the Peterborough county OPP, who have said that they support the changes to graduated licences.

The York Regional Police are also on public record supporting changes to the graduated licensing system.

The Brockville Police Service is on record supporting the school bus element of the bill.

OPP Toronto recently took part in our spring seatbelt campaign to promote the use of booster seats, as did OPP Red Lake, Pickle Lake, Dryden, Marathon, Thunder Bay, Nipigon, and others.

I would also like to take this opportunity to thank each and every one of them for their ongoing support in communicating just how important booster seats are in helping to reduce the death and injury rate on the roads.

I'm also grateful to Safe Kids Canada, the CAA, the Ontario School Bus Association, the Infant and Toddler Safety Association, SMARTRISK, the Hospital for Sick Children, the Ontario Medical Association, Canada Safety Council, the Ontario Safety League, and many other stakeholders who gave us helpful comments and advice on various policy issues affecting booster seats, school bus safety and the safety of teenage drivers.

Today I spoke at the International Association of Auto Theft Investigators, where there were representatives from law enforcement agencies. Many of them spoke to me personally about their support for this bill.

It's very important for us to consult with the law enforcement agencies, but I think what is really important is for us to consult the wider public, because that's where this legislation really applies and whom this legislation, if passed, will really impact.

On average, for the last several months, I have attended at least eight to 10 events a week, talking to people, talking to the public, and asking their views on

this legislation. This included several ethnic groups, and just last week I had the opportunity to attend one of the largest Sikh functions, where I also talked about this legislation.

As I'm talking about the Sikh function, they just recently celebrated Vaisakhi, the 305th anniversary of the Khalsa, and I wanted to congratulate them as well.

Applause.

Hon Mr Takhar: Thank you.

The Premier also attended one of the largest Sikh functions in Toronto—there were thousands of people there as well—and he also attended in Ottawa, the first Premier ever to do so.

As I am on the subject of Sikhs, I also want to say to you that this year is a very special year for Sikhs as we go on to celebrate three very significant events in Sikh history. These events are the 500th Parkash Utsav of Guru Angad Dev Ji. Guru Angad Dev Ji was born in 1504 and had a special place in Sikh history because of the services he rendered. He improved Gurumukhi, which is the Punjabi dialect, into a full-fledged language and standardized it.

Secondly, we are also fortunate to observe the 400th year of the installation of Guru Granth Sahib in the Hari Mandi Sahib, Amritsar, which is the sacred place for the Sikhs. First compiled by Guru Arjun Dev Ji, it was installed in the holiest of holy Harminder Sahib in 1604.

I want to take this opportunity to congratulate all the Sikh community for the wonderful job they're doing in this province and for the contributions they are making to society. I had extensive consultations with them as well.

The Acting Speaker: It being past 6 of the clock, this House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 1:30 pm.

The House adjourned at 1811.

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Continued from overleaf

ADJOURNMENT DEBATE

Road safety

Mr Dunlop.....	2179
Mr Takhar	2180

OTHER BUSINESS

Answers to written questions

Ms Martel.....	2146
The Speaker.....	2146

Notice of dissatisfaction

The Speaker.....	2155
------------------	------

TABLE DES MATIÈRES

Mardi 11 mai 2004

PREMIÈRE LECTURE

Loi de 2004 sur la protection des consommateurs d'essence, projet de loi 80, *M. Crozier*

Adoptée.....	2142
--------------	------

QUESTIONS ORALES

TFO

M. Bisson	2153
M ^{me} Chambers.....	2153

DEUXIÈME LECTURE

Loi de 2004 modifiant la date d'abrogation de la Loi sur les produits

oléagineux comestibles, projet de loi 68, <i>M. Peters</i> Adoptée.....	2142
---	------

Loi de 2003 sur la publicité gouvernementale, projet de loi 25, *M. Phillips*

Débat présumé ajourné.....	2179
----------------------------	------

TROISIÈME LECTURE

Loi de 2004 modifiant la date d'abrogation de la Loi sur les produits

oléagineux comestibles, projet de loi 68, <i>M. Peters</i> Adoptée.....	2142
---	------

