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des débats
(Hansard)**

Thursday 17 February 2005

Jeudi 17 février 2005

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Honourable Alvin Curling

Président
L'honorable Alvin Curling

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO

Thursday 17 February 2005

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO

Jeudi 17 février 2005

*The House met at 1000.
Prayers.*

PRIVATE MEMBERS'
PUBLIC BUSINESS

INCOME TAX AMENDMENT ACT
(PUBLIC TRANSIT EXPENSE
TAX CREDIT), 2005

LOI DE 2005 MODIFIANT LA LOI
DE L'IMPÔT SUR LE REVENU
(CRÉDIT D'IMPÔT POUR DÉPENSES
DE TRANSPORTS EN COMMUN)

Mr O'Toole moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 137, An Act to amend the Income Tax Act to provide for a tax credit for expenses incurred in using public transit / Projet de loi 137, Loi modifiant la Loi de l'impôt sur le revenu afin de prévoir un crédit d'impôt pour les dépenses engagées au titre des transports en commun.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Pursuant to standing order 96, the member has 10 minutes.

Mr. John O'Toole (Durham): I ask the indulgence of the members of the House to look at this is a non-partisan initiative to make public transit affordable for their constituents and to encourage people to use public transit.

This bill really precipitates from listening to my constituents in the riding of Durham. In fact, as one of the thousands of people commuting daily from the Durham region, it costs me about \$20 a day. That includes getting on the GO train in Oshawa to Union Station and of course the subway up the University Avenue line to Queen's Park. What that means to a normal person, at \$20 a day, five days a week, is \$100 a week. We're suggesting in this legislation that that would be 50% tax deductible and recoverable as a direct subsidy or support to the users of public transit.

Before I get into any detail on this bill and thank the public at large and the stakeholders I have been in consultation with, I'd like to thank my legislative intern, Audrey Lemieux, who has been very instrumental in helping to draft and shepherd this piece of legislation to this point. She is here in the chamber today. She has been a great help in drafting and trying to get the mechanics of this in the order it is today.

I also want to thank the public. As I say, I've had communication with the Canadian Urban Transit Association, who have widely endorsed it, as well as my own councils in the region of Durham. There has been quite a long and engaged discussion about trying to rationalize transit and integrate it across the Durham region. There have been some pitfalls and some challenges, but just recently—I'm looking at an article in the local paper that says "Region-wide Transit Gets Green Light." That's by taking Ajax, Pickering, Whitby, Oshawa and Clarington, as well as Scugog, Uxbridge and Brock. Brock, of course, is represented very capably by my seatmate Laurie Scott. Roger Anderson, the chair of Durham region, worked very hard, along with Mayor John Mutton, to explain the transitional issues that were creating a problem. I believe I have wide support for my initiative because it would help transit authorities like Durham region, and not just Durham region but York region as well, which has done a great job in terms of trying to integrate, streamline, harmonize and make more efficient the transit systems in their area.

Also, taking a broader view of this, I was pleased that *Now* magazine, which isn't commonly known to support Conservative views, stated in its November 4 issue that, "The Tories have a great idea." I won't go on at any great length, but at least people were paying attention.

I have had a lot of comment from municipally elected people. I want to put on the record what Ted Galinis, the general manager of Ajax Pickering Transit Authority, says:

"Ajax Pickering Transit Authority is very pleased to support Bill 137, an amendment to the Income Tax Act which provides a tax credit for expenses incurred in using public transit.

"Financial incentives such as the public transit expense tax credit do much to encourage use of public transit as a viable transportation alternative. This type of incentive is necessary in making public transit a more attractive choice and motivates drivers to leave their vehicles at home.

"We believe this is a good beginning in encouraging the use of public transit and look forward to future incentives, including employer-provided transit benefit tax exemptions. It is through efforts such as these that assist in altering the public's perception and attitude toward transit and enable public transit to live up to its potential."

The point here is that public transit authorities generally realize the relationship between gridlock and other

emission issues, and the use of automobiles and public transit. There is a solution for gridlock and for the emissions issue, the Kyoto kind of issue, and it is public transit. It is one of the solutions, especially in congested urban areas like Toronto, like London, like Ottawa—large urban centres. The federal government recognizes that. Ralph Goodale recently—I look at an article here—responded that the federal budget is looking at the potential of introducing a user tax credit in the upcoming budget, very similar, respectfully, to the issue I've brought to this House today. I hope they follow through federally. I don't think I have that clipping with me; I thought I did. It is here. I can only assure you that the federal government has been looking at this initiative as well.

What does it actually do? I think this is important for people, to make sure that the issues this bill will assist them with—I am at the moment trying to find some of the stuff I'm supposed to have here. Here it is. The bill, if passed, would amend the Income Tax Act and give Ontario taxpayers 50% of the public transit expense they incur during the tax year. The bill provides a monetary incentive to encourage Ontarians to choose public transit as an alternative to motor vehicles. The Liberal government supported, in their 2003 election platform, investing in public transit that would ease gridlock, reduce air pollution, decrease commute times that keep families apart and slow down our just-in-time economy.

1010

Two years ago, prior to the 2003 election, Greg Sorbara stated in the House, "The people of Ontario have an opportunity to choose soon. If they choose with us, they will see a new era in public transportation." Joe Cordiano also highlighted the negative effects of smog caused by gridlock and air pollution. The Liberal government has utilized every possible avenue at its disposal to tax Ontarians. This bill here is an opportunity for the government to ease the tax burden in Ontario while addressing the issues of gridlock and quality of life.

Public transit is safe and it's convenient. It's user-friendly. Public transit can embrace one's quality of life: less frustration and stress, more time with family and less time commuting. Air pollution is increased as gridlock increases. The bill will get more drivers off the road and on to public transit. Easing and reducing gridlock and air pollution is important to our common quality of life.

Taking public transit is more cost-effective than commuting daily by car to work. Bill 137 contemplates various municipal public transit initiatives that are currently under review in the greater Toronto area; indeed, as I mentioned earlier, in Durham.

Having worked with my municipal partners, for whom I have a lot of respect, I want to make sure I get on the record here that Mayor John Mutton and I have just recently discussed that. He is the mayor of Clarington and is also chair of finance at the region of Durham. Here is what he writes to me:

"I have had the opportunity to read your private member's bill, number 137, An Act to amend the Income

Tax Act to provide for a tax credit for expenses incurred in using public transit.

"Public transit has been a very important factor in the overall quality of life in the municipality of Clarington. We are a growth community with many new residents moving to this area because we have a stock of affordable housing. Now that they are residents, they have to be able to access public transit to get to work, to shop, to enable their children to get to school and to part-time jobs. The council of the regional municipality of Durham has recently voted to initiate a seamless transit system for the region of Durham, using GO Transit and the existing transit systems of the Durham municipalities.

"I believe that every elected official in the greater Toronto area, at the local, regional, provincial and federal level should be trying to promote the use of public transit in order to alleviate the gridlock that exists in Toronto and the GTA and to reduce greenhouse gas emissions to the environment. You are certainly taking the initiative through your private member's bill, number 137, and I support your efforts to enact legislation to provide a tax credit for expenses incurred by the residents who use public transit.

"On behalf of the residents of the municipality of Clarington, I wholeheartedly support your private member's bill number 137."

That says it: that the municipal people, who are closer to the electorate whom we all serve, have unanimously endorsed this initiative. It's non-partisan. It helps those who can often least afford it and must take transit as a way of sustaining their lives, their employment and that of their children. It affects seniors and it affects young people.

I urge people to look at this objectively. It is an initiative that reflects the sentiment in the gas tax. It will help people and encourage people to use public transit, improve the environment that we all share, as well as the quality of life for themselves and families.

Ridership drives public transit efficiency. If you can get one car off the road, you're going to help all the other drivers, and you're also going to be helping public transit.

I ask for your support this morning on this bill.

The Deputy Speaker: Further debate?

Mr. Jean-Marc Lalonde (Glengarry–Prescott–Russell): Even though I have a lot of respect for my colleague who came up with this bill this morning, it is not clear to me what effect this would have on the people of the whole province of Ontario. When I look in the description of the bill, public transit expenses would include "personal transportation on a regular passenger transportation service operated by, for or on behalf of the government of Ontario, a municipality in Ontario or a transit commission or authority in Ontario."

I looked at this. Who would benefit from this? Only those in large municipalities that have public transit. I'm looking at the gas tax program that we have put in place this year. We have gone ahead. We understood the importance of having public transit and having numbers

of cars off the road by encouraging the use of public transit. I look at the city of Toronto, for example. This year, we are giving Toronto \$91 million from the gas tax. Over a three-year period, we will be giving them \$365 million. When I look at Ottawa, this year Ottawa is getting over \$18 million from the gas tax.

Interjection: Unbelievable.

Mr. Lalonde: Unbelievable. When I look at the municipality where I come from, it would come up with a shortfall from this province. We either go with the gas tax or the tax credit. I was talking to an accountant this morning. If we look at 50% of the tax receipts we will get, it's a tax credit. There are two kinds of tax credit. You have the basic tax credit and you have an income tax credit. In this case, it's a tax credit which amounts to 22.05% that the government would have a shortfall.

We heard about the tsunami relief that the federal government has given to the people who were hit by the tsunami. The federal government says, "We will give over \$400 million in donations or credit to those people." Some \$146 million to \$159 million came from tax credits. In this case, I look at the town of Rockland, for example, where we have a public transit system. This is the only one I have in Glengarry–Prescott–Russell. This would mean a shortfall of \$11.17. It represents approximately \$38.69 additional revenue to the Ontario taxpayers.

I definitely recognize the intent of the bill, but why have we not looked at the whole of the province? Some people have public transportation services, but they're not run by the government; they're not run by the municipality; they're not run by a commission; they're just privately owned bus services that are providing transportation services to urban centres from the rural areas. This wouldn't be fair for those people.

I know John O'Toole is a very good hockey player. He knows how to stickhandle. On this one he said that if we were to come up with this project, it would put the government in a position that would mean that if we're not giving this to the people, the people would probably turn around and not support the Liberals. But those—I wouldn't call them gimmicks, but that approach is unacceptable to the citizens of this province when they know all the effects this would have. If we come up with this tax credit, are we going to come up with cuts in other services?

We have to balance the budget. The previous government was not able to balance the budget. We intend to balance our budget over our terms in office.

Mr. Speaker, I will now give a chance to my colleague Vic Dhillon to continue speaking on this bill.

The Deputy Speaker: Just for your information, it goes in rotation. So it will come back to you.

The member for Simcoe–Grey.

Mr. Jim Wilson (Simcoe–Grey): I'm pleased to join the debate on what I think is an excellent proposal by my colleague Mr. O'Toole, the MPP for Durham. As the Progressive Conservative transportation critic, I wish I had thought of this myself or that John had provided me

with the idea so I could look good to all of those commuters and people who would like to use public transit. Perhaps this bill will spur them to get out of their cars and use public transit, because it will give them a tax credit for 50% of the cost of public transit. Public transit, as we know in the city of Toronto, is not cheap. It's \$98.75 per month for a TTC Metropass. Some other fares that we have here, as soon as I find them: The GO bus from Barrie to Toronto costs \$20.80 per round trip; a monthly pass is \$331.

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Speaking on behalf of the people of Simcoe–Grey, in my riding, I note the statistic from the Ministry of Transportation that there are—the only statistic we have is from the city of Barrie to Toronto—some 20,000 commuters a day going from just Barrie alone, up near my part of the province, to Toronto. Soon, we hope, the GO train will go all the way to Barrie, and perhaps once this is widely publicized, if the government would adopt this idea in the upcoming provincial budget—Mr. O'Toole's timing is excellent with this private member's bill—this would be a great way to provide an incentive for people to get out of their cars and use the GO train. The GO bus right now is available from Barrie and, as I say, it's very, very expensive.

Gridlock is probably the number one issue that everyone commuting from my riding thinks about every morning, because you've got two or three hours to think about it. If I want to get down here for an 8 o'clock meeting from Wasaga Beach, I have to be going through Barrie by 5:30 in the morning. So it will take me from 5:30 till 8 to get here, and it gets worse.

I read yesterday in a newspaper article that we used to call gridlock "rush hour" in Toronto. According to the Ministry of Transportation, it's now called "rush 13 hours." They estimate that the traffic is congested over a 13-hour period, morning and evening. That's my own experience as an MPP. Of course, we're provided with a subsidy for an apartment in Toronto. Not everybody is provided with that. Nonetheless, I still find myself often commuting several times a week, and it's horrendous. This is the best idea, Mr. O'Toole's idea, that I've heard of in 14 years with respect to public transit.

We always went about it in another way. We always went about it that we'd subsidize the TTC. You mentioned the gas tax, and although Toronto's going to get less under the gas tax scheme than they got under the Mike Harris–Ernie Eves transit subsidy—probably about \$9 million less this year than they got in our last year of office—the fact of the matter is, we have always gone about it in the front end by trying to lower the ticket fare.

Usually, this type of tax incentive, tax credit, is a better way of going about things, because people have to put the money forward and make the commitment, knowing that when tax time comes, they can get 50% of that back, just like medical expenses and charitable donations. So, for the people at home, that's what we're talking about.

The government should be embracing this. I was disappointed to hear just a few minutes ago that the

member from Glengarry–Prescott–Russell doesn't think this is the greatest idea in the world. I don't know why. I bet Mr. Goodale, the federal Liberal finance minister, as Mr. O'Toole said in his remarks—I know he's seriously looking at it. We've seen that in media reports. I bet he'll do something in his budget, and I would encourage the government, on behalf of all the people who have to commute every day, to give them an incentive to get out of their cars. They want to do that anyway because of the high price of gasoline, and we see no relief in sight on that over the next decade.

We know, in my part of the province, the GTA area and just north, that over the next 20 years, the population will almost double. We're expecting 2.6 million more people. So the sooner you can get the GO train up there, the sooner you can get people using it. This is a very pleasant way to encourage them to go to public transit.

Finally, I want to mention one thing—because I rode the TTC recently—and that is about their student fares. I promised that I would raise this in the House, because I got an e-mail from a mother, Christine Walsh from Peterborough, whose son is going to school in Toronto, but because his permanent home residence is Peterborough, he is not entitled to the student rate on the TTC. Yet, if you're a senior citizen in this province, no matter where you live, you go to buy a senior citizen TTC token and you just have to show your proof of age. It doesn't matter whether you're from Peterborough or Collingwood or Tottenham or whatever—

Mr. Gilles Bisson (Timmins–James Bay): Timmins.

Mr. Wilson: —or Timmins—my old northern hat on—it doesn't matter. As long as you're a senior citizen, you're entitled to the senior discount. It doesn't work that way for students. So we're asking the TTC to do that. That doesn't make any sense. Most people don't live in a university town. They have to go to school somewhere else, like Toronto. It would only be fair. So I'm dealing with Howard Moscoe, which is always a pleasure—

Mr. Bisson: A good friend of mine.

Mr. Wilson: —and I haven't heard back from him. You know, Howard is pretty good to be on the airways when it's his issue, but when it's someone else's issue, you never hear much from him. But hopefully, he'll get back to me. He's had two months to think about this.

Having said that, I'm going to leave the floor to my colleagues, but I just want to encourage the government to adopt this idea before the feds beat you. You'd look good, commuters would love you, and it would go a long way to getting people into public transit.

Mr. Bisson: To my good friend, Mr. Wilson: They don't want to look good. That's the whole point. All these guys in government want to do is make people mad. I've been watching them for the last, almost two years now. Any time they get a chance to break a promise, they break a promise, so they make people mad. To my good friend from Simcoe, I've got to say, I don't think they're going to do it because they'd look good.

To the author of Bill 137, I think this is not a bad idea, actually. I'll echo what was said by a few people before.

It's not a bad way of dealing with what is a fairly significant issue when it comes to the city of Toronto, and also for commuters. We know there is a gap between what it costs to run the TTC and what the province is giving—I'm going to talk to that in a few minutes—and this is kind of an innovative way of coming at it and saying, "Let's try to put some dollars back in the pocket of the actual transit users by way of a tax credit." I never knew that this existed. I always assumed that people had the right to do this. But unfortunately not, because currently, as any Ontarian, if you're not getting a mileage allowance from your employer or a car allowance of some type, you're allowed to deduct your car or your driving to and from work in certain circumstances. That would bring transit somewhat in line with what the rules and provisions are under the Income Tax Act. So I think it's not a bad idea.

To the issue of Toronto transit, I just think it's interesting. My good friend the critic for the Conservative Party probably would like to bear this out, if he can get the floor back. You know, we were here yesterday. We watched the Premier. The Premier got caught in a scrum yesterday morning, and he said, "Oh, Lord, we're having a hard time in Ontario. That bad old federal government, they're just not giving us the money that we're entitled to. We've got to run into the House, and we've got to get an all-party motion here in order to say the feds are bad and we're good." Imagine how the city of Toronto feels when they look at that. It happens to be that there is a \$70-million gap between what it actually costs to run Toronto transit and what the province is giving. I just sit here and say, "Hang on a second here. Something is a bit askew." If it's good enough for the Ontario government to whine against the federal government, then it should be good enough for the city of Toronto to whine against the provincial government.

There's an old saying: Physician, heal thyself. I think the Premier would be well set to try to deal with municipalities fairly, because they're our transfer partners. We're responsible for municipalities, much the same way that the federal government is responsible to us when it comes to transfers. Maybe we should be setting an example of what we should be doing with our own transfer partners before we start whining to the federal government on the issue of how much money we are entitled to.

Now, why are we in this situation? I think it's quite a simple one. It's not the government that created this problem; I'll give them that much. We have a deficit in Ontario. First of all, the Liberals knew there was a deficit before they got elected, so I don't buy this argument, "Oh, big surprise, didn't know, boo hoo, boo hoo." We all knew that there was going to be a deficit; we all knew it would be about \$5 billion. I think, more to the point, the issue is that the federal government has got a surplus. And why do they have a surplus? Because they didn't do tax cuts. At a time when the economy was slowed down, at a time when we were trying to come out of one of the worst recessions we had seen in Ontario in a long, long

time, up to the mid-1990s, the provincial government decided, contrary to the federal government, to do tax cuts. When you annualize the tax cuts in today's dollars, if you were to say the province of Ontario would have never, never, never cut taxes in the way that they did, we would now be in our own surplus situation here in Ontario. The actual number, when you annualize it, I always thought was around \$6 billion, but somebody yesterday was telling me it was closer to \$10 billion. But I'll be more conservative in my approach and say it was \$6 billion. Well, you know, you wouldn't have a deficit in this province. So that's how we got into this mess in the first place.

Imagine the federal government—we'll get a chance to debate that this afternoon, and I'll speak to that more then. They're going to listen to our request for them to give us \$5 billion, and they're going to say, "Well, you did it to yourselves. Why should we bail you out of your problem?" That's a bit of the argument. I think we'd be better served to come at this from a completely different perspective, and I'll talk about that in this afternoon's debate on the emergency motion that the government will bring forward. But I wanted to raise it in the context of this bill, because the province finds itself in the same situation with the federal government that the city of Toronto has with the province.

1030

On the issue of the tax credit for transit, that's not a bad idea. We need to find ways of being innovative when we provide a public service so we can do it at a cost that is as reasonable as possible. One of the ways to do that, obviously, would have been to say, "We will give transit more money to make sure that they don't have to raise the fares." That is one option. The other option is to offset the costs somewhat, because we know that transit costs are going up. One way of doing that is to do what the member suggests by way of this bill, which is that you can deduct the full cost to buy a transit pass or a GO Transit pass against your income tax, and I think the rate you would be able to get back is about 50%. It's not a bad way of dealing with the end users so that they're not put in the position where it becomes so expensive to get to work that they're in the position of being almost in the negative every time they get up to go to work.

The other thing is what the member for Simcoe-Grey raised, and that is the congestion on our highways. He's right. I use that highway on a fairly frequent basis. I come down Highway 11 from northern Ontario, and around Orillia it starts to get pretty busy. When you get to Barrie, you may as well say you're in a parking lot, from Barrie to the top end of Toronto. Then, when you get on the 401, it's another big parking lot, but it's going east-west. Then you get on to the streets of Toronto and it gets even worse. The point is, why do we have all that gridlock? Because we have not provided a good alternative for people to be able to move on mass transportation.

If we look at Europe, for example, Europe has been much, much more progressive and forward-thinking

when it comes to getting people off the roads and on to trains or subways. If you go to cities like Paris or London or others, if you go anywhere within Germany, France, Italy, Spain or England, you have a very good intercity train system. You can stand at any railway track in Europe and wait for a train to come by and go pretty well anywhere you want to go at a pretty reasonable cost. So most people say, "Why use the highways when I can do it that way?" That's something this government has not created, and it's something we have to deal with.

I think the government would be well advised to let one of our standing committees of the Legislature take a look at this issue, to ask, what kinds of things can we do as a province, in partnership with the municipalities and our federal government, and possibly the private sector if that makes sense, in terms of how we move people off our highways and into a mass transportation system?

For example, can we do a better job of how we run our already public system of GO Transit? I think the answer is yes. Certainly GO Transit services should be expanded into other communities. If we can do that and, more importantly, provide a frequency of service that is usable on the part of the commuters, you're going to take them off the highways. If you take them off the highways, then you don't have to build bigger highways, so you save some money, plus you reduce the overall amount of emissions into our atmosphere, which is something we should all be aiming for, especially with the Kyoto Protocol being brought forward, which I think we all support, by and large.

We can probably do some pretty innovative stuff, but I don't think one person has the answer. I think the standing committee would have to go out, over the period of a winter session or a summer session, and canvass the various people who are involved in transit, to talk to riders and everybody who has something to say on it so we can at least come forward with a comprehensive plan to deal with gridlock. If we did that, I think we'd be well served in the future. That's not to say that once the committee finished its work, all these problems would go away, but it would provide the province of Ontario with a plan—something it doesn't have—about where we should be making our key investments within the current system and how we can expand the system in other ways.

For example, as I mentioned earlier, if you're able to provide really good GO Transit services to the cities of Barrie and maybe even Orillia, you would take people off the highways. Jeez, it would make a heck of a lot more sense than having to take one's car. On the other hand, for northern Ontario, obviously, that may not be an option because the distances are greater.

In Europe, which is interesting, they've got what they call the TGV. You can get on a 300-kilometre-an-hour train that moves pretty darn quick. It would probably be far too expensive to build, in terms of laying track all the way into Hearst and westward into Thunder Bay. The ridership may not be there to recover that kind of cost, so in northern Ontario we may have to look at something different. You'd probably have to look at an investment

in our highways to make sure we finish the four-laning promised by this government—for example, Highway 69.

I don't know how many times the former member from Sudbury, the now Minister of Northern Development and Mines, when he was in the previous Parliament, went after the Tory government to four-lane Highway 69, denounced the government for not doing it, did all kinds of press conferences along the highway. Every time there was a fatality, he ran to the media saying, "We've got to four-lane Highway 69." Then he gets himself elected—bully for him; his party won—and people in the media asked him, "When can we have Highway 69 finished?" "Oh, six months from now I'm going to have a comprehensive plan." Six months went by—no comprehensive plan. The only thing they did was that they went and had a press conference on the highway where they announced they were going to make one overpass and one underpass. I guess that's the sort of four-laning they were thinking about, but we're nowhere nearer where we need to be than what he was promising when he was in opposition. The question is, with the scarce dollars we have as a province, where would it be better to spend our money when it comes to four-laning highways or providing passing lanes so those passing lanes are able to move traffic along?

Again, we need a strategic plan. The problem is that nobody has gone out and done the kind of work that's needed to say where the bottlenecks are, where the congestion is. Does it make more sense to invest in four-laning Highway 69, or do we have to do something else? Do we have to put passing lanes on Highway 11 or Highway 17? God only knows. That committee would be able to look at that issue.

The other thing that committee could look at for northern Ontario is the whole issue of air service. The reality in northern Ontario is that to get down here to the city of Toronto—which other people call the centre of the universe—it really is the only option if you're trying to get here quickly. The problem is that we are in the worst possible situation in northern Ontario. The federal government some years ago deregulated the airline industry, so it became open competition for anybody who wanted to set up shop, and they privatized Air Canada. We went from jet service in places like the city of Timmins, which used to bring us to Toronto for a fare, in today's dollars, of maybe \$150 return, to where you are paying, on a deal—I pay \$700 to go home every weekend. I can fly to Vancouver cheaper than that. In fact, I went to Vietnam two or three weeks ago, and the ticket I purchased—I used my Aeroplan, but if I had bought the ticket, I could get a ticket to go to Hong Kong for around \$1,400 or \$1,500, but I have to spend almost a thousand bucks to go to the city of Timmins. It doesn't make sense.

One of the things that the committee could look at, if we were to form a committee to do such a thing, is to take a look at the kinds of things the province can do, or the kinds of things the province needs to do with the federal government, to provide air service in northern

Ontario that works, first of all, and so we have east-west connections, not just north-south connections. It could look at what we need to do to provide a transportation service that is reasonable when it comes to cost.

I want to remind people that northern Ontario goes far beyond Timmins and Hearst. There's the whole question of travel among the northern communities north of 51. We need to look at transportation for all those communities along the James Bay coast, like Big Trout Lake and others on the northwest, because trying to buy everything from diesel fuel to milk or bananas or whatever it might be is astronomically expensive in communities like that because they don't have highways to bring the stuff in. The only way they can bring it in is either by winter road, which costs a lot of money to make every year, because basically you're using the frost on the swamp to build a road, or to bring it in by air. To give people an idea, the cost of milk in a community like Attawapiskat is about four times the price you pay here in the city of Toronto. How do a mother and father provide milk for their growing young children when they have to pay those prices? It's pretty ridiculous. The point is that one of the things the committee should look at is the whole question of transportation for those communities north of 51.

At the end of the process, we'd find ourselves in a position where we would be able to come forward with a comprehensive transportation strategy for the province of Ontario. The three distinct parts, in my view, are the urban centres around southern Ontario, southeast and southwest; the central and northern part of the province, up to places like Hearst and the northern part of Highway 11, the northern transportation route; and also a plan for what we do north of Highway 11, which is basically the north of 51. I think that would be a good idea. We would be able to look at a number of issues and alternatives about how we're able to come forward with a comprehensive transportation strategy.

1040

I do want to say to my good friend Mr. O'Toole that New Democrats will support your motion. We think it's a darn good idea. I hope the government doesn't kill this thing. We should at least allow it to go to committee. I heard the parliamentary assistant get up and say some bad things about the bill. I hope what he means is that Liberals will vote in favour of the motion to allow it to go to committee so we can have a discussion about it, take a look at the alternatives and look at what the idea looks like. From there we'd bring it in for a third reading vote, and then the government can do what the government's going to do. But to say no at this point and kill the bill, for it not to get second reading, I think would be a disservice to the transit riders of Ontario.

Mr. Vic Dhillon (Brampton West—Mississauga): I'm glad to speak to the bill introduced by my colleague the member from Durham. I think, and my constituents think, that Bill 137, An Act to amend the Income Tax Act to provide for a tax credit for expenses incurred in using public transit, is an important bill.

A large segment of my riding is comprised of new immigrants. Most often, these new immigrants automatically resort to buying an automobile once they arrive in Canada and don't even think about using public transit. I think this bill gives them a very good incentive to think about using our public transit system.

Over the past few months, I've been approached by several seniors' groups in my riding about the rising cost of public transit. This bill is welcome news to these people, and they'll be very happy to know that it'll be more economically feasible for them to use public transit.

The provincial gas tax funding was very well received by Ontario's municipalities. Our government is committed to public transit. In fact, we're committing over \$300 million to public transit. This is much more than I can say for my colleague's party. I have to admit, when the bill was introduced, I was very surprised that it had Tory affiliation. Our government has been very supportive of transit within Ontario. Whether it's the environmental assessment for the extension of the Spadina subway to York University, the AcceleRide rapid transit initiative in Brampton or the GO-Mississauga rapid transit busway, our government is committed to getting people moving on public transit.

Car owners who use cars for business or their jobs can deduct part of their car expenses from income tax, often to great advantage. Why can't taxpayers who use public transit to get to their jobs, at far less environmental cost, also benefit from the tax system? This will definitely increase transit ridership, getting more people out of their cars and on to trains, subways, streetcars and buses. Increasing ridership is a major tenet of our government's transit philosophy.

Again, based on what other jurisdictions are doing—Quebec comes to mind—I think this bill will be very beneficial to our constituents. A lot of my constituents are recent immigrants and are good, honest working people just trying to make ends meet and raise their kids. Transportation costs can mount, and this bill, which I'm happy to support, will go a long way.

Mr. Joseph N. Tascona (Barrie-Simcoe-Bradford): I'm very pleased to join in the debate on the member for Durham's bill. I fully support this change to the Income Tax Act to provide a tax credit for expenses incurred in using public transit.

Some of the information provided by the member was a regional breakdown of the number of commuters into metro Toronto. From my area, Barrie, there are 20,000. I can tell you, being on the highway—I was on the highway very early yesterday, at 5 o'clock in the morning, coming down here to Toronto, and it was just bumper-to-bumper at that time. That just continues all through the morning.

We need public transit. We made a significant investment, when we were the government, to the city of Barrie. We gave them \$2 million toward saving the rail from Barrie to Bradford, because the federal government at that time had brought legislation in to discontinue and

pull out the track, and they were about to do that. So the city purchased and owns the rails.

GO Transit has done an environment study—and it's completed now—for the three sites: one on Mapleview Road off Highway 11; one down in Bell Ewart; and another one at the old Allandale train station. That has been done, and it's GO Transit's plan to be going ahead with the operation by 2006.

We're hopeful that the city of Barrie is going to approve that, just like they did in Bradford-West Gwillimbury recently to expand their GO Transit service, because they have up to three trains a day out of Bradford, hopefully to go to six trains. So we're waiting on the city of Barrie for them to make final arrangements with the province and the federal government for that to happen.

So I fully support the bill. Certainly, a public transit income tax credit will encourage more use of public transit. I think we now have about 10 to 15 GO buses a day going out of Barrie. I know Jim Wilson's constituents use it also. So it's very important that this happen. I think it's a very progressive measure by the member from Durham.

Ms. Laurie Scott (Haliburton-Victoria-Brock): I'm very pleased to rise today to speak on the motion from the member from Durham, An Act to amend the Income Tax Act to provide for a tax credit for expenses incurred in using public transit. He mentioned at the start that it's a non-partisan issue, and I think all of our ridings certainly face some transit challenges.

In my riding of Haliburton-Victoria-Brock, some of you may be surprised to know that General Motors is the number one employer. So there's a lot of traffic that's going down to the south and the west in the riding. One part in Pontypool still has some train tracks. I know the member from Simcoe had mentioned that there were trains available. We just have one track left in the northern part of the riding—they've lifted all the tracks—and I know the snowmobilers are happy, because they use it to snowmobile, but there are still some opportunities in the former Manvers township and around Pontypool. There's a train track there.

I know GO has mentioned for several years a possibility of coming to that community with a train, which we fully support. There's no question that if transit is made more affordable and more accessible, especially in my part of the riding, we can deal with our gridlock problems, especially with the greenbelt legislation coming in and the leapfrogging that's going to occur. We need to plan for that, and I think this would be good for the environment and good for our quality of life, with fewer people sitting in their cars, away from their families. They would be able to add more to their communities.

So I think the 50% tax credit is great. The member from Durham mentioned Brock township, which is in my riding. It's also in Durham region, which has GO buses there now. I think this would increase their ridership. Just the number of students alone from our area going to Durham College and the University of Ontario Institute of Technology has been increasing, and they're included

in the greenbelt so far. We want to encourage more of the public transit there.

In an article in the *Globe and Mail* on Wednesday, February 9, by Jeff Sallot in Ottawa: "Minister Ralph Goodale says he is ready to use the tax system to promote a clean environment, suggesting yesterday that the coming budget could have tax breaks to encourage commuters to use public transit." We need the federal partners in here.

"Environmental groups want the government to introduce 'green budget' measures, including encouragement to employers to provide transit passes—instead of parking spots—as a non-taxable benefit for workers."

So I commend the member for Durham. I think our thinking has got to be progressive, it's got to be in that direction, and I want to fully support his bill. I think it's a great idea. I encourage all the members of the Legislature here to adopt this bill today.

1050

Mr. Frank Klees (Oak Ridges): I'm pleased to rise today in support of this important piece of legislation proposed by the member from Durham. It's this kind of thinking that we need, not only in this chamber but also at the federal level of government. Transit is, without question, the key to unlock the problems that we're facing in the GTA, and that is the problem of gridlock. We have many other issues that are facing us, but when it comes to the issue of quality of life, there is a very practical challenge that we face, and that is the issue of gridlock.

I want to take this opportunity to commend the good work of the region of York and the vision they have to deal with this issue of integrated transit throughout York region. Kitchener-Waterloo as well deserves to be commended for taking these important steps. Often there's so much polarization at the local level that they fail to see the importance of bringing municipalities together and working together.

The saying, "Build it and they shall come," is not true. What the member from Durham has recognized is that once you build the transit system, you also have to motivate people to use it. The way you do that is by coming forward with proposals such as the member for Durham has presented to this Legislature to give people a very practical reason for focusing on transit. We have to make it attractive for people to choose the transit option. Responsible local governments will work with the provincial and federal government to ensure that the funding is there.

Our government, you may well recall, made it possible and delivered to the region of York some \$50 million for their Quick Start program for their transit program. That program today is working. As you drive through York region, you can see the evidence of that money at work. They are now looking to move to the next step, and we implore the minister of infrastructure and the Minister of Transportation to support the region of York with funding so they can indeed move on to the next step of that important transit strategy.

Again, I commend the member from Durham. He has always been a member who looks at the very practical issues facing his constituents, facing the people of this province. Transit is a key. We have a serious gridlock problem throughout the GTA and in other areas of the province, be that Ottawa, Windsor, other areas such as Kitchener-Waterloo, the London area. What we need now are practical solutions. I pray that the people opposite, who may be tempted to look at this as a partisan issue, will just look at it from a public policy perspective and know it's the right thing to do, that this bill be sent to committee to work out the details in terms of how it should be implemented and make whatever necessary amendments perhaps are required to have it fit into the overall transit strategy of this province, and we will see good public policy as a result of this proposal being put forward by the member from Durham.

The Deputy Speaker: Further debate? Further debate? Sorry. The member for Stoney Creek.

Ms. Jennifer F. Mossop (Stoney Creek): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Tucked away in the corner here, it's easy to miss out.

Anyway, I'm very pleased to speak to this, An Act to amend the Income Tax Act to provide for a tax credit for expenses incurred in using public transit. I think it is a good idea, a good initiative, for all the obvious reasons that have already been talked about this morning. It encourages use of public transit, which hopefully will alleviate the congestion on the roads out there, give us cleaner air and also even the playing field: In some cases, there are those workers who do get a car allowance or a tax credit for using their car and there isn't that same provision for those who use public transit.

I've listened carefully this morning. It's interesting, because it's turned into a bit of a venting session for commuter angst. I'm going to join in, because I spent six years driving between Toronto and Hamilton. I had to leave the Toronto area during rush hour, at 3 o'clock, 4 o'clock in the afternoon when all of Toronto is leaving Toronto and heading west, or it seems that way, along the QEW. I had to use a car because there was no GO Transit returning at the hour that I was returning, which was after midnight. So I would sit in this car every day and watch cobwebs form on the cars around me, and I would try to amuse myself coming up with entrepreneurial ideas, like maybe I could start a chip wagon out there on the highway and I could walk in between these cars and sell potato chips and cold drinks or something to these people who had nothing else to do but stare at the tail lights of the car in front of them. You get all these wonderful suggestions from your friends, who say, "Why don't you try some of those talking books? You could do those." I tried some of that for a while, and maybe I could learn another language, and I tried a bit of that.

You can spend hours and hours out there, and quite frankly, it sucks the life out of you after a while. We've already heard from doctors who say that commuting is a serious health problem. I know why, because I did it for so long. It is a serious health problem. So we do need to

improve public transit. I think an initiative like this points in that direction and it's a good idea.

The other thing I wanted to talk about a little bit: I know that our government is committed to improving public transit, is committed to cleaner air, to improving infrastructure and all the rest, but I don't want anybody to think I'm taking any chances. All MPPs like to invite cabinet ministers for visits to their riding to meet with their constituents. I always try to time the visits of cabinet ministers to rush hour so that they have to leave Toronto and go along that QEW toward Hamilton in the worst possible traffic. Invariably they get there late because they didn't anticipate it was going to take them two hours to get between Queen's Park and Hamilton and Stoney Creek, but indeed that is how long it will take you if you are trying to do it during rush hour. Rush hour, by the way, is no longer a couple of hours in the morning and a couple in the afternoon; it's pretty much all day long. Everybody out there who's done it knows that I am speaking the truth. You might get an hour's break somewhere in the middle of the day, but if there's an accident, then you're toast, because all bets are off at that point. You're not going to get anywhere in any period of time. So I always try to invite my cabinet ministers for a visit during that big, terrible, rush-hour period. They finally arrive and get out of the car, "I'm so sorry. I hate being late. This is dreadful. But, boy, the traffic's just awful," and I say, "Yes. GTA actually stands for 'God, traffic's awful.'" At least that's what it has come to be in these many, many years. I haven't seen any improvement. We are very addicted to our cars. In fact, the working world, the way it works now, where we're actually working 24/7, doesn't help much because public transit isn't meeting the needs of the 24/7 world yet in many cases. There's a lot of work that has to be done in the area of public transportation.

We've also heard about other parts of the world and how much better they do public transit than we do. I spent quite a bit of time in Europe and never had a car. I travelled nine different countries, on public transit all the time. Their systems are so much better than ours. They have so many more people in a smaller space as well. Perhaps we've just been spoiled by the space we have. We've always had bigger cars and bigger roads, but it's catching up with us now and going far beyond us. We need to be very aggressive in making some changes with regard to public transportation, to lessen the congestion on the roads so that we aren't driving people absolutely out of their minds by having to do those sorts of things.

The tax credit that is being proposed here I think is a good start, a good initiative—pointing in the right direction, as it were, for this sort of thing. But I just have to encourage everybody out there to think about it before you get in your car. If you really don't have to take your car, don't take your car. Try public transit. The public transit we have is very good if it fits in your schedule. That's the only problem: sometimes it doesn't fit, which is why we need improvements. But if it does fit in your schedule, if you are able to do it, do it, because it's nicer

to sit on a train or subway and read a book than to sit in a car with your knuckles wrapped around a steering wheel getting whiter and whiter because you just can't stand what you're facing. You're probably going to have a better chance of getting where you're going on time if you use transit as well.

I think this is a good initiative. I'm really glad to see it coming forward. It certainly won't cure the whole problem of public transit, but it's a step in the right direction, and that's a good thing.

The Deputy Speaker: Mr. O'Toole, you have two minutes to reply.

Mr. O'Toole: I would like to thank each of the parties, specifically Mr. Lalonde, who of course is the critic in this area, and our own caucus, Jim Wilson from Simcoe-Grey, as well as Frank Klees from Oak Ridges, Laurie Scott from Haliburton-Victoria-Brock and Mr. Bisson from the NDP.

It looks to me, with a few exceptions, that there's general endorsement as well by the member from Stoney Creek in her comments—supportive comments, I might say. That's encouraging, to take this as a non-partisan way of recognizing the frustration and the expense for commuters, as well as the benefits of increasing ridership, which is to the quality of life that we all share, and the reduction in gridlock.

1100

Jim Wilson is our transportation critic, and he spoke to the issue of commuters, of students commuting and transit cost as part of education costs. I know he was very, very flattering and supportive. The closing remarks from our caucus were by Frank Klees, who was the Minister of Transportation and knows full well the implications of building more and more infrastructure in the form of highways and bridges. Public transit: It's time to turn the corner, and it's time for the government to realize that their current strategy, the gas tax, has a potentially high risk of failure.

I'm going to refer to an article in the Toronto Star from February 16. This is by Royson James, who writes often on these issues, talking about Mayor Miller having the Premier in the headlights.

What has happened is that the gas tax that's being transferred to the city of Toronto is being offset by reducing the city's contribution. In 2003, Toronto provided \$182 million in support, last year it went to \$142 million and this year it's down to \$123 million. As the province adds more, the municipality cuts back. We need to ensure that the drivers of Ontario move to transit.

ASIAN HERITAGE ACT, 2005

LOI DE 2005

SUR LE PATRIMOINE ASIATIQUE

Mr. Wong moved second reading of the following bill:
Bill 113, An Act to proclaim the month of May as Asian Heritage Month / Projet de loi 113, Loi proclamant le mois de mai Mois du patrimoine asiatique.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): According to standing order 96, Mr. Wong, you have 10 minutes.

Mr. Tony C. Wong (Markham): As a member of Asian origin, I feel extremely proud today to rise and speak to Bill 113, the Asian Heritage Act, 2005. It is now a cliché to say that diversity is Ontario's strength. Immigrants from many Asian countries have chosen Ontario to be their home. It should come as no surprise that after English and French, the third most spoken language in Canada is Chinese, followed by an array of Asian languages including Vietnamese, Tagalog, Punjabi and Tamil.

Asian Canadians are a large percentage of Ontario's population, with more than 1.5 million Ontarians. That's 12% of our province's population. It is important to recognize and pay tribute to the many Ontarians of Asian descent who have contributed and continue to contribute to the welfare and development of our province.

British Columbia is the only province to have officially declared May as Asian Heritage Month. That happened in 1996. On December 6, 2001, the Senate of Canada passed a motion designating May as Asian Heritage Month. The Senate adopted a motion introduced by Senator Vivian Poy to recognize May as Asian Heritage Month. On May 21, 2002, a declaration was signed by Senator Poy and a number of other federal representatives officially declaring May as Asian Heritage Month in Canada.

I want to talk about a bit of history also related to economic contributions. Asians settled in Canada more than 100 years ago. Their hard work and entrepreneurial spirit contributed to the evolution and development of many of our country's natural resources industries. South Asian immigrants initially worked in lumberyards, with a few opening their own mills once they got settled. And we must not forget the significant role that Chinese Canadians played in the construction of the Canadian Pacific Railway. Many gave their lives to what Pierre Berton described as the national dream.

Over 17,000 Chinese workers were brought over from China to spend the next four years completing the most difficult and dangerous section of the railroad. At least 600 Chinese workers died while working on the railroad. One Chinese worker died for every mile of track. Upon completion of the railroad in 1884, Sir John A. Macdonald commemorated the efforts of Chinese workers. He stated: "Without the great effort of the Chinese labourers, the CPR could not have been finished on schedule and the resources of western Canada could not also be explored."

I want to talk about economic prosperity and trade partnerships. As globalization brings us together, Ontario needs to leverage its multicultural workforce. The biggest growth economies are in Asia, specifically China and India. China's economy is gaining such strength that it is destined to become the world's largest trading partner. Our diverse workforce connects us to the rest of the world and gives us an edge over other countries. This

workforce and its connectedness through family, friends and business partnerships will enable Ontario to form significant trading relationships with China and other Asian nations.

With respect to cultural contributions, Asian Canadians have greatly enriched Canadian culture. We need only look to the world of literature and the names of Joy Kogawa, Paul Yee, Michael Ondaatje, Anita Rau Badami, Shauna Singh Baldwin, Wayson Choy and Rohinton Mistry to remind us of how lucky we are to have such great writers tell us wonderful, compelling and thought-provoking stories in their own unique voices that reach back into their Asian heritage and experience.

Asian Ontarians have also excelled in other areas, such as sciences, the medical community and government. Our current Governor General, Adrienne Clarkson, was a journalist who blazed many trails and who is one of Canada's greatest advocates for its artists.

I probably don't have time to talk about medical and other contributions, but I want to talk about our opportunity to right a historical wrong. Asian immigrants' industriousness was not always appreciated. There were many attempts to curtail Asian immigration, as well as the rights and freedoms of Asian Canadians, through such draconian policies as the infamous head tax. We have an excellent opportunity to demonstrate Ontario's maturity. We are a province of acceptance and openness that celebrates our diversity.

This bill is more than a symbolic message. Bill 113 provides an important opportunity for all Ontarians to learn and celebrate the rich heritage we share as a result of the contributions Asian Canadians have made to our great province. In supporting this bill, we are providing a wonderful learning opportunity for the generations to come to discover and acknowledge the contributions by celebrating May as Asian Heritage Month. May is an excellent month to utilize Bill 113 as a springboard to teach our youth about the integral role that Asian Canadians have played in the development of Ontario, as school is still in session. Designating May as Asian Heritage Month is an opportunity to celebrate the cultural, economic and political contributions from the people of Asian heritage who make up the province's social and cultural fabric.

What makes us truly Canadian is our inherent understanding of multiculturalism. We relish the diversity of our communities and welcome the variety of cultural choices in our lives. This is what makes us unique and the envy of the world, and why so many go to such great lengths to make Ontario their home. We maintain our Canadian identity while celebrating our ancestral, ethnic and cultural ties. But what is special about Ontarians is not just our pride in our own heritage but the pride we take in celebrating the myriad of cultures that comprise our diverse society. Celebrating Ontario's diversity allows us to grow as a province and as a people, culturally, spiritually and economically.

I want to refer to a statement that was made by Senator Poy on May 25, 2004, in her speech to the

Rotary Club of Canada: "This month is about the internationalization of knowledge, because fostering intercultural understanding in Canada is the first step to creating a truly cosmopolitan Canadian individual who is ready to take on the world. And indeed, for our young people, this kind of multicultural education is more important than ever because they are going to have to compete with the best and the brightest around the world."

I'm proud to table this bill and move it for second reading. I'm sure that many members of all parties will be supporting this bill, and that they agree with me that we in Ontario and we as Canadians have come a long way.

1110

The Deputy Speaker: Further debate?

Mr. Frank Klees (Oak Ridges): I'm certainly pleased to rise to add my comments to this debate. I commend the member from Markham for bringing this bill forward.

I have the honour of representing the riding of Oak Ridges, which is composed of the communities of Richmond Hill, the northern part of Markham—north of 16th Avenue—and Whitchurch-Stouffville, one of the most highly ethnically diverse ridings in the province. That's what makes it so rich. Within the context of the Richmond Hill area of my riding, some 30% of the voters are in fact of Asian descent.

I am proud to call friends those individuals who have come to this country, either themselves or their parents. I too am an immigrant to this country. I was five years old when my parents immigrated from Germany. I know that they came here, that they made that decision to immigrate, because of the opportunity that was here, and that is here for anyone who chooses to seize that opportunity and the freedoms represented here. It's appropriate that we recognize our heritage. I am proud of mine. We should all be proud of our heritage, and those who are of Asian descent have much to be proud of.

I want to refer to some of the organizations within this province, and specifically within my riding, that celebrate that heritage. One is the Mon Sheong Foundation. This is an organization that is doing much good, not only within York region but across the province. The Mon Sheong Foundation was based on a philosophy of care and respect. It is based on the life of Mon Sheong, who lived in China around 300 B.C. The Mon Sheong Foundation has sponsored the construction of long-term-care facilities throughout the greater Toronto area and provides ethno-specific care for individuals who are much in need of care and support in their elderly years.

I also want to pay tribute to another organization, the Carefirst Seniors and Community Services Association. This, again, is an ethno-specific organization that provides community support and home care services. Dr. John Chan is the president and works with his wife, Susie; Dr. Ambrose Fung is the past president; and Helen Leung is the executive director—incredible service provided to seniors who cannot speak the language but

who need the kind of community care support that is being provided by Carefirst. They deserve to be supported by our government, by this government, for the kind of care they are providing.

I also want to make reference—in fact, I'm attending tomorrow night one of the regular events hosted by the Richmond Hill Chinese Seniors Association. That is sponsored by an individual who has done much good work throughout the entire area. I want to pay tribute to that organization because they provide services, recreational opportunities and supports to seniors that are very important to them. Mr. Jackie Lee, who is president of that organization, deserves a great deal of credit for the untiring work he puts into that organization.

Finally, I want to recognize the good work of the Richmond Hill and Markham Chinese Business Association: president, Daisy Wai; first vice-president, David Ho; second vice-president, Benedict Leung; third vice-president, Stanley Yim; secretary, Peggy Tang; treasurer, Larry Chiu; and legal adviser, Sunny Ho. This is an organization that has done so much over the years to integrate the Chinese business community with the broader community to ensure there is co-operation, not only within the business community but among all the levels of government as well.

When we look at our communities—I speak specifically about York region, but the broader GTA and the broader business community in this province—the amount of investment, the amount of contribution that has been made by the Asian community to this province is insurmountable. If we were to extricate the contributions of the Asian community from this province, there would be a very noticeable void. So we welcome and we are thankful for the contributions of the Asian community, their contribution to the culture of this province, to the culture and strength of our local communities, and certainly to the strength and viability of our economic foundation here in this province.

This community deserves this recognition. I certainly wholeheartedly support it. As I indicated, I welcome the initiative by the member from Markham. I join with him. I have many opportunities to attend the same events as the member from Markham and to celebrate with the Asian community the many good works that are done.

In closing, I want in my remarks to thank this community for its generosity. Whether it's the Dragon Ball, whether it is one of the many local fundraising events that take place to support the various charitable organizations and the good works the community does, time and time again we see many of the same people who are giving, I know, sacrificially for that good cause. It comes out of that philosophy of care and respect, two principles that are so fundamental and so important and that are often forgotten. It's the Asian community that reminds us of it, not only in word but in deed. We are grateful for that and we look forward to all members of the House supporting this initiative today.

Mr. Gilles Bisson (Timmins–James Bay): I want to say that New Democrats will gladly support this motion. We think it's high time.

I'm going to come at this from a different perspective, because the history of Canada and how it has welcomed the Asian community, specifically the Chinese, to this country is not a proud one. We know that Canada at one time had a head tax that said that if you wanted to have your children or your wife emigrate here, after we went and got Chinese workers from China to work on building our national dream, the CPR, the only way you could get those children or wives here was to raise \$500, which was equal to about two years' wages at the time. We know the Chinese community has for some time been looking for the Canadian government to say, "I'm sorry, that was wrong, that was something that never should have happened; it is a blight on our history," and to have some form of apology and even some form of compensation. I look at this motion a little bit through that glass and say that this is maybe one way we in the province of Ontario can do the right thing.

Every country, not just Canada, has some dark moments in its history. Canada has far fewer than most. I think we can all agree that this is a great country we live in and we're awfully happy to be here, because compared to many other nations, Canada, even at its worst times, is probably one of the best countries to live in. I would argue, it is the best country to live in. I've travelled around the world. I've been to Asia, Africa, South America, Europe and other places, and there aren't many places that compare to Canada.

To the Chinese community, I say specifically, on behalf of New Democrats, we're sorry. That should never have happened in our history.

People came here and contributed greatly to the building of our national railway. Many of them died. It was very dangerous work. They were paid half the wage that white workers were paid at the time. They were given the most difficult and most dangerous jobs.

One of the stories I remember reading at one point around the whole issue of the building of the railway was that when the Chinese workers were brought over by boat to Canada, they couldn't figure out why so many Chinese workers were dying. They thought they had some sort of disease that they contracted in China before they came to Canada.

1120

You know what it was? They were malnourished. It was as simple as that. The food that we were providing by way of the contractors who worked for the CPR to the Chinese workers was less than what we gave white workers, and the Chinese workers were having to live on fish and dried rice. They just thought that was the right way to do things for those pesky Chinese workers.

I just think it's high time that the government of Canada take the lead of the province of Ontario and make such a motion as what we have here in the House today. We say specifically to the Chinese community, "We're sorry. That was the wrong thing to do. It was a bad time

in our history, and we're prepared to say that and to move forward."

As the motion says, this is about the entire Asian community. I want to say to the member, I agree with much of what you've said, because I'll tell you, one place in the world that is growing by leaps and bounds and is, quite frankly, probably going to outperform us economically in very short order, is the Asian part of the world.

I am astounded. I have travelled to Japan, to Hong Kong, China, Burma, Thailand, Malaysia, Vietnam and other places, and I'm just amazed at the resourcefulness of the people within those countries. Many times, within countries where governments are sometimes a hindrance to marketplace principles, such as China and Vietnam, the Chinese people and the Vietnamese people seem to say, "So what? The government's there. We're just going to keep on doing what we've got to do." They're building their own economy.

In fact, I've got to tell you this story because I think it's quite a fascinating one. My brother and I were just in Vietnam in January for three weeks, and we travelled from Ho Chi Minh City down to Saigon, Hue and a few other places. You've got to try the beach in Nha Trang—it's wonderful—but that's another story.

The interesting part was this: Here we are, I guess about—what?—30 years after the Vietnam War, and I found a couple of things rather remarkable about the Vietnamese people. We say in French "la rancune"—I don't know what the word is in English—there is no bitterness, no hard feelings, among the north and south Vietnamese toward each other 30 years after the war. I thought, wow, that doesn't make any sense. If that was Canada and we had fought that kind of war, we'd still be dragging baggage from 30 years ago, because we know we've been dragging baggage between the French and the English in this country for the past 300 years.

Interestingly, there is an understanding within the country that that was then and this is now; we need to move forward. I thought that was rather interesting. So I probed that a little bit more and had a chance to talk to people on the street. When you walk into restaurants or go into the markets and you find somebody who speaks either French or English—for example, I spoke to some former north Vietnamese soldiers and got their take on things. They were saying, "I wasn't a Communist. That's not the reason I fought. I was fighting for unification." Communism was sort of like the second thing behind, but now that Vietnam is one country, this is a great thing.

So then I talked to some southern Vietnamese, and one guy was particularly interesting. He was a lieutenant colonel in the southern army. This particular lieutenant colonel did five years in a work camp. So let's be clear here. This guy didn't have it easy: lieutenant colonel, south Vietnamese army, captured after the war by the north Vietnamese, forced to work in a labour camp for five years. I said to him, "How do you feel?" He said, "Well, the important thing is, we're one country."

I think that is the remarkable thing with the Asian people: They understand that you have to work together,

that there is nothing to be gained by working by way of division. Often, in North America and in Europe, we tend to divide each other into particular groups when we're trying to move a project or something ahead. The Asian people, it's my understanding—and I don't pretend to understand it in any great detail—have more of a sense of community about saying, "All right. That was then; this is now. Let's move forward. We've got to do what we've got to do." I think that is a remarkable strength of any people, because it means that you can move forward as a community at a much greater pace, and you can make things happen at a much greater depth, if you're able to do that by way of moving forward as a community.

The other thing that I thought was interesting in speaking to Vietnamese people was this whole sense of government. I'd never been in a Communist country. It was the first time I had ever travelled into one, so it was kind of an eye-opener. You'd talk to the Vietnamese and you'd start looking around and say, "Well, look at all these businesses." Everywhere you look, there's somebody doing something. A business is either somebody carrying vegetables on their back on—what do they call those sticks?

Interjection.

Mr. Bisson: Yes. Whatever it is. You know, where they carry stuff, or somebody has a restaurant on the sidewalk, or somebody is selling something, or somebody owns a building. There's all kinds of stuff going on. I started to wonder what was going on.

We had a chance as part of the delegation of APF because I was there partly on APF business and partly on my own. I used my own travel points. That way nobody can come back and say I'm travelling on the government's dime. But the point is this: When we met with the members of the Vietnamese National Assembly, who are for the most part Communist, I said, "How do you explain all this entrepreneurship within your economy?" They said, "Well, 60% of the economy is run privately." I said, "Why is that?" He said, "Because the people wouldn't listen to us anyway." I thought, "Isn't that an interesting comment from a government member?" I said, "What do you guys do?" He said, "We let them do it. We have a minimal form of tax for private businesses." I think it's a sliding scale of 3% to 5%. But 60% of the economy is run by private individuals. It could be a small business, such as somebody carrying fruits and vegetables on their back, or somebody owning a number of buildings and having employees and selling products across the world. I thought, "Well, isn't that interesting?" I think it speaks to the heart and soul of Asian people. They're entrepreneurs in their own right, even though they have this sense of community.

I think that's the schism that we don't get in North America. We tend to think, if you live in a community, it means you've got to be a social democrat or a socialist, and if you work in business, then you've got to be a capitalist. There's no being both. In Asia, that schism doesn't even seem to exist, in my view. People are saying, "We don't care. We're Communist, capitalist, what-

ever. I've got to do what I've got to do, and we're going to do it together as a community."

So what you saw there was a very dynamic economy that's on the move. Everywhere you went, if it was in Hanoi, Saigon, Hue, Halong or wherever you might be, there was more construction going on than you could shake a stick at. Then you go to a place like Japan—and I've had the opportunity to go to Japan before—and I don't need to explain Japan; I think most people get it. Japan is like a powerhouse. You say to yourself, "Why is that?" I think it's because of the psyche of the Asian people. They come at things from a different perspective. They come at things from a sense of community and a sense of understanding that when we bring people along with us, it makes it a better thing. At the end, we get a much better product.

I've been to Hong Kong—again, the same thing. Man, that is one heck of a city to visit. To see and watch the wealth in that area is just unbelievable.

Recently I was talking to a professor who teaches at a city in China—and I forget which one it is. It's one of the new emerging cities. They're sort of economic free zones. The guy was saying that something like 10 years ago, the town had 20,000 people in it. It's now about four million. Why? Because Chinese people are flocking to it because it's an opportunity for them to participate in the economy. Chinese people are very resourceful and want to participate in the economy. Even though the government tries to keep them out, they just come in and do it. Here's this city—and I forget the name of it—it's like four million or five million people, and he says, "You've got to see this place. There are booming things happening."