CONTENTS

Tuesday 11 May 2004

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Water quality	
Mr Dunlop	2139
Gasoline prices	
Mr Crozier	2139
KidsAbility Centre for Child Development	
Mr Arnott	2139
Tourism	
Mr Mauro	2140
Collective bargaining	
Mr Kormos	2140
Wikwemikong Anishinabe Association for Community Living	
Mr Brown	2140
Scugog Christian School	
Mr O'Toole	2140
Canadian men's hockey team	
Mr Berardinetti	2141
Nursing Week	
Ms Scott	2141

FIRST READINGS

Gasoline Consumer Protection Act, 2004, Bill 80, Mr Crozier	
Agreed to	2142
Mr Crozier	2142

MOTIONS

Consideration of Bill 68	
Mr Duncan	2142
Agreed to	2142

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

Long-term care	
Mr Smitherman	2142
Mrs Witmer	2144
Ms Martel	2145

ORAL QUESTIONS

Taxation	
Mr Eves	2146
Mr McGuinty	2146, 2148, 2151
Mr Baird	2146, 2151
Mr Flaherty	2148
Mr Wilson	2151
Ontario budget	
Mr Eves	2146
Mr McGuinty	2147
Mr Baird	2147

Health care

Mr Hampton	2147, 2148
Mr McGuinty	2147, 2148

Services for the disabled

Mr Parsons	2149
Mrs Bountrogianni	2149

Ontario drug benefit program

Mr Klees	2149
Mr McGuinty	2149

Immigrant services

Mr Ruprecht	2150
Mrs Bountrogianni	2150
Mrs Chambers	2150

Gasoline prices

Ms Martel	2150
Mr Bartolucci	2150
Mr Bisson	2150

Environmental health and safety

education program	
Ms Di Cocco	2151
Mrs Chambers	2152

By-election in Hamilton East

Mr Hudak	2152
Mr McGuinty	2152

Long-term care

Mr Levac	2152
Mr Smitherman	2152
Mr Colle	2153

TFO

Mr Bisson	2153
Mrs Chambers	2153

Premier's announcement

Mr Runciman	2153
Mr McGuinty	2153

Forest firefighting

Mr Mauro	2154
Mr Ramsay	2154

Water quality

Ms Scott	2154
Mrs Dombrowsky	2154
Mr Hardeman	2154

Road safety

Mr Hoy	2155
Mr Takhar	2155

PETITIONS

Property taxation

Mr Brownell	2155
-------------------	------

Highway 407

Mr O'Toole	2155
------------------	------

Hospital funding

Ms Martel	2156
-----------------	------

GO Transit service

Mr Delaney	2156
------------------	------

Ontario drug benefit program

Mr Wilson	2156
-----------------	------

Primary care

Mr Leal	2156
---------------	------

Motorcycle insurance

Ms Scott	2157
----------------	------

Immigrants' skills

Mr Wilkinson	2157
--------------------	------

Optometrists

Mr Ouellette	2157
--------------------	------

Ontario budget

Ms Broten	2157
Mr Berardinetti	2158

TTC right-of-way

Mr Ruprecht	2158
-------------------	------

Taxation

Mr Wilson	2158
-----------------	------

SECOND READINGS

Edible Oil Products Repeal Date

Amendment Act, 2004,	
Bill 68, <i>Mr Peters</i>	
Agreed to	2142

Government Advertising Act, 2003,

Bill 25, <i>Mr Phillips</i>	
Mr Ouellette	2158
Ms Scott	2159, 2162
Mr Marchese	2160, 2162, 2166
2169, 2175	

Mr Patten	2161
-----------------	------

Mr Arthurs	2161, 2169
------------------	------------

Mr Wilkinson	2161
--------------------	------

Mr Delaney	2164
------------------	------

Mr Wilson	2165, 2169, 2170
2175	

Mr Bisson	2165, 2174, 2178
-----------------	------------------

Ms Broten	2165
-----------------	------

Ms Di Cocco	2166, 2170
-------------------	------------

Mr Ramal	2167
----------------	------

Mr Dunlop	2169, 2174, 2178
-----------------	------------------

Ms Papatello	2174
--------------------	------

Mrs Cansfield	2175, 2179
---------------------	------------

Mr Leal	2177
---------------	------

Mr Hoy	2179
--------------	------

Debate deemed adjourned	2179
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THIRD READINGS

Edible Oil Products Repeal Date

Amendment Act, 2004,	
Bill 68, <i>Mr Peters</i>	
Agreed to	2142

Continued overleaf