I regress here, and I'm going to say this: Do we remember a guy by the name of Richard Nixon? Some years ago, Richard Nixon, a former President of the United States, opened up trade with China, which was a good thing. But the interesting thing is, the Americans, as we know, are quite protectionist, right? The Americans like to speak the line, "Let's open up the economy," but what they're getting at is, "But don't open it up against me." But anyway, I find it interesting that here was Richard Nixon, who went to China in the early 1970s, met with Chairman Mao, opened trade and a relationship with the Chinese and said, "We're open for business." Well, I'm telling you, be careful what you ask for, because you might get it. What's happening in China, even though there's a Communist government in place, is that you've got one heck of an economy. You've got how many consumers? Over a billion. What's the actual number now?

Interjection: It's 1.5 billion.

Mr. Bisson: Yes, 1.5 billion people just in that one country. You've got all those consumers, all those workers and all those entrepreneurs. The rest of Asia is the same. You've got some really great, dynamic people, who, given the opportunity, are really going to do a bang-up job of developing their economies. I predict that within our lifetime we're going to see—we're already

starting to see it—that part of the world become the predominant part of the world when it comes to economic forces.

The United States, I think, is on the way down. The States have really isolated themselves, and I think it's a grave, grave mistake. That's my biggest problem with George Bush. It's bad enough that he has gone to war, but he's isolating the United States from the rest of the world, in my view, and I think that's really wrong. North America should be looking at how we are able to include people. We've always been the land of immigrants anyway. How can we include other parts of the world in our ideas about foreign policy and trade so that we're able to all benefit together? But I just say that that part of the world, the Pacific Rim, is a powerhouse that's going to outstrip us. In fact, we're already starting to see in Canada many state-run Chinese companies looking at places in the resource sector to spend all this money they've got. They wanted to buy out Stelco. They're interested in buying out Falconbridge. They've got the bucks to do it. I'm just saying that I think that's a reflection of the attitude and the hard work of the Chinese people, and of Asian people generally.

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I say to the member, this is a good motion and we'll certainly support it. There are many things I think your government could be doing to deal with some of the issues that the community and other communities face in Ontario vis-à-vis new immigrants, new people to this country.

As I said at the beginning—I want to close on this note—it is an opportunity after all these years to redress one of the great wrongs that was done to the Chinese and Japanese people during the Second World War. We have not exactly had a stellar record when it comes to how this country has viewed people from Asia. We saw what happened to the Chinese as we brought them here to work on the railway. We put a head tax on them. We killed them by the hundreds and almost the thousands when it came to the work camps of the railway. It was a very tough life.

We embraced the Japanese when they came because we wanted their labour, but in the Second World War we interned them. We didn't intern the Germans or the Italians, who were at war against us during the Second World War, but for some reason we decided we were going to intern the Japanese. Why? Because they looked different than us, and that challenged people. The Canadian government, if I remember correctly, has apologized to the Japanese people, and I think that is fitting, but we need to remember our history to make sure we don't repeat the stupidity this country has done in the past by doing the kinds of things we did to the Asian community vis-à-vis different actions that the federal government, by and large, has taken.

Provinces aren't exactly lily white in the way they treated people. We just need to look at the history of British Columbia, and even Ontario to some degree, to see that. But that was in the past. Canada has grown. The

provinces have grown. We've become a much more inclusive society. I think it's a great country we live in, and it's great, why? Because it is a country that says, "Come to Canada. Don't be like the United States and become a big melting pot. Come to Canada, be part of our country and keep your identity." In the end, that identity is what makes Canada so great. When you go from one end of the country to the other, you can walk down the street and you're able to see different communities from across the world living here in Canada in a way that you can hardly see anywhere else in the world. I have travelled around the world and I've never seen a place as unique as Canada when it comes to how people come together to live.

Are there problems that still challenge some of us as Canadians? Of course, but, by and large, most Canadians have embraced it, and I think Canada is much better for it.

Mr. Peter Fonseca (Mississauga East): It gives me great pleasure to speak today to Bill 113, An Act to proclaim the month of May as Asian Heritage Month, and to support my friend the member for Markham. I'm going to be sharing my time with the members from London—Fanshawe, Stormont—Dundas—Charlottenburgh, Thornhill and Davenport.

In my riding of Mississauga East, we have a very ethnically diverse community, and much of that community is made up of Asians or people of Asian ancestry. Some of the countries they may have descended from would be China, the Philippines, Korea, Thailand, India and Sri Lanka. I've had the opportunity to visit many of these countries. They have a wonderful culture and they've brought so much to our great city of Mississauga, our great province of Ontario and our great country of Canada.

I can go on and on about how much the Asian community has done for our community in terms of the homes they have bought, how they have beautified the area and opened up businesses. An example is the huge commercial and tourist centre that is located in my riding at the intersection of Dundas and Cawthra. The Mississauga Chinese Centre is one of North America's most remarkable tourist and architectural locations. If you visit there, and if those who are watching today decide to visit, it's located at 888 Dundas Street East in Mississauga East. You can see great sculptures there, replicas of the Great Wall and many of the other treasures we find throughout Asia.

The Asian community has been one that has integrated so well with all the other communities. I can say that the Yee Hong Centre, which is a long-term-care home within Mississauga, was built primarily by the Chinese community, as they have fundraised so well in the community through the Phoenix Ball. They have allowed other communities also to be part of that home. I know that my community, the Portuguese Canadian community, has a wing in that home, where they cater to them with the types of foods that they would like to eat and the culture, and make sure that they are integrated within the community.

They are also a community that's well aware of what it means to be a strong community. They know that their investments in the University of Toronto, Mississauga, will mean a more knowledgeable and skilled workforce for the city. As I mentioned, at the Yee Hong Centre for long-term care for our seniors, they know that third stage of life, that end of life. They want to make sure that our seniors live with dignity and respect.

They are a community that keeps on giving. Many of their initiatives are around prevention. They put together the Healthy Living Expo every year in Mississauga. They also have the Crime Awareness Expo every year in Mississauga. They do many things to make sure we have a strong community, build a strong community. I could go on and on, but I will allow my colleagues to speak a little bit about the Asian influence in their communities.

Ms. Laurie Scott (Haliburton–Victoria–Brock): I would like to thank the honourable member from Markham for bringing forward his bill today, An Act to proclaim the month of May as Asian Heritage Month.

The members of the Legislature are often asked to recognize the role that various cultural and ethnic groups play in the economic, cultural and political life of Ontario. We do this by setting aside days and months in which we can celebrate and showcase their accomplishments and successes. We have passed laws here in Ontario recognizing Portuguese History and Heritage Month; Irish Heritage Day, brought in by my colleague, the member from Durham; Tartan Day; United Empire Loyalists' Day; and German Pioneers Day.

I know they're just leaving, but I want to welcome the children up in the gallery who have come to see and visit us here today. I think they're quite representative of the diverse cultural backgrounds that Ontario shares and benefits from. So welcome, all the children in the gallery.

Members have also brought forward bills to recognize such occasions as Italian Heritage Day and Nikkei Heritage Day. Recently we considered Bill 150, the Celebration of Hellenic Heritage Act. Mr. Wong's bill builds upon the work done by the former MPP from Bramalea–Gore–Malton–Springdale, Raminder Gill. I did not have a chance to sit with Mr. Gill or to meet with him, but my colleagues who did told me he was a great representative and that he cared a lot about his constituents.

On June 28, 2001, Mr. Gill brought forward Bill 98. The bill would eventually pass and become the South Asian Heritage Act, 2001. Since December 14, 2001, we in Ontario have celebrated South Asian Heritage Month each day, and May 5 is recognized as South Asian Arrival Day. Raminder Gill should be proud of the work that he did in shepherding the bill through and having it become a law.

I think we should send this bill to committee for consideration. In principle, I believe it is appropriate to cast the net wider and to extend this recognition to people from all parts of Asia. We would still recognize those from south Asia, but we would add those from east Asia, central Asia and southeastern Asia.

I'm glad that Mr. Wong is not attempting to repeal the South Asian Heritage Act, and that we will continue to be able to recognize South Asian Arrival Day. Our country was built on immigrants, each of whom has come to our province and our country with their own story to tell. Immigrants have settled in communities both large and small across Ontario, enriching our lives.

There was a little-known—and we're trying to get it more known—Icelandic settlement that was in my own hometown of Kinmount. It was the first Icelandic settlement in North America. As Mr. Bisson has mentioned, certainly when they first came over, there were a lot of conditions that we wouldn't allow today, and they were hungry. I know my great-great-uncle went to pick them up by horse and wagon in the village of Coboconk, which was as far as the train went at that time. They were brought in to help complete the old IB&O, which only really got into Haliburton and then it finished. They stayed for a short time there.

Mr. Bisson: They'd still like to have the tracks.

Ms. Scott: Yes. The tracks are up, and I'd like the tracks back.

They came and stayed for a short time and then we finally persuaded the federal government to move them to Gimli, Manitoba. I know that Senator Johnson in the Senate in Ottawa is a descendant of one of the families in Gimli, Manitoba. Linda Lundstrom—if I can mention fashion—is descended from one of the Icelandic settlers there.

So we have a blessed diversity in Ontario. It's an economic strength when our businesses are able to talk directly to the customers and providers from every corner of the world. Celebrating this diversity reminds people of how everyone contributes to the strength and prosperity of Ontario. I am pleased to support the member from Markham's bill today.

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Mr. Khalil Ramal (London–Fanshawe): I want to commend my colleague from Markham for bringing in Bill 113, An Act to proclaim the month of May as Asian Heritage Month.

As is well known, Canada is a country of immigrants. People from different parts of the globe come to this country to enjoy freedom and democracy. Three days ago, I celebrated 15 years of being in Canada. I immigrated on February 14, 1989. It's almost 15 years that I've been in this wonderful country and this wonderful province.

Many colleagues from different sides of the House have spoken on this matter, and all of them in support. I believe it's very important to recognize the efforts of certain groups that came a long time ago and worked hard to build this province and build this country. The Asian community immigrated a long time ago, and worked hard to become a part of this country, and especially in Ontario to build and construct this beautiful province. This bill, I believe, will give them some recognition. As we know as a government, we shouldn't take

anyone for granted. Recognition by proclaiming the month of May as a heritage month for Asians is very important, a little payback for the people who worked hard and gave their lives to support this nation. The member from Markham spoke well in terms of why we have to proclaim that month.

Many people, when they talk about the Asian community, remember only the food. They have wonderful restaurants and wonderful food. Besides that, they contribute a lot to the economy by building buildings, constructing many different businesses and financial institutions, medical, journalists: In many ways, they participate in our lives. They worked hard to be a part of the mosaic of our society, to build our diversity and this nation. As we know, the diversity has strengthened our society. It's well received and it's a part of our logo, all of us, as we celebrate on a yearly basis.

On behalf of London–Fanshawe and my community of London, I am going to support this bill because it's very important to send a great signal to the Asian community as recognition for their effort and their work. We welcome them and all the people to come to this province.

Mr. Joseph N. Tascona (Barrie–Simcoe–Bradford): I'm very pleased to join the debate with respect to An Act to proclaim the month of May as Asian Heritage Month. As Ms. Scott has indicated, the South Asian Heritage Act, 2001—it was a bill from Raminder Gill—received royal assent on December 14, 2001. It deals with south Asian heritage.

This bill is a little different, I guess, in content, in terms of geography. It deals specifically with areas such as east Asia, south Asia, central Asia and southeastern Asia. Certainly the member from Markham is showing his respect to the community he is from in bringing this forth. In my riding, which is Barrie–Simcoe–Bradford, there have been some outstanding individuals who have contributed to the community. I know of the Chau family—Joe Chau—Roy Lam and his family and the people who operate the Izumi Japanese restaurant in our community. They have played a fundamental role not only in making our community better but also in making sure they contribute to its commerce. I know that last Saturday—unfortunately, I was previously engaged—there was the Vietnamese celebration of the new year in my riding. Certainly that shows they are growing stronger and more present with respect to celebrating their cultural heritage within Barrie–Simcoe–Bradford.

Certainly the recognition of the diversity of this country is something we've seen. I remember that when I was practising law in Toronto in the late 1980s with the law firm WeirFoulds, my secretary at the time had come over from Hong Kong. She had emigrated with her family. There was a lot of emigration from Hong Kong at that time because of the scare about what was going to happen with respect to mainland China. A number of individuals came over here and joined the community,

sank their roots into the community. That was just an indication of the types of reasons why people do come over. I think the member for Timmins–James Bay spoke about the building of the railway and the labour that was needed to do that. There are all kinds of reasons for people to have come to this country and contribute to the betterment of the community.

Certainly the member from Markham is showing his respect and appreciation. Asian Heritage Month, which will be celebrated in May—this a private member's bill, and I would expect this to be supported within the House. We'll see whether his government shows the same kind of respect that he's shown to the people who are covered by Asian Heritage Month, and whether this becomes law at all.

Mr. Mario G. Racco (Thornhill): I will be supporting Bill 113, the Asian Heritage Act. I want to thank my colleague from Markham, Tony Wong, for bringing the bill to the House to make sure that the Asian community will continue to celebrate the month of May as Asian Heritage Month, but in a formal way. The Asian community has already celebrated May for many years. In fact, I and my wife, who is Chinese and who was born and grew up in Hong Kong, have been able to participate in such festivities for a number of years. Also, as my colleague Tony Wong has said, the Senate of Canada has already declared the month of May as Asian Heritage Month. Of course, Bill 113 will allow the province of Ontario to officially declare Asian Heritage Month.

I also want to say thank you to so many members of the Asian community who have been asking that the province of Ontario do such a thing; specifically, the Canadian Multicultural Council, Asians in Ontario, specifically Jose Saavedra from the Philippine Independence Day Council, and Dr. Ming-Tat Cheung, from the CMCAO and president of the Chinese Cultural Centre. They represent a number of Asian communities that are strongly in favour of Bill 113; specifically, the Japanese Canadian Cultural Centre, the Indo-Canadian Association, Bangladeshi-Canadian Community Services, the Lion City Club of Singapore, Yin Hua Association, the Canada Sri Lanka Association of Ontario, the Macao Club of Toronto, the Korean Canadian Cultural Centre, the Overseas Renaissance Association of Chinese Culture, and the Vietnamese Association, Toronto. Those are only a few of the Asian organizations that are asking this House to declare May as Asian Heritage Month.

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Approximately 12% of my constituents are Asian. Of course, that's a reflection of Ontario. As my colleague the honourable Tony Wong from Markham has said, today 12% in Ontario, or 1.5 million people, have Asian heritage. Of course, it's an opportunity for all of us to celebrate our diversity and to celebrate that we have the best. That is our culture. I thank all the members, because I know the House will fully support Bill 113.

Mr. Tony Ruprecht (Davenport): Congratulations to Tony Wong for introducing Asian Heritage Month. I know, as he said earlier, that this is not simply a symbolic gesture. Canadians of Asian background helped us to enshrine multiculturalism in our Constitution. Even today, what is it that multicultural Canadians and mainline Canadians are looking for in the Constitution? This is how multiculturalism breaks down into two pillars, basically. They're looking for, one, equality before the law and opportunity in our schools. So the law must certainly be colour blind; it cannot be prejudiced. Our children must have the right to go to any school, which must be open to them as Canadians. The second pillar of multiculturalism is to maintain one's culture and one's tradition. That can be done through language and through some cultural institutions.

Asian Canadians have much to be proud about, but even today we know that multiculturalism has also a third component, and that is that multiculturalism means business. I know all of us who've been to other countries can see that Canadians of Asian backgrounds mainly come from China, Pakistan, India, Vietnam, Korea or Japan. These are the major multicultural populations in Canada. We know. We see them on airplanes. We see them doing business with their country of origin. How wonderful it is for us to see that, because it means more taxes, it means greater participation, and it means they feel they are true Canadians.

So, my friends, it is very clear, when we're looking at the third pillar of Canadians, we know that their contribution is itemized in this book called Toronto's Many Faces. Each one of these groups is very clearly received in this book because it shows, quite openly, their contribution to this country. Yes, I will sign this book for you, if you want a copy of it, because you should know the contributions of each one of these groups, who are truly Canadians. Proud Canadians they are, but they must also have the right to be proud of their own culture.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to Mr. Wong for producing this great heritage month.

Mr. Jim Brownell (Stormont–Dundas–Charlottenburgh): It is indeed an honour for me to stand in support of my colleague from Markham in recognizing Bill 113, a bill to proclaim May as Asian Heritage Month. As well, it's an honour for me today to recognize some visitors in the members' gallery. These are students from the University of Toronto who work with Cathay Magazine, their editor-in-chief being Huan Wang, and her editorial board here from the university. It was just before Christmas that I met them and was able to share my old European heritage with their new Asian heritage. That was an exciting time.

I had arranged that they would visit this afternoon, but when I heard that the honourable member my friend from Markham was presenting the second reading debate, I hurriedly got on my BlackBerry and sent a message to the editor-in-chief and said, "Come on over this morning.

You will see the House in action. You will see second reading of this bill that recognizes, supports and encourages the sharing of the heritage and the multiculturalism of this great province, and the sharing of my old United Empire Loyalist heritage with the heritage that all these new immigrants have brought into our province." That's exciting.

What's especially exciting too is that this bill recognizes May as the month. May is a month when our children are still in school. It's an opportunity to work this multiculturalism and the heritage of the countries that make up Asia into the curriculum. As a retired educator, I spent many years teaching the history and the heritage of these Asian countries and talking about the inequities too.

The member from Timmins–James Bay talked about the inequities and the challenges of the past. This is what we have to understand. With this bill and the proclamation of a special day to recognize the heritage of Asians—this is a great bill.

I welcome these students from the University of Toronto.

The Deputy Speaker: Mr. Wong, you have two minutes to reply.

Mr. Wong: I want to thank all the members who have spoken, and I do appreciate their support. The member from Oak Ridges spoke about Mon Sheong, Carefirst, and dragon boat, and I thank him for that.

I also want to talk about the Vedic centre for the South Asian community in my riding and the great work that they've done. I was recently at that centre attending a tsunami memorial.

I also want to talk about Mr. Tae-Yön Hwang, a medical doctor who arrived in Ontario in 1948, as an example of a Korean immigrant who arrived prior to the mass migration of the 1960s. He worked as a medical intern for several years before settling in Blind River, Ontario. In the early 1960s, he bought eight acres of land and established a poultry ranch for the purpose of financially assisting the migration of several individuals from Korea to Canada.

By the onset of the Second World War, many Japanese Canadians owned farms, boats, and other property, all of which were confiscated by the government during the war.

I cannot but feel a bit emotional when I repeat that one Chinese worker died for every mile of the CPR track, yet that community was still hit with the infamous head tax and the notorious Chinese Immigration Act.

In conclusion, I want to share with all of you a Chinese proverb: "Do unto the seniors of others as you would to your own. Do unto the children of others as you would to your own." I submit that that is Canadianism.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you to all the members this morning. The time allowed for private members' public business has expired.

INCOME TAX AMENDMENT ACT
(PUBLIC TRANSIT EXPENSE
TAX CREDIT), 2005

LOI DE 2005 MODIFIANT LA LOI
DE L'IMPÔT SUR LE REVENU
(CRÉDIT D'IMPÔT POUR DÉPENSES
DE TRANSPORTS EN COMMUN)

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): We'll deal first with ballot item number 49, standing in the name of Mr. O'Toole.

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

All those in favour, say "aye."

All those opposed, say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker: If we're going to do something, let's get our minds wrapped around it. It's carried.

Pursuant to standing order 96, the bill is referred to—

Mr. John O'Toole (Durham): With your indulgence—I thank the members first—I'd refer Bill 137 to the standing committee on finance and economic affairs.

The Deputy Speaker: Mr. O'Toole has asked that—

Mr. O'Toole: The committee on estimates.

The Deputy Speaker: We're really having trouble making our minds up here this morning.

Mr. O'Toole has asked that the bill be referred to the standing committee on estimates.

Agreed? Agreed.

ASIAN HERITAGE ACT, 2005

LOI DE 2005
SUR LE PATRIMOINE ASIATIQUE

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): We shall now deal with ballot item number 50, standing in the name of Mr. Wong.

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

Pursuant to standing order 96—

Mr. Tony C. Wong (Markham): I would ask that the bill be referred to the social policy committee.

The Deputy Speaker: Mr. Wong has asked that it be referred to the standing committee on social policy.

Agreed? Agreed.

We've dealt with all the business relative to private members. This House is adjourned until 1:30 of the clock.

The House recessed from 1200 to 1330.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

ANGUS THE ELEPHANT

Mr. John O'Toole (Durham): I'm pleased to rise in the House today to pay tribute to my biggest constituent. I might also say he was my biggest supporter. Angus the elephant weighs in at seven tonnes and stands 11 feet tall.

For close to 20 years, he has been a resident of Bowmanville Zoological Park. He is famous for scores of appearances in movies and ads, not to mention hundreds of visits to downtown Bowmanville and many other communities for parades, fairs and special events.

For most of his 26 years, Angus has brought a glimpse of the African savannah to Ontario. He has been in the Globe and Mail headlines recently because he is going home. Angus was just two years old when he was captured in South Africa and taken to a zoo in Texas. He was acquired by the Quebec City zoo before being adopted by the Bowmanville zoo in 1986.

The Bowmanville zoo has announced plans to return Angus to Kwandwe, a 20,000-hectare privately owned game preserve in South Africa. It is expected he will be reintroduced into the natural habitat of elephants after making a few more movie appearances.

I'd like to commend my constituents, zoo director Michael Hackenberger, and Dr. Wendy Korver, the veterinarian, along with the entire team at the Bowmanville zoo for the care they have lavished on Angus over the past years. We're sorry that Angus is leaving town, but we wish him well.

Elephants are known for their great memories. As the old saying goes, they never forget. I'm certain he will not forget me.

YOUTH SCIENCE MONTH

Mrs. Donna H. Cansfield (Etobicoke Centre): Cell mutation, robotics, water pollution, air quality, aeronautics, biochemistry, physics: What do they all have in common? It's March and it's Youth Science Month. As we speak, 250,000 students from across Ontario are planning to compete in local and regional science fairs. They're hoping to be among the top young scientists who will earn a spot on the provincial science team and take part in the Canada-wide science fair to be held in Vancouver in May.

I'm proud to say that our government supports these young people through the Ontario Trillium Foundation grant to the provincial organization called Sci-Tech Ontario. This funding supports the Stepping Stone Award, which covers the cost for each regional fair to send an additional student to the national fair. This helps to ensure that all deserving students, regardless of economic means, have an opportunity to showcase their talent and their full potential.

I would like to encourage all members to visit their local and regional fairs. It's a wonderful opportunity to know what the students in your schools are doing, because the students today are your doctors, your scientists, your technologists and your politicians of tomorrow. It's our responsibility to go out there and support them in these regional fairs. If we don't support them, not only through our money but through our presence, they won't know that they indeed are our future.

HIGHWAY 7

Mr. Norman W. Sterling (Lanark–Carleton): I rise to remind all members of this House that the residents of the riding of Lanark–Carleton, which I represent, have been waiting a long, long time to have Highway 7 between Carleton Place and Highway 417 widened to four lanes. Another tragedy occurred on January 24, when a 33-year-old man from Orléans of Ottawa was killed after being hit in a head-on crash. Only three days later, the highway was closed again because of another serious accident, although mercifully no one was killed.

The McGuinty government is led by an Ottawa native. Dalton knows the importance of four-laning this particular piece of highway. Next week, most members of the House will attend the Good Roads conference here in Toronto. I understand that the town of Carleton Place and Lanark county will be meeting with the Minister of Transportation. I call on the minister to tell them exactly when construction will begin on this most important piece of highway.

LOCAL HEALTH
INTEGRATION NETWORKS

Mr. Peter Kormos (Niagara Centre): With a stroke of the pen and an arrogant shrug of the shoulders, the McGuinty Liberals have demolished district health councils—historic, long-serving, skilled district health councils—off the face of Ontario's map. In their stead, we see these mega-jurisdictions that will facilitate only the de-democratization of health supervision and health care delivery, the centralization of it and the undermining of local control and input, and nowhere more dangerously, dishonestly and deceptively so than in the regional municipality of Niagara, which this government has thrown into a mega-LHIN—local health integration network—with Burlington, Stoney Creek, Hamilton and places as far away as Norfolk and the county of Brant and Brantford.

This government does a huge disservice and it creates huge new health dangers for the people of Niagara region by doing this. The government members from Niagara region now have the opportunity, and the duty, to stand with the two opposition members from Niagara to fight this government tooth and nail in their imposition of a totally artificial and unrealistic boundary and this government's ongoing denial of the perpetual underservicing of Niagara, to the detriment and ill health of Niagarans.

CONSERVATIVE HEALTH
CARE POLICY

Mr. Mike Colle (Eglinton–Lawrence): I'd like to say a few words about John Tory's health care agenda. When questioned about his health care plan by the Guelph Mercury, they concluded that Tory is "short on concrete alternatives." When reminded of the health care mess left

by Mike Harris and Ernie Eves, his answer was, "I wasn't part of the decision making in the past."

It's not that easy. Tory wants to forget that "health care suffered the steepest decline on his party's watch." Tory does have a plan in mind, as bizarre as it is. This is what he told the Guelph Mercury. Listen to this: "Using the 407 toll highway as a model"—can you believe that?—"he would involve the private sector in all government projects, from health care to subway construction."

Yes, the 407, the worst model in the private sector for health care. The Conservatives said tolls on 407 would increase by 2%. Do you know what the tolls have increased by? Two hundred and thirty per cent.. Then the Conservatives sold the 407 for \$3 billion. Do you know what it's worth right now? It's worth \$12 billion.

Mr. Tory wants to adopt the 407's pay-as-you-go-style health care in Ontario. Do you know what you'll need? You'll need a transponder to get into the hospital. You'll need a transponder to go see a doctor. Yes, John Tory wants 407-style health care for this province. Can you believe that? The 407 as a model for health care? Even the member for Niagara Centre can't believe that.

STUDENT'S COMMENTS

Mr. Frank Klees (Oak Ridges): I trust that you were as shocked as I was to read this morning that Jeremy Patfield and his classmates were ejected from Rideau Hall in Ottawa because Jeremy was overheard to ask what was in fact a very astute question: "Is that the lady who spends the money on the Queen when she comes?" He was of course referring to the Governor General, who is renowned for her extravagant spending habits.

Rather than being commended for his astuteness, his visit to the Governor General's residence was abruptly terminated. What message does that send to our young people? We all, at one time or another, have expressed concern at the lack of interest in the political process on the part of youth. Here we see a spark of interest, only to have it snuffed out by the overzealous staff of the Governor General.

What will the penalty be for any of the grade 5 students who tour here if they are overheard to ask, after seeing the Premier, "Is that the man who broke all those promises?" Will they be thrown out as well?

As a legislator, I want to publicly commend Jeremy Patfield for his knowledge of current events and for expressing his interest, and I want to call on the Governor General to extend a personal apology to Jeremy and to his classmates for the unconscionable treatment they experienced while they were guests in her official residence.

1340

FEDERAL-PROVINCIAL
FISCAL POLICIES

Mr. John Wilkinson (Perth–Middlesex): Fair is fair. Our Premier is spearheading a movement in Ontario to

narrow the \$23-billion gap between what Ontario gives to the federal government versus what we get back. We're willing to stand up for what is fair. I rise today to ask the question that's on everybody's mind: Is the official opposition against Ontario getting its fair share of money from the federal government?

Yesterday, during question period, the acting Leader of the Opposition suggested that the Premier call for a meeting of the Council of the Federation, but his call comes after the meeting had already happened. They're out of tune and out of touch on this file. The reality is that under the eight years of Conservative rule in Ontario, the fiscal imbalance between Ontario and the federal government grew.

This is a serious issue, and one that matters to every single Ontarian. I'm sick of the Tory talk. We need action now. I challenge all members of this House to rise in support of Premier McGuinty's resolution later today. I challenge them to follow our lead. The issue is simple: Ontario pays \$23 billion more than we get back. That's not fair, it's not good business, and we are willing to stand up for what is fair.

I'm proud to be a Canadian. I believe Canada needs a strong Ontario so that they continue to grow and prosper. I ask all members of this House to get on board now. Stand with us as we fight for Ontarians, as we fight for what is fair. Vote in favour of the Premier's motion and show your support for every single Ontarian we are proud to represent. Fair is fair.

CITY OF TORONTO

Ms. Kathleen O. Wynne (Don Valley West): I stand as a proud representative of a Toronto riding and as a Toronto citizen. After the previous government cut funding to cities across the province, Toronto was hit hard, and we can see the effects of those cuts today. The McGuinty government is working to fix the mess that was left behind by the previous government, in Toronto and around the province but particularly in Toronto.

A healthy and vibrant Toronto is necessary for a healthy and vibrant Ontario. That's why we are investing \$91 million in Toronto this year as their share of the provincial gas tax. That is new and growing money. We've also invested \$90 million for budget assistance; \$1.05 billion over five years in joint provincial-federal-city funding for the TTC; \$1 billion over seven years in GO Transit capital projects; and \$3 million in the Toronto District School Board to make facilities more accessible and affordable to not-for-profit groups. That money is making a difference across the city.

We are committed to forging a stronger, more productive relationship with Toronto. That's why we are continuing to work toward a new City of Toronto Act. That's what that discussion is about, and it is a good, solid debate we are having with the city.

If the members opposite want fairness for Toronto, they should prove it today by voting in favour of the Premier's resolution. Ontario needs to be treated fairly by

the federal government. Toronto is a vibrant part of Ontario, and we are looking for fairness.

BLACK HISTORY MONTH

Mrs. Linda Jeffrey (Brampton Centre): Mr. Speaker, as you know, the month of February marks Black History Month. The black community plays a vital role within the social and cultural mosaic of both my riding of Brampton Centre and the province of Ontario.

For more than 20 years, the staff and volunteers of the United Achievers Club of Brampton have demonstrated an extraordinary commitment to providing cultural programs, assistance for seniors, women's support programs, mentorship initiatives, education and training. As well, every year, the United Achievers Club raises money that they give in the form of scholarships to students of African and Caribbean descent.

Today I would also like to recognize the achievements of Mr. Leonard Braithwaite. Born on October 23, 1923, Mr. Braithwaite was the first African Canadian to be elected to a provincial Legislature in Canada. As an MPP, Mr. Braithwaite was the opposition party critic for both the Departments of Labour and Welfare.

In his first speech to the Ontario Legislature in 1964, Mr. Braithwaite spoke out against some Ontario schools that were still practising segregation. His criticism led to the Ontario government's prohibiting segregated schools in Ontario. As well, Mr. Braithwaite was an advocate for gender equality. For example, in 1966 he pushed for the addition of female pages in this House, at a time when females were not allowed to be pages. Two years after he began to lobby on this issue, the first female pages started working at Queen's Park.

This month, I encourage all Ontarians to learn about the significant role that African Canadians have played in the history of our province. Both the United Achievers Club and Leonard Braithwaite are examples of these contributions. Mr. Braithwaite is in our Speaker's gallery today, if we could welcome him.

The Speaker (Hon. Alvin Curling): Let me further extend a welcome to Leonard Braithwaite, who has set the path for many of us. He was the representative of the riding of Etobicoke in the 27th, 28th and 29th Parliaments. So I too, as all of us, would like to welcome you to the House today, Mr. Braithwaite.

MOTIONS

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS

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

The Speaker (Hon. Alvin Curling): Is there unanimous consent for the House leader to put forward that motion? Agreed.

Hon. Mr. Duncan: I move that, pursuant to standing order 96(g), notice be waived for ballot item 51.

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

The member from Markham.

Mr. Tony C. Wong (Markham): Speaker, I seek unanimous consent to move second and third readings of Bill 113, Asian Heritage Act, 2005.

The Speaker: Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? No.

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

Hon. Dwight Duncan (Minister of Energy, Government House Leader): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: The Minister of Education is scheduled to give a speech today and the printed text is not ready yet in translation. The English is available and I believe it's been shared with the members. We will have the French translation momentarily. I apologize to the House for that mishap. Would the opposition consent to allow the statement to go forward?

The Speaker (Hon. Alvin Curling): Do we have consent? Agreed.

SCHOOL FACILITIES INSTALLATIONS SCOLAIRES

Hon. Gerard Kennedy (Minister of Education): I rise to speak to the House today about a new government effort to ensure that every Ontario student has a good place to learn: a school that is clean, safe, in good repair and, most importantly, able to deliver the programs that every student needs to succeed. The Good Places to Learn report, which is being distributed now for the first time, is an overhaul of our capital funding formula. It sets the direction for changes to operation funding and provides for completely new school closing guidelines and capital planning by school boards.

At the most basic, unfortunately, too many of our schools have been neglected for far too long. Over the past 10 years, a record number of schools have been closed and there has been a huge backlog of repair projects waiting in the system. This has taken a toll on our education community and on our students.

Malheureusement, un trop grand nombre de nos écoles ont été pendant trop longtemps négligées. Au cours des 10 dernières années, un nombre record d'écoles ont été fermées, et il existe un arriéré considérable de projets de réparation majeurs qui sont bloqués dans le système.

For too long, inadequate facilities and funding have driven student programs. It is critical that we now let the programs that students need drive our facility investment. Boards will be funded to support lowered class sizes,

room for 16- and 17-year-olds who don't drop out, early childhood learning and care spaces, and space for community organizations.

1350

Today I'm very pleased to share with my honourable colleagues the details of that plan, a plan to ensure that every student is able to learn in a school that is in good repair and well funded. Earlier today, the Premier announced the establishment of \$280 million annually to pay for a \$4-billion amortization fund available to school boards across the province to support school repairs, additions and replacements.

The Premier and I spoke to students this morning at Vaughan Road Academy, who told us how they shivered in some of their classes because of an inadequate heating system. Several weeks ago at the same school, a caretaker was hit with a 10-pound piece of concrete, potentially because of damage from the roof not having been repaired.

Ontario's school buildings are getting in the way of the excellence in learning we need to take place within them. This Good Places to Learn initiative will give students a better chance at success because, in order for our students to succeed, the whole learning environment has to be right. Our students deserve the best because they are our greatest strength going forward.

L'initiative Lieux propices à l'apprentissage permettra aux élèves de mieux réussir, car pour assurer leur succès, c'est tout le milieu d'apprentissage qui doit être à la hauteur, et nos élèves méritent des conditions optimales, car ils sont notre plus grand atout.

This \$280-million annual investment will translate into \$4 billion worth of major repairs, expansions or replacement schools. That means that more schools will get as many repairs in the next 18 months as they have in the last seven years. Some 1.6 million students across the province will benefit in schools that need major repairs.

We are scrapping parts of the previous government's flawed funding formula, which forced school boards to close a school in order to build a new one. In its place, we will ensure that all boards have access to the capital resources they need, and we will also stop paying a premium in repairs for neglected buildings and grounds.

I'm pleased to report that by overhauling the mechanics of the formula devised by the last government, we were able to find significant savings to help ensure that all students can benefit from their learning environments. Under the previous government's formula, \$109 million a year were being sent to school boards for buildings that were not underway, and \$26 million more were spent than were needed for financing the same schools. We are working with school boards and outside experts to establish financing and purchasing arrangements that will maximize the benefits to our students.

The funds are being made available early to school boards to allow repairs to begin this summer, before the school year even starts. All boards will receive their fair share of the high and urgent needs, as assessed by inspectors who went to every school in the province.

Boards will be asked to file five-year capital plans, and these plans will serve as a comprehensive and sustainable forecast of our schools' and communities' needs. The first of these plans will be due in October 2005.

As part of the capital planning process, a school valuation committee will be struck in each of our school boards. They will set local criteria for understanding a school's education and economic value. Boards will conduct, for the first time, school valuations to look at the implications of individual school challenges and as a means to assess the impact of school closures on students, the board, the community and the local economy. For the first time, long-term decision-making can be driven by programs and benefit to students instead of facilities alone.

For the first time too, we will actually be quantifying the reasons behind facilities' decisions. It is long overdue because, instead of a funding formula that serves the needs of students, we have required boards, schools and students to adapt to a funding formula. By looking for better and smarter ways of working with school boards, we have been able to dedicate additional funds to this initiative.

For students across Ontario, this means, for example, \$556 million worth of roofs that don't leak, \$291 million worth of windows that open and close properly, \$211 million for heating and cooling systems that work, \$209 million worth of plumbing to ensure that sinks and toilets don't back up, and additional money for septic systems, boilers, fire alarms and extinguishers and other urgently needed items.

This government will deliver Good Places to Learn. We are committed to achieving a high standard for our students' education, together with the resources and the flexibility needed to make these standards achievable right across the province.

Notre gouvernement mènera à bien l'initiative Lieux propices à l'apprentissage. Nous sommes déterminés à offrir à nos élèves une éducation d'excellente qualité, de même que les ressources et la souplesse voulues pour que ces normes puissent être atteintes dans toute la province.

Our government's plan for Ontario is all about strengthening our province by strengthening our people, starting with their education and their skills. Better schools and fewer school closures will mean less disruption and a more positive learning environment for our students. Our Good Places to Learn initiative will help them to succeed, which will help Ontario to succeed in the years to come.

The Speaker (Hon. Alvin Curling): Responses?

Mr. Frank Klees (Oak Ridges): I wasn't going to give unanimous consent when asked earlier because, as usual, as per the practice of this government, we did not get advance notice of this statement and we certainly weren't presented with it in reasonable time. However, I will respond.

What I don't understand, and Speaker, maybe you can help us with this, is that the minister stands in his place and announces a fund of \$280 million to make repairs of

some \$4 billion. What does that mean? Who is going to figure out how you get \$4 billion of repairs when the government is prepared to fund \$280 million? Here's what it is: This government's great plan for school repairs is that they are going to pay for the interest and encourage school boards to borrow the money to do the work that has to be done. That's the only thing I can figure out here. That is the kind of snake oil we've become accustomed to, coming from this minister and this Premier.

What interests me, and many people across this province, is where the minister's commitment is to rural schools. During the election campaign, the Premier promised \$170 million for rural schools. What we're all now waiting to hear: Is that \$170 million that was promised for rural schools part of this \$280 million, or is this in addition to that?

The Premier committed very clearly that he would resolve the closure-of-schools issue. Now we hear that this is going to be a new school closing guideline. We've moved away from keeping rural schools open to simply providing new school closing guidelines. I'm sure that will be tremendously encouraging to people right across this province.

This Liberal government had a history of closing an average of 34 schools every year while they were in office at another time. What we can expect is more of the same. This Liberal government, which doesn't know how to balance a budget, is now going to be encouraging, very obviously, from this announcement, school boards across this province to also run deficits and to borrow money. The great announcement we have here today is that the government will come good for the interest payments. That's what I call construction. That's what I call, quite frankly, a devious way of sidestepping the responsibilities that they have.

I want to ask the minister, as the Holy Name of Mary school in Dufferin-Peel-Wellington-Grey is having serious capital problems, will this announcement today address that problem in Dufferin-Peel-Wellington-Grey? It will help parents, this minister tells us, across this province and it will keep schools open. Well, Minister, I want to put you on notice. We're going to be tracking those schools that are slated for closure and we'll hold you to account to see how many schools close over the next two years. We will remind you of this announcement that this minister is making today as supposedly the answer to the rural-school-closing issue. Is this \$280-million announcement truly an announcement that school boards will be able to embrace, or is it something that school boards will fear—fear, because they know that this is simply a matriculation on the part of this government, forcing them to borrow money that should be funded out of capital resources by this government?

Minister of Education, once again, we've caught you, and you will have to be accountable to the people of this province—one more promise broken. Where's the \$170 million you promised for rural schools? Is it or is it not

included in this \$280 million here? If not, where is the money?

1400

Mr. Rosario Marchese (Trinity–Spadina): I know the Liberals are looking for someone to support them and praise them for what they're doing, but they're not going to find it here. We all know that we desperately need money to renovate and rebuild buildings, replace old pipes, plumbing and, yes, boilers and so many other problems we have in the school system. We all know that, Gerard Kennedy, Minister of Education.

Let me tell you what you announced last May. Last May, your government announced \$200 million to be able to leverage \$2.1 billion for the renovations and rebuilding of buildings. Not one cent of that \$200 million has been spent or was ever intended to be spent—not one cent. This year, in February 2005, they announced \$280 million that will generate \$4 billion. Remember, \$200 million last year would generate \$2.1 billion; this year, we announced \$280 million, and it will generate \$4 billion. By the way, next year we're going to announce \$380 million, and it will generate \$6 billion, and on and on.

Do you think any money will ever flow, Gerard? I don't think so. I don't believe you. I have no confidence that any dollars will flow, and I'll tell you why. Look at the special-education announcement. Last year, in July, Gerard Kennedy said, "We are giving school boards \$100 million for special ed," which they were entitled to because they signed the application forms. Psychologists signed off, and they were waiting for the money. In July, he announces \$100 million. In August, he steals \$100 million from the boards and then announces that he's going to release \$50 million of that \$100 million that he stole from the boards, and that within a couple of short weeks or a month or two, he would have a new application process for people to get the money that they were entitled to before the July announcement. The application process is not yet done. Six months later, after he steals \$100 million from the boards, there is still no application process to get the money that he stole from the boards. I guarantee this to you: In a couple of months, by the end of the year, he's going to announce yet another \$100 million for special ed, that very \$100 million he stole.

The Speaker: Member, could you get to some parliamentary language that is acceptable, please.

Mr. Marchese: Thank you, Speaker, for your assistance.

I want to go on, if I can. I have no confidence that any of this money will ever flow. There will be another announcement next year on yet how much more money this government will give for renovations and rebuilding of buildings, and you won't see a cent.

Not only this, but they announced today that this money, the \$280 million, would help small schools to stay open. Now, you've got to figure this out. You've got to be some whiz kid to be able to say, "How does this help small schools?" Well, it doesn't, because not one cent is going to go to small schools to keep them open as

a result of this announcement. But the announcement was announced in such a way that small schools would stay open. Nothing in this announcement is going to help small schools. If you want to help small schools, 83 of which are about to close across the province, you've got to change the funding formula. And this government refuses to change the Conservative funding formula that is still in place. Liberals are operating under a Conservative funding formula that they are not willing to change.

So there was no announcement about a new funding formula for small schools today—no announcement, and not one cent. What does the minister announce? "There are going to be guidelines for small schools." Small schools don't want guidelines; they want money. They need money to have a principal, they need money for a vice-principal, they need money for secretaries and caretakers, and they need money for extra staff in order to keep a small school open. Did we get that today? No; we just got guidelines under the guise of capital dollars going to small schools. They're not going to get there.

I tell you this, Minister: You should be announcing today a lower pupil-teacher ratio for small schools to allow them to provide a program that is required.

Why are you not saying, "We will lower the threshold that creates the position of a principal," so that the placement of a principal in a small school will not be done at the expense of other schools? Why aren't you announcing that? You have no plan, and without a plan you are in trouble, and our students are in trouble.

ORAL QUESTIONS

GOVERNMENT ADVERTISING

Mr. Robert W. Runciman (Leader of the Opposition): My question is for the Premier. Every one of your Liberal colleagues spoke in favour and voted in favour of Bill 25, An Act respecting government advertising. Promise number 154 from your platform states that you will ban partisan government advertising and promotional materials.

This Legislature passed your bill two months ago, and yet it has not been proclaimed by cabinet. Do you still stand by your legislation and your promise, or will this be just one more broken McGuinty promise?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs): It almost leaves me speechless—almost. It's hard to imagine how somebody can work up the nerve, the temerity, the audacity to ask, on behalf of Ontarians, about the illegitimate use of taxpayer dollars on partisan political advertising when that government set the standard for all time, spending hundreds of millions of dollars in a wasteful way on partisan political advertising.

Yes, we stand behind our bill.

Mr. Runciman: You talk about nerve and audacity. Our advertising covered things like West Nile virus protection, flu shots and Telehealth Ontario.

Premier, section 6 of your advertising legislation states that an advertising item “must not include the name, voice or image of a member of the Executive Council or a member of the Assembly.” By your answer to the first question, I take it you agree with that. Yet in December, after your legislation had already passed second reading, your Minister of Health sent hundreds of these partisan political brochures to every MPP’s office. They are partisan under section 6 of the government’s legislation, and they open with a message from the Minister of Health. Worse, the language contained in your partisan brochures is virtually identical to the language in your election platform.

Premier, your legislation is law, lacking only formal proclamation. How can you justify breaking your own law?

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: I beg to differ with the member opposite. He apparently still does not understand what partisan political advertising is. If he would like, we will gladly bring back the extensive selection of brochures and pamphlets that were presented on behalf of his government during their stay in power. We are more than prepared to demonstrate for them what partisan political advertising really is.

Mr. Runciman: I think it’s clear that you’re breaking the law. We were operating, whether you agree or disagree with what we did—

Hon. Dwight Duncan (Minister of Energy, Government House Leader): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: There’s an apparent attempt to bring all kinds of boxes on to the floor of the Legislature as props.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Alvin Curling): Thank you for both points of view. I will be looking out that we have proper order in here.

Mr. Runciman: My point was that our government, whether Mr. McGuinty and his friends agreed or disagreed, was not breaking the law. He apparently is breaking the law of his own government.

I want to talk about your priorities. Two days ago, your Liberal colleagues in a Liberal riding announced a \$400-million sweetheart deal for swanky new hotel beds at the Windsor casino. Now we see you are spending thousands of taxpayer dollars to send partisan political brochures to MPPs’ offices for our constituents, brochures that break your own advertising laws.

Premier, you have shown no evidence that you have a plan for health care. Whether it’s stalled negotiations with our doctors, your firing of almost 1,000 nurses or your directive that hospitals cut \$170 million this year, it’s clear you have no plan. When will you get your priorities straight? Health care: not hotel rooms, not glossy brochures, not pit bulls and sushi—health care. When will you make that your priority?

We’re sending these brochures back, Premier. We don’t want them. Ontarians don’t want them.

Interjections.

The Speaker: Order. I ask the member for Durham to take his seat. We’ll take a five-minute break.

The House recessed from 1412 to 1416.

The Speaker: Before I continue, all of these pamphlets that are being displayed should not be on your desks and displayed during question period, please, or while Parliament is in progress here. I would like you to put that away.

Mr. Gilles Bisson (Timmins–James Bay): But it’s a government document.

Interjections.

The Speaker: Order. I’d be able to move on if the Minister of Finance and the member for Niagara Centre would come to order. We will proceed with question period and a new question.

HEALTH CARE SERVICES

Mr. John R. Baird (Nepean–Carleton): My question is to the Premier. I want to return once again, Premier, to the sad reality that you have no plan for health care, and I want to talk about the fiscal crisis that you’ve created in Ontario’s public hospitals. On behalf of the 757 nurses—

Laughter.

Mr. Baird: Seven hundred and fifty-seven nurses are losing their jobs, and I don’t think it’s anything funny for government ministers to sit and laugh at. Seven hundred and fifty-seven nurses are losing their jobs.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Alvin Curling): Order. If you want to proceed with question period in this manner, it’s fine. I can stand up for the hour, and we’ll have no exchange of questions or responses. I’d like to proceed with question period, if that’s your wish. If it’s not, we can move to the next order on the paper.

The member from Nepean–Carleton.

Mr. Baird: It’s not a laugh that 757 nurses are being given pink slips by Premier Pink Slip here.

Premier, here’s what Ontario nurses say about you and your government: “The McGuinty government has done a 180-degree turn from its stated commitment during the election to ... hire 8,000” new nurses. Those are the words of the president of the Ontario Nurses’ Association. She says, “Layoffs will deeply affect patient care.”

Premier, stand in your place and say you will overrule your bully health minister and reinstate these 757 nurses so that they can provide care to needy patients in this province.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs): I am proud of the work that continues to be done by the Minister of Health and proud of the fact that our government has thus far been able to fund 3,052 new full-time nursing positions. Some 664 of those are in our large hospitals, 538 are in our small and medium-sized hospitals, 600 are in our long-term-care homes, and 250 are in our home care and community health sectors. We have, in addition, 1,000 temporary full-time positions for new nursing graduates. Beyond

that, we've also invested \$60 million for 11,000 bed lifts in hospitals and long-term-care homes to improve the quality of working conditions for our nurses.

The Speaker: Supplementary.

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer (Kitchener–Waterloo): Premier, there's not much to be proud of. Even Doris Grinspun of the RNAO has indicated her disappointment at your government's decision to cut 757 nursing positions.

I want to talk to you about hospitals. Hospitals were forced to submit their balanced budget plans to your minister for review and approval. The bureaucrats went over every line, and they approved the cuts. All told, \$170 million worth of cuts were approved.

I want to talk to you about Sick Kids Hospital in Toronto. Your government approved plans to lay off 45 health care workers. You also approved plans to shut down all four day-surgery facilities at the hospital in order to save money. Some 3,600 procedures are performed every day. Where will these children now go? As you know, Premier, Sick Kids serves some of the most fragile children from across this province and across the world, yet you stand in your place today and you tell us that your priority is these—

The Speaker: Thank you. Premier?

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: Again, let me just say how proud we all are of the fabulous work that continues to be done at Sick Kids Hospital here in Toronto. We are partnering with them, as we are partnering with every other hospital across the province.

In fact, we've spent \$1.7 billion more on hospitals so far. I want to contrast that with what happened on the Tory watch. They cut hospital funding by \$557 million, they closed 28 hospitals, and they shut down 5,000 hospital beds in their first two years. That is the contrast. We are investing more money in our hospitals and working with our hospitals to improve their quality of care, whereas our predecessors hacked and slashed to the tune of half a billion dollars.

The Speaker: Final supplementary.

Mr. Norm Miller (Parry Sound–Muskoka): Premier, let's talk about what's happening in Ontario today. Today, six family doctors in Geraldton told the community that they are quitting. That means that 3,000 people of Geraldton will have to drive three hours to see a doctor.

Instead of getting a deal with doctors, you're spending money on brochures to tell Ontarians about how great their health care is. You only met with Ontario's doctors four times in January. You are conducting NHL-style negotiations, and we know how that ended.

Premier, tell me and tell Ontarians: When are you going to get serious about getting a deal with Ontario's doctors, and what are you going to do for the people of Geraldton?

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: Again, I want to remind the member opposite that on the watch of that former government, underserved communities went from 63 to 142 while they sat idly on their hands.

Let me tell you about some of the things that we're doing to increase the number of doctors in Ontario. We're building a brand new medical school in northern Ontario, the first one to be built in some 30 years. Beyond that, we are increasing the number of spaces in all of our medical schools. Beyond that, we have doubled—more than doubled, in fact—the number of residency spaces for our international medical graduates. That's the kind of work that we are doing to increase the number of doctors practising in the province of Ontario.

LIBERAL CAMPAIGN PROMISES

Mr. Howard Hampton (Kenora–Rainy River): My question is for the Premier.

Premier, I want to know why you continue to try to blame Nova Scotians, Newfoundlanders and Paul Martin for the health care and financial messes that you've created. You see, Premier, you weren't straightforward with the people of Ontario in the election and now you are bashing the federal government and trying to cover up your tracks. In the election, you promised better health care, better education, better public services, and then you looked into the camera and you promised Louisiana-style taxes. This week, the Provincial Auditor called you on that neat little Enron-style \$3.9-billion accounting trick that you tried in your budget and, as a result, you're now desperately looking for an extra \$5 billion.

Premier, when are you going to stop fed-bashing, stop playing the blame game, and start taking responsibility for the messes that you have created?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Inter-governmental Affairs): It's interesting how the leader of the NDP's position has changed on this, because I can recall—in fact, I have a quote here from him that I'm sure he's very interested in hearing, something that he said while serving in government. He said, "The real problem is that revenues from the federal government have not kept pace with needs." He was right then and he's wrong today.

Mr. Hampton: Premier, these are your promises, this is your failure to deliver, and it's your responsibility. Looking for someone else to blame isn't going to work. You made an impossible promise, the auditor has called you on it, and now you're desperately looking for someone else to blame.

That's not the leadership that Ontarians expect. Ontarians want their Premiers to be builders, not bashers. At the end of the day, you wouldn't be in this tight spot if you'd simply levelled with people during the election. You would have said, "We can't have good-quality health care and have Louisiana-style taxes at the same time."

So I ask you again, when are you going to stop bashing Paul Martin, when are you going to stop blaming Nova Scotians, when are you going to stop blaming Newfoundlanders, and recognize these are your promises and you're the one responsible—

The Speaker (Hon. Alvin Curling): Thank you. Premier.

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Hon. Mr. McGuinty: There is in fact an important issue here, although the member opposite refuses to recognize it. The fact that if a new immigrant lands in Quebec, the Quebec government gets \$3,800, and if an immigrant lands here at Pearson, the Ontario government gets \$800, I think is a real issue and we ought to address it. The member opposite may not think that is a real issue. He may not think we should stand up on behalf of Ontarians to work with the federal government to address that issue, but we on this side of the House are demanding nothing more and nothing less than a modicum of fairness from the federal government, and that's what we're going for.

Mr. Hampton: Once again, I want to quote someone who condemns bashing the federal government: "Once again" the Premier "plays the blame game when it comes to the federal government. He says that if only the federal government would send the province more money, then things would be better off here.... Well, it is time for the Premier and this government to stare into the face of their own economic failings."

Interjection: Who was that?

Mr. Hampton: Who said that? That was Dalton McGuinty just a few years ago, the same Dalton McGuinty who now wants to bash the federal government and play the blame game. New Democrats support more funding for our important public services, like health care and education, but the real story here is that you picked a fight with Ottawa to try to cover up the problem that you, and you alone, created. When will you stop blaming others and take responsibility for your own promises and your own broken promises?

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: Apparently the leader of the NDP doesn't think we should raise this issue with the federal government. Apparently it's not something that is worthwhile even exploring. He is apparently choosing to sit this one out. Speaking of leadership, I think that will lend real insight into his style of leadership when it comes to the people of Ontario.

Something else I want to remind my good friend opposite about is that when it came time to vote to end the Tories' corporate tax cuts, he voted against that bill. When it came time to end the private school tax credit, he voted against that bill as well. So if we get the record straight here, he is not prepared to support the government when it comes to raising these basic issues of fairness with the federal government. He is not prepared to support our legislation that eliminated the corporate tax cuts and he is not prepared to support our legislation that eliminated the private school tax credit. It seems to me the member opposite is not prepared to stand up for Ontarians any which way at all.

HEALTH CARE SERVICES

Mr. Howard Hampton (Kenora–Rainy River): No, Premier, I'm not into whining. I don't think the people of Ontario are going to be fooled by your new-found

attraction to whining and blaming the federal government.

Let me ask you about a mess you have created. Today, all 3,000 people in Geraldton woke up to discover that they will have no family doctor come May because the six doctors are leaving town. You're turning Geraldton into a doctor ghost town. You have no plan to fix the mess other than wasting some money on partisan political advertising and looking for someone to blame. When are you going to stop the blame game and start delivering better health care? Not more propaganda—better health care. When are you going to stop the blame game, Premier?

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

Hon. George Smitherman (Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): First and foremost, the message we send to the people of Geraldton today, which I've done through an expression both to their mayor, Mayor Power, who is actually in Toronto today, and to Michael Gravelle, our MPP who is in the area and working on it, is that the government will stand with the people of Geraldton and work to resolve this situation.

I would say to the honourable member, who as a northerner and especially as someone who has his DNA involved in the challenge we have around the doctor shortage in Ontario stemming from the realities of his government, which were that they closed medical schools, that I think he ought to be more cautious about this.

The reality in Geraldton is that doctors have given notice, and if we don't have some success in attracting additional doctors, there will be a loss of service in the community in May. We're working very closely with the local community to resolve the situation.

Mr. Hampton: The minister says we closed medical schools. I'm not aware of any medical schools that were closed in Ontario.

It's interesting that you bring up the mayor, because the mayor says, "If there are no doctors in the community, where do you go? Do you go to Nipigon? Do you go to Hearst or Thunder Bay?" Nipigon is 175 kilometres away; Hearst, 246 kilometres away; Thunder Bay, 271 kilometres away; and the McGuinty government is a million miles away from keeping its promises on health care. You're more interested in picking fights. You're more interested in partisan political propaganda.

The Speaker (Hon. Alvin Curling): Order. I've warned about that pamphlet that you keep waving.

Mr. Hampton: Speaker, it's a government document.

The Speaker: Order. I'm asking the leader of the third party to co-operate and put that pamphlet away, because at the outset we made a strong demonstration of faith and I ruled that we would not—

Interjection.

The Speaker: Could I ask the member for Halton to come to order, please.

I ask him to put it away because now he's using it as a demonstration. Could you now complete your question.

Mr. Hampton: This is a government that is more interested in picking fights with doctors, taking advantage of nurses and putting out partisan political propaganda than in solving health care problems.

I ask the minister and I ask the Premier again, when are you going to stop playing the blame game? When are you going to stop bashing everyone else and live up to the promises that you and you alone made?

Hon. Mr. Smitherman: First and foremost, the honourable member, in his earlier supplementary, didn't wish to acknowledge the reality, which is that the record of his party is clear. When they were the government of the province of Ontario, they reduced capacity at our medical schools by 15%, and this party took years to respond to it and begin to increase it.

The issue, with respect, is clear on an additional point, which is that in our negotiated agreement with the Ontario Medical Association, both that party and the leader of that party stood in their places and said we were being too generous to our doctors, and now the honourable member suggests that isn't the case.

He asked about our health care plan: this year alone, an investment of \$2.8 billion to enhance the quality of health care in the province of Ontario.

The challenge in Geraldton is a challenge we will face. We're working already with the mayor and the local member. I send this message to the people of Geraldton: While that party wishes to play politics, we will work—

The Speaker: Thank you. Final supplementary?

Mr. Hampton: According to the McGuinty government, it was the Conservatives or the NDP or a government that may have been in place federally in 1993 that is to blame now. Anyone else is responsible but the McGuinty government. But it's not going to work.

You see, it's not just health care but child poverty. You promised to eliminate the clawback of the national child benefit supplement. You're not. Child care: You promised to invest \$300 million of new provincial dollars to create 330,000 new child care spaces. You haven't done that.

Tuition: You said that students are paying too much and that you're not going to lift tuition fees. You're going to do that.

Here is the reality: Ordinary Ontarian families feel let down. They were really hoping you would be different, but your government is disappointing them. When, Premier, are you going to stop blaming everyone else—blaming Newfoundland, blaming Nova Scotia, blaming Paul Martin, blaming doctors, blaming nurses—for your problems?

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Hon. Mr. Smitherman: There are two political parties in this Legislature, not three but two, that have been in power over the course of the last while and have actually cut hospital funding. We have invested \$1.7 billion in our hospitals since we arrived.

There are three political parties in the Legislature, and two of them have a very recent record of reducing nurses

in the province. On the NDP watch, it was 3,800; on the Conservative watch, it was 6,600.

This year alone in Ontario, our government has funded and created 3,052 additional spots for nurses: nurses in the community; nurses in public health; nurses in long-term-care homes; and nurses in hospitals, large and small, all across the province. That is—

The Speaker: Thank you.

Interjections.

The Speaker: This is question-and-answer period. We seem to be getting a lot of long speeches. I have allowed a minute—

Mr. Peter Kormos (Niagara Centre): Exercise control.

The Speaker: Order. I will exercise control if you come to order, member from Niagara Centre.

I'd like all members who are asking a question and those who are responding to adhere to the one minute. When I get up, I'd like them to sit down.

We will then proceed to a new question.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mr. Jim Wilson (Simcoe–Grey): Mr. Speaker, it was good of you to settle them down before I get wound up.

The question is for the Premier. While you waste hundreds of thousands of dollars on health care brochures, cancer patients in York region and Simcoe county continue to suffer. As you know, they are slated to have two new cancer centres built, one at Royal Victoria Hospital in Barrie and one at the Southlake hospital in Newmarket.

I just want to remind you about the patient needs in this region of the province. The southeast region's population is growing 80% faster than the provincial average. Our growth rate for residents over age 50 is rising 50% faster than the rest of the province, and the cancer rate in our region is growing 25% faster than the rest of the province. The death rate for cancer in this region is 42% higher per year than the provincial average. You have an obligation to these patients and you have an opportunity to improve their lives, to save their lives and to improve the quality of their lives.

Each hospital has now raised in the last two months \$10 million from their own communities for their share of the construction. When are you going to give the green light to these badly needed cancer centres?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs): The Minister of Health, Speaker.

Hon. George Smitherman (Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): I think, first and foremost, you should establish the reality that John Tory himself acknowledged in Cornwall recently, which is that in the run-up to the last election your party ran around all over Ontario with your rubber cheques in hand, making promises about hospital construction to the point where the Ontario Hospital Association has indicated that that list totals \$6 billion. This presents a challenge.

On the issue of cancer centres, I've had the opportunity in the House previously to answer this very same question as relates to Barrie and Southlake. First and foremost, we want to acknowledge the excellent work that's being done in the local community. These centres are indeed needed.

We take advice from Cancer Care Ontario, and they have said to us very clearly in their report of last fall that there are five regional priorities, and that Niagara, as well as increased capacity in both Kingston and Ottawa, stand slightly ahead of those priorities in Simcoe county and in Newmarket. We'll be abiding by Cancer Care Ontario's advice.

The Speaker (Hon. Alvin Curling): Supplementary?

Mr. Ted Arnott (Waterloo-Wellington): A supplementary to the same minister: We've seen the government announce on Valentine's Day, when the House wasn't sitting, a \$400-million sop to lure more gambling addicts to the Windsor casino and shore up the political fortunes of the MPPs for Windsor West and Windsor-St. Clair. The government clearly has its priorities backwards.

Almost every hospital in the province is facing a financial crisis. The Palmerston hospital, the Mount Forest hospital, the Fergus hospital, the Kitchener-Waterloo hospitals, the Guelph hospital, the Orangeville hospital, the Georgetown hospital—all of those hospitals needed a piece of that \$400 million and they didn't get it. And today we read in the Toronto press that the Humber River Regional Hospital is being forced to push 100 service staff out the door, including staff helping kidney dialysis patients. What is the government going to tell these dialysis patients who will be inconvenienced and forced to wait longer for the health services they need to live—that they should go to the Windsor casino?

Hon. Mr. Smitherman: The honourable member manages to get himself all worked up today. One wonders what he did when his party stood in office and cut \$557 million from Ontario's hospitals. What was his position then?

The realities are very clear that in order to be able to support the health care of the future, we need to have vibrant economies. I'm very proud to be part of a government that, at the same time that it can make a \$2.8-billion new investment in health care, we have the wherewithal and the capacity to support the economic diversity of a terrific community like Windsor. This is obviously very necessary if we're going to be able to support the kinds of program expansions that the honourable member talks about in his question. I would point out that on the hospital line item alone, a \$2.8-billion investment in health care alone this year is \$700 million more than that party promised in their Magna budget.

GREENBELT LEGISLATION

Ms. Marilyn Churley (Toronto-Danforth): I have a question for the Minister of Municipal Affairs. Last week, the Coalition on the Niagara Escarpment, a

respected guardian of escarpment lands, had this to say on your greenbelt:

"The Liberal Party majority on an all-party legislative committee examining the Greenbelt Act ... voted down an opposition amendment that would have made the Golden Horseshoe greenbelt boundaries permanent. In so doing, the Liberal government has broken an election promise made in 2003 and repeated when the Greenbelt Act was first introduced in the Legislature in October 2004 that the greenbelt would be 'permanent.'"

I made that amendment because I thought it must have been an oversight or an error in the legislation. I was stunned when every Liberal member voted it down. So, Minister, the question is: Will you keep your promise and make the greenbelt boundaries permanent?

Hon. John Gerretsen (Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, minister responsible for seniors): I appreciate the question from the member opposite. Let me just tell you this: Yes, the greenbelt will be permanent. It will be a million acres of lands, of sensitive environmental and agricultural lands, saved for future generations to come so that the kinds of sprawl and gridlock situations that were involved with this part of Ontario will not happen in the future.

Let me just quote to you from another document: "The proposed Greenbelt Act, 2004 and ... greenbelt plan create a unique opportunity to reverse the negative effects of sprawling urban development, preserve farmland and protect natural systems. It is also the chance to achieve something truly extraordinary for this and future generations: a robust, continentally significant greenbelt." Who said that? David Suzuki and 74 other scientists and academics who are totally behind this effort of this government. This government is doing something about this that other governments did not have the courage to do.

Ms. Churley: Minister, he said it was a unique opportunity—an opportunity that you have squandered. Not only did the Niagara Escarpment group say this, but John MacKenzie, a spokesman for Municipal Affairs Minister John Gerretsen, conceded that there is a provision in the Greenbelt Act to allow the government to modify the greenbelt boundaries. You have squandered your opportunity. It is not permanent.

Minister, I'm going to ask you again—because what this means, in case you're not clear, is that 1,000 hectares can be removed from inside the southern greenbelt boundary where development pressures are the greatest, as long as 1,000 hectares are added along the northern boundary. So your development friends now know that they don't have to worry, because you can give them that prime land there.

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Minister, let me say it again: Ontarians do not want a floating greenbelt. Will you make your greenbelt boundaries permanent, or are the greenbelt boundaries, like stopping the construction of 6,000 houses on the Oak Ridges moraine—

The Speaker (Hon. Alvin Curling): Thank you. The Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Hon. Mr. Gerretsen: Speaker, this is hard to take from this member, because this member also said, and let me just quote: "Listen, I make no bones about it. We are supporting this legislation."

What else did she say on the record? She said, "I just want to say, I will be voting in favour of this bill. I believe it is a step in the right direction."

Interjections.

Hon. Mr. Gerretsen: What we have simply said in the bill, in order to make sure that there isn't going to be any diminution of the greenbelt, is that if an acre of land is taken out of the greenbelt, another acre of land will be added in. It is a better provision than exists in any kind of similar legislation—

The Speaker: Thank you.

Mr. Richard Patten (Ottawa Centre): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I believe the member across the way asking the question used an unparliamentary term and called the member a liar. I believe that is out of order.

Interjections.

The Speaker: Order.

Mr. Peter Kormos (Niagara Centre): I heard her call the government a liar.

The Speaker: I did not hear the word, but if the member has said something unparliamentary—

Interjections.

The Speaker: Order. If the member has said something unparliamentary and would like to withdraw it, she may do so. I did not hear the word.

Interjections.

The Speaker: Order. It's becoming a bit difficult to keep some order in the House. I know the honourable members here would like to make sure that we have an orderly Parliament, but it's becoming extremely difficult.

I've just asked the member. If she so wishes, could she respond?

Ms. Churley: Mr. Speaker, the minister—

Interjections.

The Speaker: Order. I will say it again: I did not hear it. If you wish to withdraw, you may do so. If you do not, there's nothing I can do, because I did not hear it. Do you wish to do that?

Ms. Churley: No, I don't wish to withdraw.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Ms. Churley: The minister lied about—

The Speaker: Now I have heard the member.

Interjections.

The Speaker: Order. I will ask the member to withdraw the word. If she fails to do so, I will then have no alternative but to name the member.

Ms. Churley: No.

Ms. Churley was escorted from the chamber.

Interjections.

The Speaker: Order. I will now ask the member from Niagara Centre to withdraw his comment.

Mr. Kormos: Of course, Speaker. I withdraw.

SCHOOL FACILITIES

Mr. Dave Levac (Brant): My question is for the Minister of Education. Minister, it is not a secret that some of the schools across the province are suffering from years of neglect. We're talking about the lack of funding, the lack of textbooks for our students, the lack of investment from the previous provincial government and the overall decay of some of those schools. Some of our schools are literally crumbling in front of us, and some of those schools are in my riding.

Minister, today you made an announcement that this government will be investing in the crumbling schools. Can you please explain how the schools like those in the Grand Erie District School Board and the Roman Catholic separate school board in my riding will be able to spend that money as has been allocated so that they can get to work in fixing our schools for those students to have a great place to learn?

Hon. Gerard Kennedy (Minister of Education): We have indeed, unfortunately, in this province been subjected to years of neglect. The previous government let our facilities run down, which had two effects: It deprived students of their education, and it cost us a lot of money. Because the facilities were not being fixed in a timely fashion, we paid a compounded price.

We are making \$4 billion worth of resources available to school boards, and we have improved on the funding formula from the last government. They actually had a financing formula in place that cost us more money and left stranded grants out there. Each year, they sent \$109 million to school boards that didn't build a thing. We have actually made it possible that the boards will start to renew the schools this summer, and they are actually going to be able to make a substantial improvement in the quality of education for virtually every student in the province.

Mr. Levac: I know for a fact that the parents in my riding, and I'm sure across the province, and in particular the students who have to learn in those conditions, will be very happy about today's announcement. When do you expect those school boards to begin repairing the schools, and how are they going to be identified?

Hon. Mr. Kennedy: Independent assessors have gone through every school in the province and found that we have accumulated \$3 billion—previous governments have known about these needs—worth of high-level and urgent requirements that were ignored by previous governments. In the next 18 months, we will take care of all of these \$3 billion worth of needs. There is \$1 billion that will be available before the start of the school year this summer, because that's the construction season. That will go to boards as soon as they confirm that their portion of the \$3 billion—and they get to choose when their portion is going to get done—and then a capital plan has to be submitted, because for the first time in this province we're going to be spending money, investing money on capital so we can deliver better programs. Every board will be required to fit in the smaller class

sizes, those extra programs for dropouts. Those things will be done first, and then the rest of the money will flow.

Mr. Frank Klees (Oak Ridges): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: The Minister of Education has made a statement that he has made \$4 billion available. That is not true. That is not true—

The Speaker (Hon. Alvin Curling): Order. Today's question period seems to be rather raucous and unparliamentary. I'm very surprised at certain members who are using some very unparliamentary language. I'm going to ask the member from Oak Ridges, who has actually accused a member in an unparliamentary way, to withdraw his comments.

Mr. Klees: I withdraw, Speaker.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Ms. Laurie Scott (Haliburton–Victoria–Brock): My question is for the Premier. As you know, the McGuinty government has no plan for health care. John Tory was in Peterborough standing up for the hospital this week because it had no choice but to cut 75 staff, half of whom are nurses. It was Elizabeth Witmer who first approved the plan in 2000, and it's your government now that is stalling. Your Minister of Health stood here in December 2003 and said the new hospital would be built by 2007. On December 9, 2004, a full year later, he said the same thing, and still nothing has happened.

You have \$400 million for a new five-star Papatello palace in Windsor and money to waste on partisan brochures that break your advertising law. Premier, instead of hustling taxpayers in a game of Texas Hold'em, maybe you should fold your hand and solve the real issue facing patients in Peterborough. Will you commit today to the residents of Peterborough that you will respond to the tender for the construction of a new hospital in Peterborough within 30 days of March 1, and not a day longer?

1500

Hon. Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs): The Minister of Health.

Hon. George Smitherman (Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): It's interesting that the honourable member would start with a comment about our health care plan when she has been lobbying me so aggressively for family health teams for her community.

As to the other item with respect to the hospital in Peterborough, this work you're on to today has already been done by our colleague the member from Peterborough.

Applause.

Hon. Mr. Smitherman: The hard-working member.

I know the Premier will be in this community tomorrow and he will have the opportunity to reiterate to the community what has been already very clearly stated to Chair Brick, in a letter from me to the hospital, which is that we have given this hospital the approval to move forward. It's an important hospital, it's long since

overdue and it stands on that lengthy list totalling about \$6 billion that John Tory himself in Cornwall admitted is one more piece of the cruel legacy of your party while in government.

The Speaker (Hon. Alvin Curling): Supplementary.

Mr. John O'Toole (Durham): My question is also to the Minister of Health. It's good to see that the Premier's office has just ushered Mr. Leal in to stand up for his constituents in the riding of Peterborough.

I'm reading an article from the Peterborough Examiner that is saying what the minister said, that the Premier is indeed in Peterborough tomorrow, but, Minister, you should be aware that he's skipping the hospital. The question then remains, why is he skipping the hospital when this is the front page story? Mr. Stewart, when he was the MPP, would stand up and ask the tough questions. It appears Mr. Leal spends all his time as a trained Liberal reader. He isn't standing up for his community.

Honest to God, Minister, I really am concerned that you have—

The Speaker: Order. All questions are directed to the Speaker and all responses are also directed to the Speaker. I would like the member to direct his question here, and I ask the members to give me an opportunity to listen to the question.

Mr. O'Toole: They have promised on two occasions to commit to the new facility for the Peterborough Regional Health Centre. On many occasions they have promised but failed to deliver, as they did all during the election. So my question is quite simple: Is the minister prepared, or is the Premier on his visit to Peterborough tomorrow prepared, to make one single response here, and that is, to respond to the tender for the construction of the new hospital in Peterborough within 30 days? Do this for the people of Peterborough. Jeff Leal fails to do it. Will you stand up tomorrow, Premier, in Peterborough and tell your friend Sylvia Sutherland that—

The Speaker: Thank you. Minister of Health.

Hon. Mr. Smitherman: I appreciate the opportunity to talk about Peterborough because it is such a good example that our health care plan is working. Yes, the Peterborough hospital will go forward this fiscal year.

In addition, Peterborough represents one of the most impressive applications for family health teams, because there has been tremendous work by all the primary care physicians in Peterborough. We're going to work very closely to deliver on the promise of family health teams in communities like Peterborough all across the province. The mayor of Peterborough, Sylvia Sutherland, is a representative of the voice of small communities on the College of Physicians and Surgeons board, with a view toward making sure that these communities are well spoken for.

You talk about the Premier. I'm sure the Premier has been in Peterborough more times than the honourable member has, despite the fact that it's an adjoining community. Our response to the problem that community had with floods stands as an example of our community's commitment—

The Speaker: Thank you. New question.

CHILD CARE

Ms. Andrea Horwath (Hamilton East): My question is for the Minister of Children and Youth Services. Minister, the last time we heard from you, you were promising to be a leader in Canada in child care, but you've come back empty-handed. There's no agreement with the federal government and there's no new provincial money for child care. Families are on waiting lists. Child care workers are underpaid. Children are being placed in unregulated spaces. You can't be a leader in child care by breaking promises and avoiding decisions.

You promised to provide \$300 million in new provincial funding for child care. Minister, where's the money, and where is the action plan for our children?

Hon. Marie Bountrogianni (Minister of Children and Youth Services, Minister of Citizenship and Immigration): I'm very proud to be part of a government that gave the first new investment in child care in almost a decade—\$58 million this year alone to create 4,000 new spaces. We are on target for creating those spaces by the end of March of this year.

It was a very excellent meeting in Vancouver. Unfortunately, some of the other provinces did not want accountability and did not want to report to Ottawa. We know what happened in this province when there wasn't accountability for child care money: Not one penny went to child care. We agree with accountability for child care. We are working with the federal minister, and we will obtain those funds for child care for Ontario children.

Ms. Horwath: Minister, you broke your promise, and now you're shirking your responsibilities as our advocate for children.

Studies show that children need a not-for-profit system that puts them before the bottom line. That should be the pillar of any new child development system. The federal minister said on Tuesday that only one province is pushing for a non-profit model. We know it's not you.

You are trying to dodge responsibility by downloading this crucial decision to municipalities. You want cities and towns to take the heat for the fact that you don't have a plan. You're out of touch with what really matters to everyday families: putting their children first.

Minister, will you put children first right here and now and commit to making all new spaces in the province of Ontario not-for-profit?

Hon. Mrs. Bountrogianni: I'm very happy to respond to that question. We're very proud of our Best Start plan putting child care spaces in schools so that JK and SK students have a full day of education and service, making it a smoother transition to school.

Ninety-five per cent of our existing child care spaces in schools are not-for-profit. We don't anticipate this trend to change. The federal minister is also asking us to monitor the effects of our child care spending in profit and not-for-profit centres; we will do so. Our first criteria for any centre or any space in this province will be

quality. That is, first and foremost, the most important aspect of child care in this province.

WORKPLACE SAFETY

Ms. Judy Marsales (Hamilton West): My question today is for the Minister of Labour.

Hamilton, as you know, has a very proud heritage in the industrial and manufacturing sector. The industrial sector in Hamilton has been working earnestly and diligently to ensure the health and safety of their most important resource: their employees.

Minister, last year you announced that the government would be hiring new health and safety inspectors, which you have now delivered to this hard-working sector. Each year thousands of people are injured on the job in Ontario. How soon can we see these new health and safety inspectors on the job, supporting the health and safety initiatives which have been the hallmark of good leadership?

Hon. Christopher Bentley (Minister of Labour): I'd like to thank the member from Hamilton West not only for her concern about the thousands of workers injured in workplaces every year but for her advocacy on the part of her community and on the part of the workplaces in the Hamilton area to make sure that they are safe.

Yes, indeed, last July the McGuinty government announced that it would be hiring 200 new health and safety inspectors to keep workers safe throughout the province of Ontario.

On December 14, we hired the first 100 of those inspectors. Fourteen of those inspectors are going to be based in Hamilton to keep workplaces in Hamilton West and the surrounding area safer than they were before. Those inspectors are being trained now. They'll be on the job April 1, fully trained, able to keep our workplaces safe. They are part of our commitment to reduce workplace injuries by 20% by the year 2008.

Ms. Marsales: I'm very glad and proud to hear that this government is taking workplace safety seriously. The additional inspectors will help ensure Ontario workers are safe. Would you please tell us what tools the inspectors have to adequately enforce workplace health and safety in this legislation?

Hon. Mr. Bentley: In fact, just a few weeks ago we announced an additional tool that I'll get to in a moment. An inspector, when they approach a workplace and do an inspection, can provide advice to either the employer or the workers. They can issue stop work orders. They can institute an investigation that may or may not lead to a prosecution.

Just recently, this government announced that we were providing a new means of prosecuting offences for the industrial sector, and that is a ticketing means, so that now for serious offences you can have what are called the long form or part III prosecutions, and for less serious offences, you can have the inspector issue tickets. These tickets have been available before in the mining sector

and in construction and they are now available in the industrial sector as well.

The point is, we are determined to ensure the safety of workplaces throughout Ontario and determined to ensure that the laws of this province protecting workers are enforced.

1510

ACCESS TO HEALTH CARE

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer (Kitchener–Waterloo): My question is for the Minister of Health. Yesterday I asked you to give your assurance that you would provide uninterrupted coverage for Fabry's disease to patients in this province. I did so in light of the fact that Bill Taylor and Carolyn Auger have been denied treatment now for four weeks by the Ottawa Hospital. Minister, today I heard from Bill Taylor and he said the following: "I am having trouble living. I am losing weight because I cannot eat. I am on dialysis and I have neuropathy in my hands and feet."

Bill and Carolyn do not want to die. Minister, I'm asking you today to please stop blaming the company. Please don't play the political games. Please follow through on the promise you made to Donna Strauss last July, in this letter after the death of her husband, that you would provide coverage. I ask you, would you consider providing the company with a date when your committee will render its verdict and ask the drug company to provide the drug free until such time as that decision is rendered? Will you please do the right thing in the interest of these patients?

Hon. George Smitherman (Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): The honourable member in her question asks me not to play politics, but I wonder what she's doing when she asks me to circumvent a process that in fact was part of her leadership.

Mrs. Witmer: I'm urging you to talk to the company.

Hon. Mr. Smitherman: We have been in communication with the company. The approach I take is that the company should fulfill the commitment they made to the media, which is that in the interim period, until such time as the Common Drug Review—they have instigated a second review on the company's concerns—they would fulfill their word and provide drugs on a compassionate basis to patients in all provinces. This is the position we take. It's a consistent position. I make that appeal again today. We have been in correspondence with the company and they are choosing to play politics with patients in Ontario versus others. We say to them again today that we expect them to fulfill the commitment they made, which is to treat patients equally across Canada.

PETITIONS

HEALTH CARE SERVICES

Mr. Norman W. Sterling (Lanark–Carleton): I have a petition from 1,700 people from the town of Smiths Falls in Lanark county.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the Liberal government has announced in their budget that they are delisting key health services such as routine eye exams, chiropractic and physiotherapy services,

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

"To reverse the delisting of eye exams, chiropractic and physiotherapy services and restore funding for these important and necessary services."

I have signed my name to that petition.

GREENBELT

Mr. Wayne Arthurs (Pickering–Ajax–Uxbridge): To the Legislative Assembly:

"Whereas we, who are landowners of north Ajax, are opposed to the proposed greenbelt plan in the north Ajax region. We request the complete removal of the proposed greenbelt plan on privately owned lands in north Ajax, such that all landowners in north Ajax will have equal opportunity to rezone their land without restrictions.

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

"We are clearly opposed to the allocation of land designated as proposed greenbelt land in north Ajax. This opposition is based on:

"(1) Lack of available, current scientific data that supports the designated lands in the north Ajax region as 'environmentally sensitive';

"(2) Lack of clearly defined terms of the proposed policy, and their implications, such as: (i) Would the use of the term 'permanently protected' allow rezoning of the land, by either the landowners or the government? (ii) Will the landowners of 'permanently protected' land be financially compensated by the government to ensure that their property values are competitive in the current marketplace?

"To be clear, we are not opposed to preserving environmental land in the province or our region, such as in the Oak Ridges moraine. However, as stated, we are opposed to the ambiguous and to date unjustified allocation of land designated as proposed greenbelt land in the north Ajax region and request that all zoning restrictions be lifted from privately owned land in north Ajax.

"We would also like the governing bodies responsible for the proposed greenbelt plan to extend the December 12 and December 16 deadlines by at least one year, in order to allow for a reasonable time for the policy review by all parties affected and involved, especially in

consideration of the complex scientific, economic, social and political factors and implications inherent in the proposed policy.

“The landowners of the north Ajax region are eager to participate in the decision-making process of amendments to the proposed greenbelt plan, specifically in the north Ajax region, and we look forward to an immediate response from the governing bodies responsible for the proposed greenbelt plan.”

HEALTH CARE SERVICES

Ms. Shelley Martel (Nickel Belt): I have a petition that was sent to me by the United Steelworkers of America. It reads as follows:

“Whereas the McGuinty Liberal government is cutting provincial funding for essential health care services like optometry, physiotherapy and chiropractic care;

“Whereas this privatization of health care services will force Ontarians to pay out-of-pocket for essential health care;

“Whereas Ontarians already pay for health care through their taxes and will be forced to pay even more through the government’s new regressive health tax;

“Whereas the Liberals promised during the election that they would not cut or privatize health care services in Ontario;

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

“We demand the McGuinty Liberal government keep its promises and guarantee adequate provincial funding for critical health services like eye, physiotherapy and chiropractic care.”

I agree with the petitioners. I have affixed my signature to this.

NURSES

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

“We, the undersigned, want more full-time positions for Ontario nurses. We feel there is not enough being done to retain nurses in Ontario. This province needs Ontario-trained nurses; therefore more full-time employment should be created for nursing graduates.

“Whereas, in a recent speech by Premier McGuinty, the current provincial government has mentioned designating \$50 million toward full-time employment opportunities and enhancing working conditions for registered nurses. Job creation should be in the form of full-time jobs, and new nursing graduates should be given equal consideration for these positions.

“Whereas nursing students represent the future of the nursing profession, we request creation of full-time positions for all nurses, but especially for new graduates.

“Whereas nurses compose a significant portion of health care providers in Ontario, therefore career opportunities should be supported by policy and government funding.

“We” therefore “declare our support of job opportunities for nurses and request government assistance with the creation of full-time” nurses.

This petition is signed by many people in the Peterborough area. I’ll give it to Alyssa to give to the Clerk.

1520

FREDERICK BANTING HOMESTEAD

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

“Whereas Sir Frederick Banting was the man who discovered insulin and was Canada’s first Nobel Prize recipient; and

“Whereas this great Canadian’s original homestead located in the town of New Tecumseth”—Alliston—“is deteriorating and in danger of destruction because of the inaction of the Ontario Historical Society; and

“Whereas the town of New Tecumseth has been unsuccessful in reaching an agreement with the Ontario Historical Society to use part of the land to educate the public about the historical significance of the work of Sir Frederick Banting;

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

“That the Minister of Culture endorse Simcoe–Grey MPP Jim Wilson’s private member’s bill entitled the Frederick Banting Homestead Preservation Act so that the homestead is kept in good repair and preserved for generations to come.”

I want to thank Steve Dixon at Dixie Cleaners in Hamilton for circulating that petition.

SECOND-STAGE HOUSING

Ms. Andrea Horwath (Hamilton East): I want to present this petition that I received from a number of people in the city of Hamilton.

“Whereas funding for core counselling programs is needed, Family Services Hamilton has no funding to operate 28 units and therefore does not have the core funding to operate the second-stage services program;

“Whereas on April 6, 2004, the Honourable Sandra Pupatello stood in the provincial Parliament to announce government initiatives to fight domestic violence. She stated, ‘Probably the most significant part of this announcement today is getting our government back in the business of second-stage housing.’ The Liberals indicated that they would return core funding to support the programs and services in cash-strapped organizations like ours;

“Whereas on November 1, 2004, to the astonishment of Family Services Hamilton, these dollars were to be allocated for transitional housing support. Instead of following through with the original promise to reinvest in the 27 existing programs, the \$3.5 million was to be dispersed among 70 agencies across the province. Most of these agencies are not second stage, and some second stages have since found out that their programs will not

be numbered among those receiving the funds. We got no funding! Where is the core funding to come from to operate programs that were ignored?

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

“That the government revises their decision based on the impact to the services in our sector and immediately reinstate full funding to the second-stage services program of Family Services Hamilton.”

I affix my signature on this petition because I agree with it wholeheartedly. The women and other citizens of Hamilton need these services.

PIT BULLS

Mr. Phil McNeely (Ottawa–Orléans): “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas pit bulls are dangerous dogs, responsible for vicious attacks on humans out of all proportion to their numbers; and jurisdictions where bans on pit bulls have been introduced have seen dramatic reductions in pit bull attacks on humans; and community leaders and law enforcement officials all across the province have supported a ban on pit bull ownership;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to enact legislation banning ownership of pit bulls in the province of Ontario.”

This is signed by 35 people from Ottawa–Orléans. I’ll put my signature on that as well.

FREDERICK BANTING HOMESTEAD

Mr. Jim Wilson (Simcoe–Grey): I found some more Banting homestead petitions.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas Sir Frederick Banting was the man who discovered insulin and was Canada’s first Nobel Prize recipient; and

“Whereas this great Canadian’s original homestead located in the town of New Tecumseth is deteriorating and in danger of destruction because of the inaction of the Ontario Historical Society; and

“Whereas the town of New Tecumseth has been unsuccessful in reaching an agreement with the Ontario Historical Society to use part of the land to educate the public about the historical significance of the work of Sir Frederick Banting;

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

“That the Minister of Culture endorse Simcoe–Grey MPP Jim Wilson’s private member’s bill entitled the Frederick Banting Homestead Preservation Act so that the homestead is kept in good repair and preserved for generations to come.”

I want to thank Alliston Family Pharmacy, with special thanks to Johnny and Pamela for circulating that petition.

OPTOMETRISTS

Ms. Shelley Martel (Nickel Belt): This petition has been sent to me by the Ontario Association of Optometrists, and it reads as follows:

“Whereas the last funding agreement between the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care and the Ontario Association of Optometrists (OAO) 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 that 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 Ministry 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 agree with the petitioners, and I’ve affixed my signature to this.

CONTROL OF SMOKING

Mr. Richard Patten (Ottawa Centre): This is to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas 20% of the adult population, or 1.8 million adults in Ontario, continue to smoke; and

“Whereas hospitality concepts like bars, pubs, taverns, nightclubs, Legions, bingo halls, racetracks and casinos are businesses with a high percentage of patrons who smoke; and

“Whereas more than 700 businesses in Ontario have invested tens of thousands of dollars each to construct a designated smoking room to comply with municipal bylaws;

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

“Permit properly ventilated and separated designated smoking rooms in hospitality establishments that regulate and control employee and customer exposure to second-hand smoke.”

HEALTH CARE FUNDING

Mr. John O’Toole (Durham): I have the pleasure to present a petition on behalf of my constituents in the riding of Durham.

“Whereas the federal Income Tax Act at present has a minimum amount of medical expense for which a tax-

payer is entitled to claim a non-refundable income tax credit;

“Whereas the health and medical expenses of every citizen in the province of Ontario, great or small, affects of their overall net income;

“Whereas the Ontario Liberal government moved in their 2004 budget on May 18, 2004, to delist publicly funded medical services such as chiropractic services, optometry examinations and physiotherapy services;

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

“That the Income Tax Act remove the present minimum amount of medical expense for which an Ontario taxpayer is entitled to claim a non-refundable income tax credit.”

I'm pleased to support this on behalf of my constituents like Dr. James Stevenson.

LONG-TERM CARE

Ms. Shelley Martel (Nickel Belt): I have a petition signed by residents in my own constituency, which reads as follows:

“Whereas the Ministry of Health has approved a request by the Sudbury Regional Hospital to expand the geographical area where hospital patients who need long-term care can now be placed;

“Whereas this situation has occurred because there were no long-term-care beds available in the Sudbury region for these patients;

“Whereas patients now face discharge and placement in long-term facilities far from home in”...“Espanola and Manitoulin Island;

“Whereas the redevelopment project at Pioneer Manor has freed up space which could be converted into 30 temporary long-term-care beds;

“Whereas this provides a positive solution to our bed crisis;

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

“We demand that the McGuinty government fund 30 temporary long-term-care beds so that no patient is sent far from home for long-term care.”

I agree with the petitioners, and I have affixed my signature to this.

ANTI-SMOKING LEGISLATION

Mr. Brad Duguid (Scarborough Centre): I table a petition on behalf of a number of members of the Royal Canadian Legion, submitted to me by a good friend and constituent, Carolyn Fenn. It reads as follows:

“We, the undersigned members of the Royal Canadian Legion in agreement, are against the proposed McGuinty government anti-smoking legislation to be brought forward by the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care, George Smitherman, and our veterans' rights to freedom.

“During wartime, we sent our soldiers cigarettes, and now, 60 years later, our government wants to ban smok-

ing in their private club. We find this very ironic, especially since this was founded by a special act of Parliament to service the needs of our veterans. This is a very special place to the veteran, and different from any other private club, because of their history and role in honouring those who served in this great nation in wartime.”

Mr. Phil McNeely (Ottawa—Orléans): “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas smoking and exposure to second-hand smoke is the number one preventable killer in Ontario today, and there is overwhelming evidence that retail displays of tobacco products in plain view of children and adults increase the use of tobacco; we have collected 1,350 postcards from our school and community supporting a smoke-free Ontario in 2005 and banning the use of power walls to promote tobacco use.

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to support the Smoke-Free Ontario Act to make all public places and workplaces smoke-free and to ban the use of power walls. The city of Ottawa has been smoke-free since August 2001. All of Ontario deserves clean air.”

1530

ANAPHYLACTIC SHOCK

Mr. Kim Craiton (Niagara Falls): My petition is to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

“Whereas there is no established province-wide standard to deal with anaphylactic shock in Ontario schools; and

“Whereas there is no specific comment regarding anaphylactic shock in the Education Act; and

“Whereas anaphylactic shock is a serious concern that can result in life-or-death situations; and

“Whereas all students in Ontario have the right to be safe and feel safe in their school community; and

“Whereas all parents of anaphylactic students need to know that safety standards exist in all schools in Ontario;

“Therefore be it resolved that we, the undersigned, demand that the McGuinty government support the passing of Bill 3, An Act to protect anaphylactic students, which requires that every school principal in Ontario establish a school anaphylactic plan.”

I'm pleased to affix my signature to this petition.

NOTICE OF DISSATISFACTION

The Speaker (Hon. Alvin Curling): Pursuant to standing order 37(a), the member for Timmins—James Bay has given notice of his dissatisfaction with the answer to his question given by the Minister of Natural Resources concerning mill closure. The matter will be debated today at 6 pm.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Hon. Dwight Duncan (Minister of Energy, Government House Leader): Pursuant to standing order 55, I

rise to give the House notice of the business for next week. On Monday, February 21, we will be dealing with Bill 164 in the afternoon; on Tuesday, February 22, Bill 167 in the afternoon and Bill 163 in the evening; on Wednesday, February 23, Bill 135 in the afternoon and Bill 167 in the evening; and Thursday, February 24, 2005, is to be confirmed.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

FEDERAL-PROVINCIAL FISCAL POLICIES POLIQUÉS FISCALES FÉDÉRALES-PROVINCIALES

Hon. Dwight Duncan (Minister of Energy, Government House Leader): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I believe we have unanimous consent for the debate this afternoon to proceed as follows: That the time for debate up to 5:50 p.m. shall be split equally among the recognized parties. At the end of that time, the Speaker shall put every question necessary to dispose of the motion, and any recorded division required may be deferred.

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

Hon. Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs): I move the following: Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly of Ontario supports efforts to narrow the \$23-billion gap between what the federal government collects from Ontarians and what it returns to this province.

What you have before you is a simply worded motion, but it speaks volumes, because it speaks to the ambition that we all share in this House for the people we are privileged to serve. If you embrace diversity and understand that immigration strengthens our society and our economy, then you support this motion. If you want our children to continue their education in high-quality universities, colleges and apprenticeships, then you support this motion. If you want our seniors to be treated with dignity when it comes to health care, home care and nursing home care, then you support this motion. If you care about providing these things here in Ontario and you care about supporting them across the nation, you support this motion.

Parce que cette motion porte sur le renforcement de notre population, elle porte sur le renforcement de notre province pour qu'elle puisse continuer à servir notre pays.

Because this motion is about strengthening our people; it's about strengthening our province so it can continue to serve our country.

We Ontarians are proud Canadians. We're proud to be the economic engine of the country, with 39% of the country's population, accounting for 42% of its GDP. We're proud to be the heart of Canada, the province that

helps fund social programs like health care and higher education in eight other provinces and three territories. We are proud of our traditional role in Confederation. Our province has been commissioned by history to play a leadership role in the continuing evolution of this magnificent country, and we embrace that responsibility.

I was proud to work with the Prime Minister and my provincial and territorial colleagues at the First Ministers' meeting in Ottawa just last September, where together we crafted a new funding agreement for health care for the benefit of all Canadians.

And now our province is working with the federal government to create a new agreement on child care. We understand that some of our provincial counterparts have some reservations about the accountability provisions that the federal government is seeking to impose in return for new funding. We have no such reservations, and we are prepared to move ahead with the child care agreement as soon as possible.

I am pleased to report that Ontario supports a single national securities regulator, because, like the federal government, we believe that is in the best interests of Canadians.

At present, we are also working with the federal government to harmonize the collection of corporate income tax and to strike new agreements on matters ranging from immigration to skills development for our unemployed to offering Ontarians one-stop access to their provincial and federal government services.

I cite these instances of strong co-operation between our two governments because they symbolize my government's desire to work with the federal government in the interests of Ontarians and Canadians and because they provide the real context within which the substance of this motion is best judged.

Ontarians are proud to share the wealth they generate with Canadians so that Canadians everywhere can enjoy quality public services. But there comes a point where, if we do not retain a sufficient amount of our wealth to invest in Ontarians, we compromise our ability to continue building a stronger Ontario and therefore a stronger Canada.

We have come to that point. We find ourselves at a point in Ontario's history when our wealth generators are badly in need of renovation. Our education system needs rebuilding, our transportation network needs investment and our electricity system needs an upgrade, all within the context of a tax system that must be competitive. But our ability to invest in Ontario's future prosperity is compromised by the \$23-billion gap, the \$23-billion gap between what the federal government collects from Ontarians and what it returns to this province.

Here in this Legislature, regardless of political stripe, we know that no place has as much going for it as our province, Ontario. But we also know that there is an urgent need for these investments if Ontario is to remain the place to be for years to come. By way of example, Ontario ranks 10th out of 10 provinces when it comes to investment in post-secondary education per capita. Our

universities, colleges and apprenticeships require an investment of \$1.3 billion just to bring Ontario up to the national average. Aren't Ontario families entitled to even the average level of investment in their own universities when they're contributing so much to universities right across this country? If Ontario were treated the same as its provincial counterparts and received a per capita share of the Canada health transfer and the Canada social transfer, we would receive \$1 billion more to fund health care, post-secondary education and social assistance every year.

1540

Here in Ontario we embrace our diversity. We want to welcome and settle new immigrants and integrate them into our economy, but the federal government spends an average of \$819 per immigrant on settlement services in Ontario, compared to \$3,806 per immigrant in Quebec. Isn't an immigrant who lands in Toronto worthy of the same level of support as one who lands in Montreal? Does it make sense that Ontario attracts 54% of the country's immigrants, but just 34% of federal funding for their settlement?

Unemployed Ontarians receive the lowest benefit in Canada: \$5,060 per unemployed person. It's almost three times that amount in Prince Edward Island. If employment insurance benefits were distributed equally according to the number of unemployed persons living in a province, Ontario would have received \$858 million more in employment insurance benefits in 2003-04. The list goes on.

As one editorial put it, "Is it really too much to ask that our immigrants be treated like immigrants in other provinces; that our unemployed be treated like other unemployed Canadians; that our college and university students, our sick people and our citizens on welfare receive as much support from Ottawa as they would if they lived in another province?" If Ontario is the goose that lays the golden egg for the rest of Canada, this \$23-billion gap threatens to stunt the goose's growth, if not strangle it altogether.

To be clear, we are not seeking to eliminate the gap. It is only right for Ontarians, as Canadians, that the lion's share of that \$23 billion should go to benefit our less wealthy provinces and territories. We only seek to reduce the size of the gap so we can invest in the things that will create the prosperity that Ontario deserves, the prosperity that Canada counts on.

This last point is very important. Like my fellow Ontarians, I am a proud Canadian. I grew up in the shadow of the Peace Tower, the son of a francophone mother and an anglophone father. Growing up with nine brothers and sisters, we had everything we needed because we had each other, we had opportunity and we had Canada. I would never sacrifice my country, but I will always stand up for my province because my country depends on it.

So I say to my colleagues in this House, I hope you will join me in working to narrow the \$23-billion gap, because I know you love our province and our country. After all, you chose public service. I ask our fellow

Ontarians on Parliament Hill to join us in our effort. I say to them, we are striving to work with you on so many fronts.

This motion doesn't change that. It's not about drawing jurisdictional lines in the sand or attacking each other. It's about working together to attack Ontario's challenges.

As elected representatives from Ontario, we share a special privilege and we shoulder a unique responsibility. It is our privilege to live in the best province in the best country in the world. It's our responsibility to ensure that our children can say the same thing years from now.

When we vote for this motion, we affirm our willingness to accept that responsibility, to leave future generations a legacy that is without compare: a prosperous Ontario and a strong Canada.

Thank you very much.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Joseph N. Tascona): Further debate?

Mr. Robert W. Runciman (Leader of the Opposition): I appreciate the opportunity to lead off the debate on behalf of the official opposition, the Progressive Conservative Party of Ontario. I want to indicate at the outset that the official opposition will be supporting the resolution. I say that for a couple of reasons. One, it has been the position of our party and certainly of our current leader, Mr. Tory, for some years. And I want to draw attention to the fact that less than five short years ago the Progressive Conservative Party, when in government, tabled a somewhat similar resolution before the House. Unlike the official opposition of that time, I think we are acting responsibly in putting the interests of the province and the country first and not playing politics.

If you reflect back to April 2004, in a somewhat similar resolution moved by the Honourable Michael D. Harris, the Premier of the day, expressing many of the concerns Premier McGuinty has outlined today, one of the people voting nay on that list was Mr. McGuinty himself. I can go over it: Mr. McGuinty, David Levac, David Caplan, Monte Kwinter, Michael Bryant, Gerard Kennedy, David Ramsay, Gerry Phillips, Richard Patten, Leona Dombrowsky, Mike Colle, Jean-Marc Lalonde.

I think the people of Ontario should be aware of the history related to this issue, as well as listening to the good words of the Premier today, and what we're going to believe is a sincere view of the current fiscal arrangements and his clear desire to see some change occur in the near future. That's something for which we've been pressing for some time.

I mentioned earlier this week that the Premier has become the Amelia Earhart of Ontario politics, constantly changing direction but not finding a place to land. This is another indication. The government has been in office for about a year and a half, and all of a sudden we're hearing concerns about the fiscal arrangements on the national level. Why is that? It certainly wasn't part of the Liberal platform when they ran for election in 2003. It wasn't part of the throne speech. It wasn't part of the budget. All of a sudden, we're now hearing from the Premier and the Minister of Finance about how badly we are being treated

by their federal brethren in the great city of Ottawa. I think some people in this province and some people in this assembly have a right to be somewhat cynical about what's happening here.

We're going to take it on its face and support the resolution, but I think the government's actions and lack of a plan in a whole range of areas across government to date are cause for concern and certainly cause for questioning the motivation behind the resolution tabled and being debated here today.

I want to put on the record some excerpts from an open letter written by the leader of the Progressive Conservative Party of Ontario, Mr. John Tory, to the Premier, dated February 16. I'll just read a couple of paragraphs. This is Mr. Tory:

"I have been talking consistently for the past two years about the need for broader reform of overall federal-provincial financial arrangements. Many of these have evolved as governments have changed and as the country itself has changed, but we have not taken a thoughtful, deliberate overall look at the entire picture and whether it is presently working in the best interests of all Canadians.

"I"—John Tory—"have been making the case over the two-year period that the current regime is not working for all Canadians. To take one simple example, taxpayers (of which there is only one group) must wonder how a huge surplus of their money could arise at one level of government while other levels of government are struggling to provide services to those very same taxpayers.

1550

"Consequently, I support the notion that Ontarians and other provinces are in need of new, more equitable and realistic arrangements with respect to the country's overall finances, but I fail to see how your confrontational approach will reap the desired rewards.

"Premier, if your recent comments toward the federal government are genuine and not just politics of diversion, I urge you to start working with the first ministers in order to reform and review federal-provincial finances to ensure the utmost fairness for all Ontarians and Canadians....

"In my view, continuing with your current policy of demanding one-time grants from an existing federal surplus will not achieve this end. It is not the result of any plan or proposed reform to federal-provincial-municipal finances, which would provide real, long-term solutions....

"It is time that Ontario re-assert itself as a leader in Canada, and assume a prominent role in ensuring equity and fairness for Ontarians and for people across the entire nation."

Those are the words of Mr. John Tory, the leader of the Progressive Conservative Party of Ontario, someone who has been speaking out on this issue, as leaders of this party have been doing for a number of years. Mr. Tory raises the issue of the politics of deflection.

Hon. Greg Sorbara (Minister of Finance): Politics of what?

Mr. Runciman: The politics of deflection—deflecting attention away from the very serious issues that are facing you, facing the government, facing all of us, especially in the health care sector. We've seen a range of diversionary tactics over the past year or so, whether it's pit bull legislation, sushi, bring-your-own-wine or film censorship. We have to wonder what the motivation is behind all of these initiatives in their attempts to distract the attention of Ontarians away from the very serious challenges we're facing, primarily in the health care sector, at a time when the hospitals are laying off people and closing down beds. We just heard about St. Joe's in London closing its emergency ward for specific hours—Humber, Peterborough: Those are significant concerns that the government doesn't want to address or is trying to distract attention from by a variety of initiatives. One has to wonder about the resolution here today, whether indeed it is real.

Of course, we also know that this arose with some revelations with respect to the deficit. The deficit, we're advised, may now be approximately three times the estimate included in the budget: two point something billion dollars. We're now told it may be in the neighbourhood of \$6 billion. If that is indeed the case, it's because the Minister of Finance counted revenue that he will not be receiving until 2048.

But there is a whole range of things. Severance: The government is now spending \$91 million to fire nurses; 776 I think it is. That's \$91 million being used to compensate for the firing of nurses across the province. We do not know what the implications are going to be with respect to the district health councils or with the CCACs in severance costs.

Those are all significant challenges that will have to be met and dealt with. Again, there is an effort at real avoidance and an effort to camouflage some of the real problems that are facing this government and by default facing the people of Ontario.

Although it doesn't specify in his resolution, the Premier made some comments to the media—I think in a press scrum going into the caucus meeting the other day—that a good starting point for monies to be transferred back from the federal surplus was \$5 billion. We'd like to see the rationale for that. We'd like to see a breakdown for that. We'd like to see the justification for that. It has to be looked at in light of other transfers to the province. I know that some of the provinces have mentioned transfers to the auto industry, for example. They have to be balanced. You have to look at the total picture. We want to look at the total picture, whether we can agree with any specific figure or not-specific figure.

It's an indicator of this Premier and this government operating by the seat of their pants. This is writing something out on a napkin, coming up with a figure as you go into a caucus meeting without any specifics to back it up, without any rationale to back it up. I don't think that stands our government or our province in good stead when you're entering into these kinds of negotiations.

You have to wonder what the federal Liberal government is thinking about their so-called friends here at Queen's Park and talking about a new relationship. As I said the other day, the Premier drank the Kool-Aid and now fed-bashing is in vogue. After the unprecedented \$800 million dollars in additional revenues transferred by the Liberal government to assist you in funding health care, you brought in the largest tax increase in the history of the province—\$2.4 billion—supposedly to fund health care, and now you're crying poor. You're increasing taxes. You're increasing all sorts of costs. You've had increased transfers from your friends in Ottawa, yet you're chastising them, denigrating them, bad-mouthing them, at every opportunity and trying to wrap yourself in the flag as the protectors of Ontario, although only a little over four years ago when we tried to make the case for an additional new system of financing arrangements across the country, all of you who were here at that time stood up and spoke against and voted against that resolution. So it makes one pause, to say the least, with respect to this and with respect to wondering about the impact this is having on the federal government, especially when they see some of the initiatives being taken by Mr. McGuinty and his colleagues.

One that we've also mentioned is this \$400-million announcement in Windsor for a palace, a five-star hotel. People want hospital beds, not improved room service. That's simply because of two Liberals in that riding. Two weeks before the announcement, the Windsor Star said that it's time for Dwight Duncan and Sandra Pupatello to bring home the bacon. So they brought home the bacon. They say, "Well, this is arm's-length. We had nothing to do with it." Who was standing there at the announcement? Who was holding the picture of the new facility? Dwight Duncan and Sandra Pupatello. This is tawdry politics, pork-barrel politics at its worst, at a time when hospitals are suffering and we do not have a deal with the doctors. We had a walkout of doctors for the first time in 20 years. We're having nurses being fired.

When the president of the OMA heard about this Windsor casino investment, he said that he was "flabbergasted."

"Half the people in Windsor and Essex county can't even get a family doctor. To improve access to a casino instead of hospitals, nurses and doctors, well, it's not like me to be speechless, but it takes my breath away."

That was from John Rapin, the head of the Ontario Medical Association.

It should take the breath away of every person in this province who is concerned about the state of our health care system, and I suspect it takes away the breath of Prime Minister Paul Martin when he reads about Mr. McGuinty criticizing him for not giving them enough: "We're not getting enough of that pie, Mr. Prime Minister." At the same time, we have \$400 million to keep a couple of Liberal MPPs happy and to ensure that they can get re-elected. We have that money.

So there's a whole range of inconsistencies, to be very polite, with respect to this government.

We're going to support the resolution. We think it's time, well overdue, that there was a review of the fiscal arrangements. Our leader has called for it. Our former Premier, Michael Harris, called for it, without the support of the Liberal Party of Ontario at that time.

We do, I have to say, suspect the motivation behind this and the sincerity behind this, but regardless of that, this is a need. There's a real need for a review and a restructuring of the arrangements, and at the end of the day, we will stand in support of the resolution.

1600

Mr. Michael Prue (Beaches—East York): I listened to the Premier quite intently, and he said this was a very simple motion. I beg to differ. This is not a simple motion.

For the record, I'd like to read it out and explain why it's not simple. It says, "that the Legislative Assembly of Ontario supports efforts to narrow the \$23-billion gap between what the federal government collects from Ontarians and what it returns to this province."

Right away, there is a dichotomy if you look at it. It is the money that is collected from the 13 million people of this province, individuals, versus what is returned to the province i.e., the government of this province, to use for individuals. It is a complex matter and it is a difficult matter, and I want everyone to understand that at the beginning.

Having said that, I think we have to start off with the presumption of whether or not we support this province. I don't think any member of this Legislature will stand up and say we do not support this province. But I, as an individual, have to tell you, I am very proud to come from East York. I am very proud to represent the people of Beaches—East York. I am very proud to be an Ontarian, but first and foremost, I am proudest to be a Canadian. When you take that away, if you take away your pride in the country, then something is lacking.

I want to tell you that everything we do in this Legislature should not only support and strengthen this province, it should support and strengthen this country. It should support and strengthen the people who live in our communities, be they big or small, in this province.

When you look at who our true national heroes are, who are our national heroes? We just had a TV program—you probably saw some of it. Who are the national heroes who were remembered? Sir John A. Macdonald for building the railroad and uniting the country from sea to sea. We had Lester Pearson, who brought us a flag in very difficult times and in minority Parliaments, among a number of other very good measures. We had Tommy Douglas, the father of medicare, who pioneered it in his own province and saw it come to life for every Canadian across this country. We had Pierre Elliott Trudeau, who brought us a Constitution. These were all people who united and spoke passionately for all Canadians, not passionately for their province or city but for all Canadians.

I want us, as a province and as a government, to do the same thing, because I don't believe that division in any of

its forms is good for this country. We, as Canadians and as Ontarians, look in despair when we hear some separatists in Quebec talking about breaking away and forming another country or that they're not getting a fair share in Confederation. We look in despair and anger when we hear the Premier of Alberta or people from that province talk in similar terms about Alberta not getting a fair share and potentially breaking away from the country. We look in despair when we hear people in British Columbia occasionally say the same thing.

We ought not to be talking in any way to weaken this country, and we should be very careful in what we are asking the federal government. We should be very careful in saying we want more if the taking of that money will result in a weaker federal government and a weaker Canada, of which we are all so proud.

We have been blessed in this Ontario—absolutely blessed since Confederation. In 1867, the real money in this country was not in Ontario. The real money in this country was in Nova Scotia and New Brunswick. The real money was on the east coast. Those people thought long and hard about joining Confederation and in their wisdom decided to do so. They had an option—actually two of them. They could have stuck it out themselves—they were very prosperous—or they could have joined the United States. They thought long and hard before joining Canada.

But we have been blessed. Since Confederation, most of the money, most of the power, most of the authority and most of the population have come to this province. As a result, we have been blessed by the people, the resources, the money and the laws to build Ontario. It is the powerhouse of this country. We have never done this in a begging way, but we have done it with innovation; we have done it with daring. I do not want what is being done here today to be seen as the people of Ontario begging the federal government for more. I do not want to see this as some Dickensian character saying, "What do you want? More." What we are saying is that we want something that is fair.

But what we want for ourselves we should want for every other Canadian and every other province, because let me tell you, I believe they are all in the same boat. We have taken these federal policies and we have built this province: the federal policies around the auto trade, the federal policies around manufacturing, about protecting Canadian industries, about the mines, about agriculture. We have taken those and we have built a great province. At the same time, we have seen it as our duty and our privilege and our right to give back at least as much, if not more, than what we have taken out of Confederation.

Is something wrong today? I will tell you that something is very wrong when a federal government can have successive budget surpluses in the tens of billions of dollars—whether it be \$8 billion or \$9 billion or \$10 billion, or this year probably \$11 billion—year after year run those surpluses and see provincial governments and municipal governments not able to make ends meet, with the exception of Alberta, which is blessed with huge oil

revenues. With the exception of that province, every other province in this Confederation is running a deficit.

There is a very good reason why we are all running deficits. That is because the responsibilities set out under the British North America Act and now our Constitution are becoming more and more social. The money that it costs for education, the money that it costs for health care, the money that it costs for secondary school or tertiary education, the money that it costs for the environment and all of those things that are within the purview and responsibility of the provinces have escalated in costs. The same cannot be said for the costs borne by the federal government, be they the post office or national defence. Those costs, in fact, have declined over the years.

So we now see an imbalance. That imbalance needs to be looked at, and it needs to be remedied. But I am reluctant, given the arguments of the Premier, to say—I'm not reluctant with the motion but with the arguments of the last few days, that we in Ontario need \$5 billion, that we in Ontario need this money because we give \$38 billion more to the federal government than we get back, or some number that I don't even know where it comes from. Do we need \$5 billion? Probably. Would we spend it wisely? Probably more wisely than some of the money that's been spent in Ottawa. But can we expect to get \$5 billion alone and in isolation because Ontario says it needs the money? I think that this is a difficult problem and that we ought not—ought not—as Canadians, as proud Ontarians, to simply ask for that money.

If the argument is accepted as put forward by the Premier, what is to stop a city like the city of Toronto from saying to this province, "We send \$9 billion to the provincial government and we get \$4 billion back in services"? What is to stop the city of Toronto from saying the exact same thing: "We want \$5 billion from the province, because we are giving far more to you than what we are getting ourselves"? As a person who lives in this city, I reject that argument, just as you should reject the argument as put forward by the Premier.

The request is a justified request. The argument being made that we give more and should get it back is not one which can be sustained in the long term, because the argument works equally as well the other way, when it comes to the municipalities of this province. If we do so, I think it's flawed. I think it negates our history, and it negates who we are as Canadians and as Ontarians.

Do we need that money? Yes, we do. The question is, how do we get it? I would suggest we should do it in a sane and rational and Canadian way, the way we have done it in the past and the way that has been proven to work. It was some 20 years ago that the provincial Premiers of this country sat down with the Prime Minister at that time, Pierre Elliott Trudeau, and negotiated new cost-sharing arrangements. They sat down and they talked about tax points. Now that's not a really sexy thing to talk about, and probably many Canadians won't understand it. But in a nutshell, all that happened is that the federal government reduced the amount of taxes it

collected by 1%, and 1% was divided equally on a per capita basis with the provincial people. At that point, the federal government spent less, the provincial government spent more, the taxpayers spent the same, and it was understood that this was going to resolve the difficulties.

1610

That same process needs to be done again today. That same process needs to be looked at. We need to sit down with the federal government, not just Ontario but all 10 provinces and three territories, to talk about a sane and rational way to lower the \$11-billion deficit in favour of the provincial governments so that each one of those governments, be it Prince Edward Island, Nova Scotia, Newfoundland, British Columbia—all of them—or be it the three territories, get a portion of that money.

The responsibilities are becoming more and more provincially and territorially related and the monies to go with those responsibilities need to be found. That's what has to happen. I'm not saying that we, as a government, shouldn't be asking for money back, but I am saying that you cannot make the argument that we are paying so much more and therefore deserve \$5 billion. We cannot do that at the expense of any other place. I cannot do it to the poor regions in the Miramichi. I cannot do it to Manitoba. I cannot do it to Saskatchewan. I will not do it to Newfoundland. If we're going to do it, we need to do it together, as Canadians. This has to be a strong country, and we all deserve to share in its prosperity.

When we do that, we will also be in a very strong position to deal with the municipalities of this province. We know that municipalities, even strong ones like Mississauga, that for years and years have not had any debts, that for years and years have been able to hold the line on taxes, can no longer do so because of downloading and because they too have new responsibilities that they never had before.

When we negotiate with the federal government for tax points, we have to be prepared at the same time to negotiate and to deal fairly with the municipalities of this province. Just as much as this province needs more money for worthwhile goals like education, for hospitals, for our children, for daycare, the municipalities need it for what is happening here. You only have to travel around this great city or you only have to go to Hamilton or to Ottawa to see that the cities are not in the same kind of condition they once were. You see potholes, garbage, all kinds of problems that you never saw before. We, as Ontarians, need to address this, and we need, if we are to get some money here in this province, to ensure that monies flow just as equally and probably at the same time to our municipalities. If the argument being made is good for us, then we have to accept that the argument being made by the cities will also be good for them.

We are at a pivotal point here in our history. We are at a pivotal point when we, as a people, have to decide, is the Confederation working the way it should? Do we need to strengthen the federal government by allowing them to keep the monies they have? Are the services being provided for them the key services that the people

want and need, or are the services better given over to the provinces, better given over to the municipalities? If that is the decision we make rationally as a province, rationally in the municipalities, rationally in the federal government, then I think it's quite clear that we are going to have to redistribute that tax revenue.

I say it knowing full well that if, as Canadians, we choose in the long term to negate or to lessen the power of the federal government, we run the risk of negating and lessening the power of this great country we call Canada. If we stop saying, "We want more," or "We want our fair share," and say, rather, "What is going to work? What is in the best interests of the people of this province? What is in the best interests of this country?" we will come to the sane and rational decision that too much money is being collected by Ottawa and too little money is being collected by the province of Ontario and the other nine provinces, the three territories and the thousands of municipalities across this country. If that is the sane and rational decision we come to, then we need to come to it all together. I do not want to go this alone.

I will vote for this motion—perhaps; I want to hear some more speeches—if, in the end, we go together, if the Premier commits to sit down with the other provinces and come up with a solution that benefits all Canadians. I will not agree if it is simply that Ontario is going to ask for more. We have been blessed within this Confederation. We have a wonderful province. We are dynamic. We have skills and abilities. If we need to come at it a different way, I will come at it a different way, rather than do what I think would be destructive to the people of this country.

That's all I have to say. I hope my words have been listened to. I'm thankful that no one has heckled me. Let's go on and let's do it, but let's do it together. Let's involve every province. Let's involve every citizen in a national discussion of where their money would best be spent.

Mr. Khalil Ramal (London–Fanshawe): I'm privileged, as always, to stand up to speak and represent my riding of London–Fanshawe and the people of this province.

I listened to the Premier when he was talking about his motion, addressing the province about the logic behind this motion. It's very important, before I start to speak, to state some numbers.

In 2004–05, Ontarians will contribute \$23 billion more to the federal revenues than we'll get back in the federal spending and in paying our share of interest on the federal debt. Ontarians pay into the federal revenues \$84.9 billion every year. Federal spending in Ontario is \$48.5 billion every year and Ontarians' share of interest on the federal debt is \$13.5 billion. The gap: \$23 billion.

I just wanted to say those numbers because not many people know those numbers exactly: how much we pay the federal government and how much we receive from the federal government, our share of the interest on the federal debt, and also the gap of \$23 billion.

I was listening carefully to the member from Beaches–East York when he was talking about his logical approach to the situation, for somehow I agree with him on many issues, especially since I’m a person who came from a country that was divided and torn by war, where many religions and many sects were fighting among each other, every group claiming they weren’t getting enough of a share from the federal government. It’s the same story we’re talking about today. Then we had a weak federal government. We had a civil war where people hated each other. Three days ago, we heard about the assassination of the former Prime Minister of Lebanon.

But we go back to the Premier’s motion. I believe we are not asking for money. We are asking for fair treatment. I believe we are not asking for money. We are asking the federal government for more investment in this province. It doesn’t mean we have to go against Newfoundland or New Brunswick or any other poorer provinces of this country. Our obligation is to strengthen the nation by supporting all the corners of this country, but at the same time, we have to have fair treatment.

1620

I want to give an example about the immigration issue. We, as the province of Ontario, receive only \$819 dollars per every immigrant in the settlement program. In the meantime, Quebecers receive \$3,806 for every immigrant. When you go to any Canadian embassy across the globe, you see two departments: one for Quebec and one for the rest of the country. We’re not talking against Quebec. We are saying that we should give the same opportunity to every other province.

In the morning I was talking with an immigration lawyer who was telling me about some kinds of privileges the federal government gives the Quebec government. If you are a person who wants to immigrate to Canada and you have money, you can bring \$400,000 and give it to the Quebec government for five years with no interest. The Quebec government uses the money to support local business people, which is great, which is excellent. I’m not against it. But we, as Ontarians, should have the same right to strengthen our economy, especially when we have a deficit of \$5.6 billion crippling many aspects of our economy and hurting our education structure; when we have a health situation all of us are concerned about, all of us are talking about and all of us are trying to fix; when we have post-secondary education—especially after we received a report from Bob Rae, the former Premier of this province, that told us we need \$1.3 billion to be in balance; when we also have infrastructure problems. Our report says we need \$100 billion dollars to be on the right footing.

That’s what we are asking for. We are asking for more investment. We are not asking for money to balance our books. We never asked for that. We, as the province of Ontario, are part of the great nation we call Canada. We are asking for more investment, to be able to pay more, to be able to support our federal government by generating more tax and more revenues.

All of us heard the Premier talking about his initiative, his dialogue, not to create a war with the federal government, not to put down the other provinces, but to work with all the provinces and work with the federal government in order to understand our position, because everyone knows we are the heart of this country in terms of population and in terms of economic growth, especially when we talk about immigration. About 57% of the total of those who immigrate to Canada come to Ontario. At the same time, we receive 34% of total settlement support from the federal government. How are we able to make sure all the people who decided to come to this great province are being looked after? All of us have heard about so many foreign-trained doctors, so many teachers, so many engineers, so many professors, so many nurses, so many pharmacists. All those people who immigrated to this land immigrated on an assumption that they will be trained to be integrated in the system, to be utilized and be a benefit for the system. In the meantime, the federal government wasn’t able to give us support, the monetary support or the investment in order to maintain our responsibility for all the people who decided to come to our great province.

In the end, I’m going to support this motion, and I hope, as I heard from all the different parties, that they’re going to support it. I think it’s a great motion; it’s going to be good for the great province of Ontario.

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer (Kitchener–Waterloo): I’m very pleased to join this debate and to indicate that I will be supporting this motion. I certainly do support the position that has been taken by the leader of the Ontario PC Party, John Tory, who in his letter to Premier Dalton McGuinty on February 16 stated: “I urge you to start working with the First Ministers in order to reform and review federal-provincial finances to ensure the utmost fairness for all Ontarians and Canadians.”

He says: “This meeting must be called in order to begin the process of rebuilding and strengthening our federation and to ensure that taxes paid by Ontarians and, for that matter, by residents of other provinces, make it to the level of government, whether it be federal, provincial or municipal, which is required to deliver services to Canadians in the 21st century.”

I would acknowledge and recognize that Ontario has long been the driver of the Canadian economy. We want to ensure that, as Canadians, we will always be in a position where we can make a contribution toward the overall prosperity of our country, because that in turn helps Ontarians. However, at the same time, we need to ensure that there is a viable, long-term series of arrangements in place. We want to ensure the stability of our own economic future and financial viability, as well as that of our country.

It is important that this province assume leadership. We would support that type of initiative, as opposed to a one-time grab for additional money based on the current surplus.

I do need to point out as well that our government, on several occasions, also recognized the need for the

federal government to share more with other provinces, including Ontario. It's interesting. I think it's already been noted that on those occasions we did not have the support of the Liberal government in office today when Mike Harris put forward a similar resolution in 2000. I know that Dwight Duncan did not support it; Sandra Pupatello, Lyn McLeod or Jim Bradley.

In fact, Dalton McGuinty said about Premier Harris: "Once again he plays the blame game when it comes to the federal government. He says that if only the federal government would send the province more money, then things would be better off here."

In many ways, that's just what's happening right now. He goes on to say, "It is time for the Premier and this government to stare into the face of their own economic failings." I do think, in some respects, that's also what's happening here at the present time.

This government made tremendous promises in their election platform. They had a very ambitious spending program. They now recognize that the costing was not accurate. They are facing critical issues in the health system which they are not able to resolve. There are shortages of money; hospitals are short about \$170 million. They are being put in a position where they're laying off nurses. Seven hundred and fifty-seven nurses are going to be fired, despite the fact this government promised to hire 8,000. Hospitals are laying off not just nurses but other professional staff. We've heard about the cuts at the Sick Children's Hospital here in Toronto. The day surgery is going to be closed. I ask, where are those children, the most fragile children in this province, going to go for treatment?

We also have a government that has failed to reach a negotiated conclusion with the doctors in the province of Ontario. So there are many, many challenges that face people in this province. The commitment to improve access to care, to reduce waiting times, is simply not occurring, and I hope that this attempt on the part of the Liberal government and Premier McGuinty is not one to divert attention from their lack of ability to move forward with a plan for health care in this province.

1630

I would also say that if we take a look, the Liberals now have a debt of about \$6 billion. Again, they're trying to divert attention from their lack of fiscal competence. Maybe this is just another attempt to blame the feds and ask for a bailout. But I think, if it's as it appears, an attempt to take a look at equalization and better sharing of surplus revenue, certainly we would support that. We do recognize that Ontario needs a new deal, and the leader of our party certainly does support that.

I guess the concern at the present time is, is this just another diversionary tactic? We know that the Liberals in the province of Ontario are unable to address the issues of concern to people, when it comes to health care, and certainly the media attention on this particular issue takes the focus off the cuts to nurses, doctors, other health professionals and also the fact that hospitals are having to reduce their programs and services.

I will be supporting the motion, but I do have some concern about the motion and whether or not, in reality, it's intended to accomplish the goal of additional money being shared by the provinces and the territories.

Ms. Andrea Horwath (Hamilton East): It's interesting that this initiative came so quickly, really without any prior knowledge that it was coming forward. I took some time to think about it because, over the break that we had not too long ago, I spent some time listening to the CBC. Lo and behold, the particular program I happened to tune in was one of the talk shows the CBC has, discussing this very issue. People were calling from all over the province and all over the country to chime in on this debate, not from the perspective, of course, of Ontario but from the perspective of Newfoundland, because it was the Premier of that province who was on, speaking about his efforts and initiatives to have the federal government recognize the needs of that province in regard to the revenues they could have been gaining from off-shore oil. It was quite interesting to me because he made an extremely cogent argument about the historic situation the province has been in, as well as the concern that, should the federal government begin to address their issues with what they felt was a lack of equal treatment, then it might raise the exact kind of thing that's happening here today: that other provinces would start to indicate that they were not getting a fair shake from the federal government.

When this first came on my radar the other day, I was a little bit concerned, because I thought that the speakers who had been calling in to that radio show were, on balance—certainly not 100%—very sympathetic to the Premier of Newfoundland and very concerned about the ability of all provinces of our great nation to thrive, to do well, to benefit from being part of a strong, united country. So I was pleased in many ways to hear people, in the majority, speaking in favour of the new deal for that province, for the east coast provinces. But I also did hear, unfortunately, some rather high-pitched concerns from some members of the province and some members of the country—actually, some residents of various provinces—who were really not looking at the whole picture, I think.

I know the speakers so far today, from all parties, have taken pains to talk about how important it is for us to look at the situation as holistic; not as "us against them" or "we need and they don't," but rather as a recognition that the federal government, as a result of the decisions that have been made over the last decade or decade and a half in regard to transfer payments and how programs and transfer payments are made across the country, looking at those payments, looking at the way money gets transferred to the individual provinces, as well as for which programs—we've seen that it's the reduction in supports across the country, province by province, that has led to this eventual surplus that the federal government now has.

As you look at that from where we are here, as we've seen over the last decade and a half, the reduction of the

first deficit and now the surplus the federal government has been able to obtain are a direct result of the cutbacks the federal Liberal government has been making, year after year, to the provinces. We've seen that trickle down. Those cutbacks have affected the municipalities, as my colleague Mr. Prue quite adequately indicated. We see that not only do we have crumbling infrastructure across the province, city by city; we also see that poverty has grown enormously, not only in Ontario but across the country. The extent of child poverty, which was supposed to have been addressed, I think, in the year 2000 by the federal government, was not, so we now see continued growing child poverty across the country.

I think it's important to put this entire situation in perspective, because what we have is a situation where the deficit was eradicated and people were hurt by that, both here in Ontario and across the country. We certainly have surpluses now at the federal level, and I think it is appropriate that we take the opportunity to have a look at how those federal surpluses can be redistributed so that not only the people of Ontario but across the country can benefit. It's their dollars and, quite frankly, their pain that created that surplus over the last decade or decade and a half.

With that, I would just like to say that I'm concerned too about the context in which this initiative is being undertaken. I hope it is going to be undertaken in a way we can all feel proud of, not only as people who are sticking up for our province but as people who are concerned about what is happening from coast to coast to coast in this great nation.

Ms. Kathleen O. Wynne (Don Valley West): I'm pleased to rise to speak to the Premier's motion. I think one of the things we need to do is think about how we are framing this conversation. Wanting our fair share as Ontarians is definitely at the core of this. That's a piece of it, but I think the larger issue is that we really want a prosperous country. If we're going to have a prosperous country, then we've got to have a prosperous province.

I want to make an analogy—it's one that I know my constituents are making—and that is, if we want to have a prosperous Ontario, we have to have a prosperous Toronto. I made a statement in the House today to that effect. This government recognizes that if we are going to have a healthy province, we have to have a healthy Toronto, which is the economic engine of the province. That's why the City of Toronto Act, and the review of the City of Toronto Act, is such of an important one for the relationship between us and the city. I think there is a direct parallel between the health of the city influencing the health of the province and the health of this province, Ontario, influencing the health of the country. The difference is that in the case of the relationship between Toronto and Ontario, Ontario is dealing with a structural deficit. In the case of the province dealing with the federal government, the federal government is in the situation where it has a structural surplus. We have to look, I think, at the impact of downloading through the 1990s, both at the provincial to municipal and at the

federal to provincial levels. We have to look at this point in history and say, "OK, what is it we can do to redress those imbalances?" That's the issue we're dealing with right now.

1640

There are people who would say, "Well, why now?" The members of the former government are saying, "Why are you onside with this now? You weren't onside with this X number of years ago." The answer to that has to be that factors have changed. There's a confluence of factors right now that make this the right time, I believe, for the relationship between the federal government and Ontario to change in terms of the net contribution we make. As all the speakers before me from the government have said, that's not to say we're interested in eliminating our contribution. That's not what this conversation is about; it's about narrowing that gap.

To go back to the confluence of factors that I think are at work right now, the federal structural surplus has to be a piece of why the timing is now: the fact that we are in desperate straits in terms of investment in our post-secondary education, our social programs are in trouble, and we are dealing with a structural deficit that is not going to be resolved without further pain to those social investments. We need a different relationship in terms of the flow of money to the federal government.

We've tried, and we are trying, to work with the federal government to put in place a fair labour market development agreement, a fair immigration agreement, a child care agreement. Those are all discussions that are happening that will help the province to be on a sounder footing. We're happy, in fact, to have strings attached to those investments.

I believe that in recent years the reasons it was difficult for the federal government to take seriously the request for funds from the previous government were twofold. First of all, the previous government was dealing with a booming economy and was not dealing with a structural deficit. Second, I don't believe our federal cousins could necessarily trust that the money was going to be put into social programs. I believe the issue was that the federal government knew the previous provincial government wanted those funds so they could continue to cut taxes. That is not a viable reason for continued investment in the province of Ontario, and that's not what we want to do. What we want to do is invest in the people and the prosperity of this province so that we can continue to be the economic engine for the rest of the country.

The Premier used an elegant phrase. He talked about the fact that we've been commissioned by history to stay in this relationship of a net donor to the federal coffers, and we are absolutely committed to doing that.

I speak to a former history teacher in Richmond Hill, Jim Reid. I can remember, in my grade 10 and 11 history classes, that sense of Ontario as the place where wealth was generated to the benefit of the rest of the country. We can talk about the railway. We can talk about how those major national projects were financed and the role

Ontario played in those. I don't think there's anyone in this House who would want to step away from that historical commission we've been given. It's part of our psyche as Ontarians. We are, as the Premier has said, proud Canadians, and part of being a proud Canadian in Ontario has been giving to the rest of the country in terms of those grand national projects. We will continue to do that. We will continue to graduate students who will be the scientists, doctors, teachers and philosophers who will continue to grow this country.

But in order to do that, we have got to make investments now. We're at a critical juncture in the history of our province. If we can't get a handle on this structural deficit, and if we can't forge a new relationship with a federal government that is dealing with a structural surplus—we're not suggesting taking money away from other parts of the country, but we are saying, if we're going to continue making those investments, talk to us now. Help us to deal with our issues around post-secondary education. Help us to deal with our issues around adult education and the fact that we need dollars to invest in the immigrant population that comes to this province. More than 50% of the immigrants in the country come to Ontario, and we need the funds to deal with those immigrants. If we don't have them, then we are at risk in this country of not attracting those people, and we will be in trouble in terms of our demographic, of our workforce, going forward.

So it's at the peril of the country that the federal government and Ontario can't work out a new agreement. I certainly will be working with my federal member, John Godfrey, with whom I have a terrific relationship. I know that the conversation is going to unfold to the benefit of the entire country. That's our goal.

Mr. Frank Klees (Oak Ridges): I'm very pleased to participate in this debate. I find it interesting that this resolution is coming forward under the name of the Premier who, as leader of the official opposition when our government brought a similar resolution forward, would have nothing to do with it. To the person, their caucus voted against it. But here is the consistency. The consistency is that this Liberal Party is being inconsistent. I just question what credibility this resolution will carry with anyone.

I'm not sure, other than for the purpose of a media ploy, why we're even discussing this, because we know this Premier has no credibility with the people of this province. No one believes him. He has no credibility with anyone in Ottawa. All we have to do is speak to members, not of the official opposition in Ottawa, but of the government in Ottawa. There is no one I could find who gives any credence to what this Premier has to say.

Now here we are and he's asking us as members of the Legislature to give him an endorsement for this resolution, which I have no hesitation in doing because it is the right thing to do. We should be narrowing this gap. But there is a credibility gap that really needs to be narrowed, and that's the gap between what this Premier says on one day and does the next. That is the credibility

gap. Somehow, when this Premier gets to the business of narrowing that gap, then I believe we'll start to see some leadership, but I doubt that that will happen until after the next election, and my prediction is it won't be this Premier who will be giving that leadership.

I would like to take the opportunity to share with you an excerpt from a letter that was written to the Premier by John Tory, the leader of the Ontario PC Party, who is engaged now in a by-election, and whom we look forward to having in this House following the election on March 17. It was John Tory who wrote to Dalton McGuinty on February 16, and he makes the following statement in his letter: "I have been talking consistently for the past two years about the need for broader reform of overall federal-provincial financial arrangements. Many of these have evolved as governments have changed and as the country itself has changed, but we have not taken a thoughtful, deliberate overall look at the entire picture and whether it is presently working in the best interests of all Canadians."

1650

John Tory is of the mind that indeed what we are discussing here should happen, but he has also made the point that it's going to take leadership from the province of Ontario to initiate that. Dalton McGuinty is in a position to respond to the letter that Mr. Tory sent him, challenging him to call a meeting of his fellow Premiers and territorial leaders to address this financial imbalance that exists in this country; and then, when he calls that meeting, that he take the necessary steps to ensure that not only is that gap narrowed but—what we are very interested in, as the official opposition, and I'm sure the members of the third party share this with us—when additional funds are in fact transferred to the province of Ontario by the federal government, that they are then used responsibly.

We hear an announcement this week that \$400 million is going to be allocated by this government to build a casino hotel in Windsor. This is at a time when hospitals are closing beds, when nurses are being fired, when we have waiting lists that are longer than ever for important diagnostic services, when we have a doctor shortage, when this government is at an impasse with medical doctors in terms of their contract, when every teacher union in the province has voted strongly in favour of strike votes.

Every single ministry of this government is having problems meeting their budgets. The Minister of Finance is at risk now of being off his supposed commitment to balance the budget. We hear now that what we're on track for is another \$6-billion deficit, strictly the doing of this Minister of Finance.

My concern is that there's a great deal of rhetoric here in this resolution, with very little, if any, substance. The credibility gap lies in comments that this Premier, when he was Leader of the Opposition, would make whenever we spoke about the need to narrow that gap and to bring the federal government to the table. Constantly, there was defence of the federal government at the time.

I want to read into the record, for the purpose of providing some historical context to this gap, the following quote. I'm going to ask you if you can surmise who the author of this quote is. It reads as follows:

"I am part of the problem, not the solution. It was my government that diminished the size of transfer payments. I will not stand here and tell you that the cuts in transfer payments were insignificant. They were not. And I won't tell you that they have not had an impact. They have."

That was Allan Rock, federal member of Parliament, speaking about his own Liberal federal government and the actions that federal government took successively over the years to cut back on transfer payments and to reduce their participation in essential services being delivered to citizens in this province. That's what we're facing.

I will vote in favour of this resolution because it is the right thing to do. I have no confidence that this Premier will be successful. I have even less confidence that any amount of money that we might well receive by way of transfer from the federal government would, in fact, then be used responsibly. We have no evidence that this government has the ability to manage.

I look forward to the opportunity to hold this Premier, this Minister of Health, our Minister of Education accountable for how they're spending taxpayer dollars. We look forward to the people of this province holding them accountable for that same purpose.

Mr. Howard Hampton (Kenora–Rainy River): We are debating today the motion by the Premier. I want to read the motion: "That the Legislative Assembly of Ontario supports efforts to narrow the \$23-billion gap between what the federal government collects from Ontarians and what it returns to this province."

I think that most of us acknowledge that there is a gap, a fiscal gap. In fact, many of us who have been around here know that this gap has existed for some time. In fact, this gap has existed for at least the last 15 years, and other governments, other Premiers, have raised this issue and have spoken out on this issue. What I find remarkable, and what I think needs to be read into the record here, is that many members who now form the government, when other Premiers raised these issues and said that there is a fiscal gap and it needs to be addressed, were outraged in their criticism. I just want to note some of those people.

The current finance minister, Greg Sorbara—this is what he said May 17, 1994: "I get so offended by the increasing tendency of governments—municipal, federal, provincial—who are always looking for another level of government to blame."

Then he said, "It's not as if the government in Ottawa, the current one and the previous one, is absolutely without fault, but what always struck me as really unconscionable is for Ontario to be complaining that other governments in Canada were getting more and that Ontario wasn't getting its fair share." That's what the current Minister of Finance said just a few years ago.

In fact, he said, "We had a debate on a resolution to that effect in this Legislature last week, if I recall correctly. I couldn't even be here for the debate or the vote, because I would have been so angry at Bob Rae, once a champion of Canadian unity and Canadian solidarity, whining publicly in this Legislature about what cruel treatment Ottawa had given to Ontario over the course of the past five years, and indeed with the new government in Ottawa." That's what the current Minister of Finance said. When someone raised the issue of fiscal imbalance just 11 years ago, he couldn't scorn them enough; he couldn't ridicule them enough; he couldn't hide his anger, saying it was "unconscionable."

This is something else he said: "I was appalled and embarrassed that an NDP Premier, any Premier in Ontario, could whine and whimper about not getting more from the national government." That is what he said then.

I remember just a few years ago—I didn't agree with most of what the former Conservative government did. But I know that, from time to time, the Minister of Finance or the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs or the then Premier would raise the issue of the fiscal imbalance with Ottawa, and this is what some of the current cabinet ministers would say.

Minister of Health George Smitherman: "I believe that if members were to talk to their constituents and not be partisan about this, most of their constituents would say that they're tired of governments, provincial and federal, hammering each other with salvo after salvo after salvo and not getting on with the real task of finding improvements in the system." That's what he had to say when somebody raised the issue of fiscal imbalance.

Jim Bradley, now the Minister of Tourism, had this to say: "After the federal budget, we had the solemn face of the Premier and the angry face of the Minister of Finance blathering on about wanting more federal money." The Liberals called it blathering.

1700

This was the Minister of Energy and government House leader, Mr. Duncan: "They like to blame the federal government for this, that or the other thing. They like to imply a whole bunch of things." This was the response.

I want to read the response of the Premier, who brought this motion today: "...once again [the Premier] plays the blame game when it comes to the federal government. He says that if only the federal government would send the province more money, then things would be better off here." Well, it is time for the Premier and this government to stare into the face of their own economic failings. This is what the current Premier said just a few years ago when the former government raised the issue that there was a fiscal imbalance with Ottawa.

Or let me quote again from the current Premier, just a few years ago: "Mike Harris is so obsessed with fed-bashing, he's ignoring the crisis in health care in his own backyard, one largely of his own making." That was the current Premier.

When other governments raised the issue of fiscal imbalance, virtually every member of this McGuinty government cabinet couldn't scorn them enough. They couldn't disparage them enough. They couldn't call them whiners enough. I have to wonder a bit about the sincerity, because what I heard from the current Premier just 18 months ago was that if a Liberal government were elected in Ontario and there were a Liberal government in Ottawa, it would be sweetness and light, it would be motherhood and apple pie, everything would just proceed with such harmony that there would be no issues, no difficulties. In fact, I remember the now Premier, now that he's out there fed-bashing and blaming Paul Martin, just six months ago—not even that—at the federal-provincial health conference. When the current Prime Minister announced that the federal government was going to make available several billion dollars for provincial health care budgets and that at least \$2 billion was going to come to Ontario, the current Premier described the now Prime Minister as visionary, as putting in place a framework that would sustain medicare for the next generation. Even six months ago, the now Premier was completely unaware of this fiscal imbalance; completely unaware of it.

Suddenly, now, after virtually every one of these McGuinty government cabinet ministers has disparaged, has scorned, has literally torn a strip off any Premier who would dare raise this issue in the past, it is critical issue number one on their agenda. I wonder why. I wonder how this could happen in just six months.

Well, let me tell you what has really happened. New Democrats, like every other Ontarian, are in favour of Ontario receiving more money that we can put into health care or education or into our municipalities, into our colleges and universities, money to protect the environment. I'm in favour of that. I'm very much in favour of it. In fact, let's be clear: That's motherhood and apple pie. I'm in favour of that, but I want Ontarians to know what's really happening here, what's really going on, how Dalton McGuinty could go from not seeing the fiscal imbalance as a problem at all just a few short months ago to now seeing it as the critical issue. This is what happened, and it's important for the people of Ontario to understand it.

What this is really all about is that the Provincial Auditor has called the McGuinty government on its Enron-style accounting trick. This government tried, in the same way that Enron and Nortel tried in their accounting tricks, to take credit for revenues which might come to the province five years from now, 10 years from now, 15 years from now, 25 years from now. It tried to take credit for those revenues all in this year's budget: \$3.9 billion worth. I want to remind people that people who participated in that in Enron are going to jail, and people who participated in that kind of budget accounting scheme at Nortel are likely to go to jail, and many of them are being sued for millions of dollars. The McGuinty government tried exactly that kind of accounting trick in this budget and the Provincial Auditor

blew the whistle on them. He said, "You can't pull this \$3.9-billion accounting trick."

So now, after the Provincial Auditor has blown the whistle, suddenly the Premier is looking for a lifeline and he's looking for someone to blame. Thus, the very idea of a fiscal imbalance that this Premier used to scorn, that all these cabinet ministers used to scorn, that they couldn't criticize enough when other governments raised the issue of fiscal imbalance, suddenly, it is like the saviour to this government. This government desperately needs a quick \$5 billion to cover up a problem that it has created.

What this debate is really all about is that Premier McGuinty, in the last election, didn't level with the people of Ontario. He promised people Rolls-Royce health care, Rolls-Royce education, Rolls-Royce financing for municipalities, but then at the same time he said, "Oh, but we can have those low, low Louisiana-style taxes." Anyone who thinks about it for a minute knows you can't have billions to put into health care, you can't have billions to put into education, you can't have billions to transfer to municipalities, you can't have billions for colleges and universities and you can't have money for the environment and still have Louisiana-style taxes. There is a big gap there; a multi-billion-dollar gap.

Dalton McGuinty went through a whole election campaign pretending that didn't happen. Now the chickens have come home to roost and the gap is becoming very apparent. So he is desperately looking for someone else to blame. If you think about it, over the last six or seven months, gee, the former government has been blamed. They had some sins, and I probably criticized them more than anybody. But the former government has been blamed, doctors have been blamed, teachers have been blamed. Now Nova Scotia has been blamed, Newfoundlanders are being blamed, and even the person that the Premier described as visionary six months ago, Paul Martin, is suddenly a bum, a grinch. He's somehow responsible for the McGuinty government's difficulties. That's what is going on here.

This government has gotten themselves into this financial jam. Yes, it's a financial jam. It's becoming a health care jam. It's becoming an education problem. It's becoming a problem with municipalities that don't have the money to provide the services that they need to provide. It has become a real problem. But this isn't something that Paul Martin created. This isn't something that Newfoundland created or Nova Scotia created. There has been a fiscal imbalance for a long time. Dalton McGuinty used to scorn people who mentioned that fiscal imbalance, but now that he's desperate, he is going to embrace the concept of fiscal imbalance and say that something needs to be done about it right now.

I think it's time for the Premier to be straight with the people of Ontario. I want a better fiscal deal for Ontario. I want a better fiscal deal for other provinces as well. But let's be clear. This is not the source of the McGuinty government's problem. The source of the McGuinty government's problem is their failure to level, to be straight with the people of Ontario in the last election. To

tell people that on one hand you can have the best health care, the best education, the best colleges and universities and the best-financed municipalities, but on the other you can have Louisiana-style taxes—that is the root of the problem.

1710

I simply wonder when we're going to see an actual plan. This is a panic attack for a bailout, but we still don't see a plan. We don't see a plan for better health care. We don't see a plan for more nurses. We don't see a plan for our schools and our children's education. We don't see a plan for colleges and universities.

I was embarrassed for them yesterday when they stood up and tried to say that a draft regulation on air conditioners was their Kyoto plan. I was embarrassed. I couldn't believe it. It wasn't even a real regulation. It was a draft regulation, a virtual regulation, a cyber-regulation—not the real thing. I was embarrassed for them.

That's the question the people of Ontario are asking: Where is the plan?

I want to deal with the credibility gap of one Dalton McGuinty, because that's the heart of the problem now: It's the gap between the unending list of promises made by Dalton McGuinty and the reality that people are now seeing every day. Public services are not improving, health care is not improving, education is not improving, and the financing of municipalities is not improving. That's the gap, and that's the reality that far too many Ontarians are having to face in their daily lives. Far too many people are saying, "Where's the plan?"

One of these realities is that there are far too many children in Ontario who are living in poverty. All of the experts on the subject agree that one simple step on the part of the McGuinty government would go a long way toward improving things for many of these poor children: eliminate the clawback on the national child benefit—something that Dalton McGuinty promised to do. You've got to admit, you can't blame Ottawa for that. In fact, that new-found grinch, Paul Martin, actually sends the money to deal with this serious problem to Ontario every month, but instead of using this money to deal with child poverty, the McGuinty government pockets that money. It takes it out of the hands of poor children and pockets that money itself. Do you want to fix that problem? End your clawback of the national child benefit. I should say that New Democrats put forward a motion before the finance committee to do that. The very McGuinty government members who are now crying about the fiscal gap refused to vote for that amendment. In fact, they voted it down.

Let me give you another example. Premier McGuinty promised that the government would invest \$300 million in new provincial money to benefit 330,000 Ontario children with better child care. We checked with some Ontario child care experts, and it turns out that not one penny of new provincial money has gone into regulated child care in this province—not one penny. The government promised \$300 million. Where is it? The least you could do is allocate \$100 million toward that goal in the

coming budget to get partway there. But once again, that motion was before government members in the finance committee, and they voted that down too.

Do you know what's really happening here? Do you know the real result of this credibility gap? People actually hoped that the McGuinty government would be different, but in fact people are becoming very disappointed.

Here's an example from today: I remember the holier-than-thou sanctimony when this government brought in their act to outlaw partisan advertising by the government. You read the section of the bill, and it says, "No picture of the cabinet minister; no name of the cabinet minister; no signature of the cabinet minister." Then what do we see today? After the act was passed by this Legislature, what do we see? This government engaging in exactly that: the same disgraceful partisan advertising that they were so holier than thou in condemning, so sanctimonious in condemning. Here they're doing it themselves. Do you know what their excuse is? Their excuse is that they haven't proclaimed the bill into law yet. Parliament passed it. Do you mean that now, through your own act of omission, you want to leave the door open so you can engage in the same kind of partisan advertising you so sanctimoniously condemned? That's why people are becoming disappointed. That's why people are saying, "Where's the plan?"

I'm serious about this. As I said, all Ontarians would like to see more money coming for health care, more money for education, more money to protect the environment, more money to lift children out of poverty, and more money for our colleges and universities. We'd like to see that. We need to see some money for farmers. We need to see some money in an investment strategy for the forest industry in northern Ontario, which is being hurt by this government's policy of constantly raising electricity prices but having no economic or investment strategy for the forest industry. We need to address the needs of farmers. We need to address the needs of First Nations that have been so long overlooked.

But we need to recognize that that's not what's here today. What's here today is a Premier who used to scorn the idea of a fiscal imbalance, who used to heap cynicism on other Premiers who raised the issue of a fiscal imbalance, and now he's trying to save his own skin because he wouldn't level with people in the last election.

I want to present an amendment to the motion.

I move that the motion be amended by inserting after the words "returns to this province" the following: "and that this money be targeted for the hiring of 3,000 nurses, a 3% increase in Ontario Works and Ontario disability support plan benefits, an end to the clawback of the national child benefit, and \$100 million of new funding for Ontario's regulated, non-profit child care system."

That is the amendment I move so that we can actually see some of this money, if it ever arrives, go to what it was promised for.

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn (Oakville): I'm here to speak on behalf of the people of Oakville who, as you know, are proud Ontarians, like all the people of Ontario

who are represented by other members around the House. They're also very proud Canadians.

When you think of Ontario as the economic engine of our country, it's a province that's consistently been a net contributor to Confederation. If you put it in very simple terms, if Ontario is successful, then it follows that Canada will be successful as well. In supporting the resolution that was put forward today by our Premier, you're supporting the continued success of both our province and our country.

What the resolution calls for is that this Legislative Assembly support efforts that would narrow the \$23-billion gap that exists between the amount of money that is currently collected by the federal government and the amount that is actually reinvested in our province. What we need in this province is a process to be undertaken in conjunction with all the other provinces and our federal partners, and we need to re-examine the fiscal imbalance that currently exists and begin to narrow that \$23-billion gap.

As the economic engine that drives Canada's economy, Ontario is also home to a very strong manufacturing base. It's got a wealth of natural resources. It's got a strong and growing auto sector that's extremely important to my community of Oakville. It's got a world-renowned financial sector.

The men and women of Ontario are proud Canadians. They're hard workers. They pay their federal taxes. It's a country we embrace with pride, and we're proud to be a province within that country.

1720

It's time to re-examine the current financial arrangements with a view to securing federal reinvestment in such items as quality child care, which is an issue that is so important to the working families of this province. Also, such items as investment in post-secondary education should be of prime importance. It's of prime importance to our young people and the future of our economy. We know that skills training and education are vitally important to securing the investment that creates the well-paying, secure and long-term jobs that we want in our province.

Our review of the current funding arrangement with our federal and provincial partners, and a new arrangement that looks at the \$23-billion gap, will allow more investment in better post-secondary funding, which is not only good for Ontario's young people but is good for Ontario's employers, is good for the economy of Ontario and is also good for the economy of Canada.

Last summer we learned that Ontario suffers about a \$100-billion gap in infrastructure funding. It's the infrastructure we need that provides clean drinking water, treats our wastes, and provides transit and transportation for our communities. Every level of government understands how important adequate and well-maintained infrastructure is to attracting investment to our province and to our country.

Our country depends on skilled and hardworking immigrants from all over the world to choose Ontario as

a new home for a better life for themselves and their families. Over the last three years, Ontario received about 134,000 new immigrants. The province of Quebec, by comparison, received just over 38,000 in that same period. Yet the current funding formula that we have with the federal government allows Quebec immigrants to receive approximately \$4,000 each for settlement purposes, while the same immigrant or immigrant family in Ontario receives only about \$800 per person.

What we need is to re-examine the funding formula that has helped to make our province strong and our country strong, but we need to re-examine it, I think, with a view to allowing Ontario to continue to make this a strong country. There are three provinces that are net contributors—Alberta, British Columbia and Ontario—and the more provinces that become net contributors, the stronger our economy becomes, the stronger our country becomes, and the stronger the Ontario economy becomes as a result of membership in Confederation.

I believe the points put forward by the Premier to date have been points that have been quite well received by the majority of Ontarians. It was very heartening to hear the comments from members of the opposition in support of the Premier's resolution. I think they expressed their concerns adequately, I think they expressed their concerns honestly, and I think their support at the end of the day is something that is going to serve all Ontarians well in a very non-partisan way. For this type of issue, we need to approach it. This is for the entire province, for the future of our country, for the future of young people who we know need more investment in things like post-secondary education.

We know that the best education secures the best jobs. We know that jurisdictions that have good education systems attract investment not only from within that country and that jurisdiction, but also from the international community. We've developed, I think, a reputation as a province and a country that should be invested in. In order to maintain that, we need to maintain the type of investment that has led us to that place in the first place. I think we're starting to fall behind as a province with the funding arrangement we have currently with our federal cousins in Ottawa.

In summary, I think Ontario citizens have always done their part, and want to continue to do so as a member of this great country. We're asking to keep more of Ontarians' money right here in Ontario. We want that money to develop child care. We want it to build infrastructure. We want it to invest in post-secondary education. By doing that, it can only help, as I said previously, to not only strengthen our country but to strengthen our province.

Mr. John O'Toole (Durham): It's a pleasure to respond to the government's notice of motion. I want to be very clear, because I'll only be speaking for a few minutes, but there is a very important point to be made here: I'm quite suspicious about this motion.

I recall when Dalton McGuinty was sitting over here in the third or fourth row—actually, he got to be leader

by mistake at about 2 in the morning. Quite honestly, I thought Gerard Kennedy would have been a better leader, that it would move further to the left and leave more room for us in the centre.

But I really want to make the point here: Why I'm suspicious about this is that they've said a lot of things in response to polls, but they don't do it. That's the legacy. There's a bit of a pattern developing here, as they'll say one thing and do quite another. So I'm suspicious.

I've read articles, and these articles all lead in a certain direction. In fact, the conversation in the paper this morning about his brother, and his brother's conversations with his boss—I think ultimately you can cut to the chase here. Do you know what this is about, Mr. Speaker? I'd like you to pay attention here. This is a very good point I'm making. I believe what they're doing is—he's outraged about the transfer payment of \$23 billion, as was Bob Rae in 1993, as was Mike Harris. He was accusing Harris and Eves of fed-bashing.

Mr. Jeff Leal (Peterborough): Who did that?

Mr. O'Toole: Dalton did, of course.

Here's the point: I think at the end of the day, what he's trying to do—and this is the suspicion I have. It may be the Grassy Knoll theory at work here but it's this: He's going to be outraged, but he already knows that Chrétien knows he's suffering in the polls because of no plan, no vision and mismanagement. He needs some help. So it's like Danny Williams. Eventually Chrétien or, pardon me, Martin is going to bail him out in the budget and he's going to say, "Here is an extra couple of hundred million or a billion or whatever it is into the big black hole of Liberal spending." Quite honestly, it's going to look like Dalton won again, but here's the evidence; here's the history. You should always learn from history or you're doomed to repeat it.

Do you recall, any of you who are still listening or awake here, earlier on when Dalton went as the new chair of the provincial leadership group and they got the new health accord?

Mr. Leal: Great job.

Mr. O'Toole: Dalton did a great job, didn't he? How is health care? Isn't he asking for more? You say it's a great job? Are you paying attention to what's going on here? He did a miserable job, and now he's admitting he did a miserable job. That's what he's doing. He's saying, "I failed back in the big, successful health accord." Think about it. Why is he back? Health care is 50 cents on all the dollars. Such a great victory? Obviously he's admitting it wasn't a victory right now. You've got to admit and concede that at least.

But, you know, there's another plan. I have a lot of respect for Minister Bountrogianni. In fact, she's more of a Conservative, and she belongs over here more, but the fact is that she's a kind-hearted, intelligent person. She knows the national daycare program. She wants it. She's a psychologist. She knows about it. The Liberals in Ottawa are going to give you one-time funding. They've got a \$5-billion pot for a national daycare program. That

won't cover the cost for Ontario. She knows it and that's why she didn't sign the agreement.

Mr. Mike Colle (Eglinton-Lawrence): Ken Dryden is going to look after that.

Mr. O'Toole: Yes, well, he'll probably go back and play goal for the Leafs or something. But here's the point: You can't trust them federally; you can't trust them provincially. They've broken all the promises. They've raised the taxes. They've failed in health care. They've failed in education. They've got the Toronto schools falling apart. I don't know.

But there's another part to all this: the surplus in Ottawa. Yes, it is attributed to the strong economy of Ontario. You've got to recognize that the economy of Ontario is strong because of the policies put in place by Mike Harris and Ernie Eves. There are lots of things they didn't do right, but they had the numbers right. One of the surpluses—and Minister Kwinter would know this as well; he's been here long enough to know—one of the large surpluses in Ottawa that's seldom talked about is the EI fund. The heavy-manufacturing base in Ontario is 50% of the economy. Some 50% of that \$4-billion surplus in the EI fund is Ontario's—hard-working employers' and employees' money. Think about it. Can you trust a Liberal? What have they done to you lately?

This motion is a charade, and I ask you to pay attention. I'll be supporting it because it's the right thing to do.

1730

Mr. Colle: I've listened to a lot of very heartfelt presentations here. Beyond the political points people are trying to score, I think everybody who has been around here knows that there is a serious challenge facing Ontario. It's not because of something one government of one political stripe did; it is a challenge that's inherent in the traditional role Ontario has played in Confederation. That challenge is that Ontario has been the generator of wealth and prosperity that's been shared by the rest of Canada. That's our traditional role and we'll continue to play it.

But I think the Premier is saying that it's time for a little bit of deep reflection on where this is going, considering the present fiscal realities. Other Premiers have tried to do this, and I give credit to the other Premiers for raising this in the past, but there is no denying that Premier McGuinty has received praise right across this province from editorial writers of every stripe, saying that this is an issue worth raising and worth fighting for.

It is essentially not about whether we have money for the Liberals of Ontario or for programs in Ontario; it's about the people of Ontario. We all know that our constituents work extremely hard. Whether they're in Whitby, Wawa, Oshawa, Hamilton or Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ontarians work extremely hard. I see new Canadians working in my own riding at two or three jobs: driving a taxi, working at a variety store, delivering flyers. This is a typical Ontarian who is willing to roll up their sleeves and work. All we're saying and all the Premier is saying on behalf of those Ontarians—and the member from

Dundas, Mr. McMeekin, will tell you about the farmers in Ontario. That's what this is about. It's not about this government; it's about the northerners in Sudbury, Pickle Lake and Moose Factory, where they work extremely hard and they pay their fair share of taxes to Ontario. They pay more than their fair share of taxes to Ottawa. All they're saying is, "Let us keep a bit of this in our pockets here in Ontario." It's not that they want to spend it; they want to continue to work harder in Ontario so that their children can get jobs, their neighbours can get jobs, and we can create more wealth for Ontario and Canada. That's what this is about.

It's about expanding the economic capacity of Ontario. Right now, by this outflow of money, without any kind of concern about Ontario's capacity to generate more wealth, we are jeopardizing our capacity to create jobs and wealth to be shared by all Canadians. That's the key point. It's something we have to do better, as elected officials on both sides of the House. It's something we have to get our universities and secondary schools to talk about more, about the fact that Ontario also needs to be nourished and the people of Ontario need some kind of appreciation.

The member from Haliburton will tell you that not everybody in Ontario is rich. There are people who are living on the margin. Good, hard-working people in Fenelon Falls are not in any way asking for a handout. They're saying, "We work hard, we pay taxes, we want some of that federal money," which is their money. That money belongs to the people in Fenelon Falls. They're saying, "Let's keep it in Fenelon Falls so we can create more jobs in Fenelon Falls, more opportunity; put it into our hospitals, our schools." We do it for the good of Fenelon Falls, Haliburton, Ontario and Canada, right? That's what it's about. It's not about government getting more money; it's not about the Premier getting more money. It's about keeping money in the pockets of the people of Ontario so they can help their neighbours and the whole province.

This province has always been very good in its role. It never complains. Traditionally, you hear about Alberta and BC and, God love them, the people in the Maritimes. They all need help from the federal government. We, as Ontarians, say, "Sure, help them." But it's getting to the point where we've got to keep a little bit of that money here in Ontario so that we can invest in our universities, give some money back to our farmers so they can get through these tough times and invest in our cities so we can fix our roads, our sewers. That's what this is about. It's not about begging Ottawa or asking Ottawa for their money.

People in Ontario are extremely generous, they're extremely entrepreneurial, they want to grow the pie more—they want to. That's why we have to listen to people like Roger Martin, the dean of the Rotman School of Business in Toronto. We have to listen to Dr. David Naylor. These are people who, for years, have been telling us that we have to make Ontario a more sustainable place to invest in so we can create more jobs. We have to

listen to people like Roger Martin and we have to keep some of that money here in Ontario, not for Ontario's benefit. How many times do we have to repeat that? This is for the benefit of all of Canada, which shares in Ontario's prosperity. We can't do it with this present structure.

Premier McGuinty and the Minister of Finance have been dealing with this reality ever since we came to office. Every time we look at trying to fix health care or education, we realize that, fundamentally, we can't do it with the present financial arrangement that exists with Ottawa. It's not sustainable. It doesn't help the rest of Canada. We're saying this money is needed to be invested in Ontario so that we can create a healthy Stelco, so we can create cities that are vibrant.

There are poor farmers not only in Saskatchewan or Manitoba; there are poor farmers right here in Dundas and Aldershot. There are poor farmers in Halton Hills. So when the federal government has money to help farmers, all we're saying is that the farmers in Halton Hills deserve some help too. That's all we're saying. I hope you can support us in helping those farmers in Halton Hills, because they are deserving of help.

We're seeing working people in Ontario whose blood, sweat and tears—and they're working two or three jobs. They're saying, "We want to keep a little bit here so we can help our families get through these tough times." The people in Peterborough deserve a bit of help too, because it's not just depressed areas in Cape Breton. We have places in Ontario that need a helping hand. We're saying keep a little bit of that money in Peterborough county, keep a little bit of that money in north Toronto, where there are elderly people.

I have senior citizens in my riding, and I know the member from James Bay understands this, living on \$9,000 or \$10,000 a year. How can you live in Toronto? That is what they're doing, trying to feed themselves, house themselves. We're saying they deserve a better shake here as citizens of Canada.

We've heard about the immigrants. We have an abundance of immigrants who come here, and they're wonderful because they create jobs and wealth. They're hustlers, they're entrepreneurs, but they should be given a bit of a helping hand, just as much as they get when they go to Quebec. We can't maintain that gap of \$3,000. That has to be closed so we can help our wonderful immigrants, because they will create and grow the pie like nobody else. We're lucky to have all these new people with new ideas coming to Toronto, Whitby, Sault Ste. Marie, all over Ontario. They want to make this country grow, to make this province grow. It's an amazing place.

But right now we've got one hand tied behind our back because we're using outdated, old formulas that nobody understands. These formulas are not transparent. They're oblique; they're impossible to understand. Let's make the arrangements transparent, understandable, so that the money that is needed to go to Nova Scotia or the money that is needed in Ontario is clear and understandable to all Canadians. That's what this is all about.

1740

Mr. Ted Arnott (Waterloo–Wellington): I'm very privileged to have this opportunity to speak on this important motion this afternoon on behalf of my constituents in Waterloo–Wellington.

The motion has been tabled by the Premier, as we know, and it asks the Legislative Assembly to express support for his recent statements calling attention to a so-called \$23-billion gap between what the federal government collects from Ontarians and what it returns to the province.

This particular motion was only tabled this week, and its political objective appears to me to be a precursor to the government announcing in its upcoming budget that it will be unable to balance the budget before the government's term of office ends, mercifully, in 2007. Through this admission of fiscal failure, which is implied in the text of the resolution, the provincial government is seeking to shift the blame which will surely befall them on budget day when the Treasurer informs the House of the budgetary policy of the government.

I say this because it is important that the government members understand why this motion is being brought forward at this time. The government members will recall the previous statements of the leadership of the Ontario Liberal Party in recent years on this issue. Since 1993, when Jean Chrétien and the Liberal Party were elected to form a majority government in the House of Commons in Ottawa, Ontario Liberals in this place have been very reluctant, in any way, to criticize their federal counterparts. As an example, as the Leader of the Opposition pointed out earlier in this afternoon's debate, the Ontario Liberal caucus, in April 2000, voted unanimously against a resolution tabled by Premier Mike Harris which called upon the federal government to increase funding to the provinces for the federal program that supports health care, the Canada health and social transfer. I remember that day vividly. The Liberals came in here, and they were apologists for their federal counterparts in their speeches and in the votes they cast.

I remember that day vividly because I had had a role in the development of that motion tabled by the Premier. In those days I was privileged to serve within the government as a parliamentary assistant, and I was also a member of the policy committee of cabinet for health and social services. As a member of this committee, I was privy to government information and I participated in discussions that led to cabinet decisions. I appreciated the fact that Premier Harris appointed me to this meaningful committee, and although I wasn't burdened with the responsibility of being a cabinet minister, I felt I had a say and I took this responsibility very seriously.

I recall reading the briefing material in advance of one of our cabinet committee meetings and being shocked to see that the federal contribution to health care in Ontario had fallen to a paltry 11 cents on the dollar. I couldn't believe it. I asked questions at the meeting and I was assured that, in fact, that was the case.

At that same time, the member for Kitchener–Waterloo was the Minister of Health, and I recall the extraordinary effort she put into her job, putting in 20-hour days, most days, seven days a week for months on end. I know that the member for Simcoe–Grey will know what I'm talking about, as will the current Minister of Health.

As a member of this committee, and as a neighbouring MPP to the Minister of Health, I wanted to do what I could to help. My sense was that the people of Ontario would be shocked and outraged, as I was, if they knew the medicare partnership forged in the 1960s between the federal government and the provinces as a 50-50 proposition had eroded to the point where the federal government's participation was so insignificant as to be rendered almost meaningless.

In response, I tabled in this House a private member's resolution in December 1999. The resolution called upon the federal government to restore the funding to the CHST that it had cut since about 1994 and establish an escalator clause to assist the provinces with their increasing health care costs.

About that time, many members of the Legislature will recall that the government decided it was necessary to launch an advertising campaign to inform the people of the province of the facts concerning this serious fiscal imbalance that we were facing. I recall that the federal Liberal members of Parliament were absolutely furious when we took this step. We had to move forward, in spite of the opposition of the provincial Liberals, many of whom are still here in this place.

In my own riding of Waterloo–Wellington, my federal counterpart in the House of Commons made a number of public statements suggesting that I was completely wrong and I was understating the true level of federal support, even though Tom Kent, a respected former senior adviser to Prime Minister Lester Pearson, made a public statement which reinforced and supported what I had been saying.

In any event, Premier Harris brought forward his own resolution on federal health underfunding in the spring of 2000. In his speech to the Legislature, he acknowledged my work on this issue. That afternoon, when we voted on his motion, the Liberal caucus, led by the member for Ottawa South, meekly and weakly voted against it because they were afraid of upsetting their federal colleagues in Ottawa right before an early federal election.

As I know you will recall, Mr. Speaker, just before that federal election, the government of Canada found money to restore the funding that had previously been cut to the CHST. I believe it was because of the public pressure that was brought forward in this House and on the streets in the communities of Ontario that the people learned the facts, again, all of this while the Ontario Liberals refused to stand up for Ontario.

I've related all of this not to claim credit, but to put today's resolution in some sort of context.

We need to remember one other salient fact. The Ontario Liberals, in the 2003 provincial election cam-

paign, accused our party in government of being too confrontational in our relations with the federal government. They would do better, they said. They would be able to extract more money from the federal government through a quieter and non-confrontational approach, and they would take advantage of their Liberal affiliation and connections to get the federal government to address Ontario's concerns.

The Liberals have now been in office in Ontario for some 16 months, and we can only assume that this quieter, non-confrontational approach has gotten them nowhere, hence the Premier's statements of last week and today's resolution.

Before I conclude, I have one other thought that I wish to bring to this debate. It's a word of caution. Where would this country be if every Premier viewed the federation simply from the perspective of, "What's in it for me?" What if every Premier reviewed the ledger and the accounts so as to measure the worth of Confederation from this perspective alone? Is this the kind of leadership that Canadians from sea to sea to sea expect from their provincial leaders?

If we take this logic to its extreme, are we not weakening the very ties that bind this country together? By viewing the federal surplus as simply a slush fund that we'd like to get our hands on, are we not, to some degree at least, betraying future generations who will be saddled with a massive federal debt if we are unwilling to live within our means today and view the retirement of debt as a priority?

These are questions the Premier needs to seriously consider as he moves forward on this debate in the coming weeks. In doing so, remember that the people of Ontario expect their Premier to be a national leader, not just a provincial one.

Mr. Jim Flaherty (Whitby–Ajax): In the limited time remaining, I'd like to make a couple of points, if I may, about the fiscal imbalance in Canada.

The Premier is correct that he has a financial problem in the province of Ontario. If you don't control spending, you're going to have a financial problem in Ontario every year, year after year. Spending last year in this province went up \$6.9 billion over 2003-04. If you do that year after year, yes, you're going to have a problem. They're going to have the same problem in Ottawa if they go ahead with the \$5-billion new social program they're talking about now.

The problem in the relationship between the provinces and the federal government is—in some provinces, of course, it's the overspending as goes on here—the reality of a fiscal imbalance in Confederation. Premier Charest talks about this; he's correct about it. The reality is that the federal government does not have responsibility for the important areas of health care, education and social services. Those three areas take up the majority of the operating spending of all of the provincial governments in Canada, including this provincial government, but the taxing power is disproportionately with the federal government, which has responsibility for some things that

they don't even take care of, like the military. But they do not have health care and they do not have education. Quite frankly, that needs to be reassessed and realigned.

I would hope that Premier McGuinty, as the current chair of the Council of the Federation, would take the lead on that with Premier Charest, leading the two largest provinces—not the David Miller, mayor of Toronto, handout theory. We have enough of that in Canada. It's not good enough for Canadian taxpayers for one politician in one jurisdiction to be asking the politician in the other jurisdiction to hand out more money. The money is not your money. The money belongs to all of the taxpayers of Canada. There is only one taxpayer.

What you have to do is get your spending under control and then get the fiscal imbalance straightened out in Canada so that the tax revenues that should go to health care flow to the provinces, to their area of jurisdiction. That's the big question, not the handout question.

1750

The Acting Speaker: Mr. Hampton has moved an amendment to government notice of motion number 302. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour, say "aye."

All those opposed, say "nay."

In my opinion, the nays have it.

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

Pursuant to standing order 28(h), it is requested by the government whip that the vote on the amendment by Mr. Hampton to the motion of Mr. McGuinty, "That the Legislative Assembly of Ontario supports efforts to narrow the \$23-billion gap between what the federal government collects from Ontarians and what it returns to this province," be deferred until Monday, February 21, 2005, deferred votes.

ADJOURNMENT DEBATE

FOREST INDUSTRY

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Joseph N. Tascona): Pursuant to standing order 37, the question that this House do now adjourn is deemed to have been made. The member for Timmins–James Bay has expressed dissatisfaction with the answer to a question given by the Minister of Natural Resources. The member has up to five minutes to debate the matter, and the minister or parliamentary assistant may reply for up to five minutes. The Chair recognizes the member from Timmins–James Bay.

Mr. Gilles Bisson (Timmins–James Bay): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm hoping that somebody will be here to respond to this late show. I'm not going to take the full five minutes: You can all applaud right now. I think the issue is really simple.

This is the story. Up until this point in time, wood that is basically within a particular licence is normally directed to a community. That direction, the practice we have been having for some years, has allowed commun-

ities like Opatatika, Hearst and others to benefit by having a sawmill, paper mill or pulp mill in their own community.

What has happened up to this point is that any time a licensee—in other words, a sawmill operator—decides they are going to shut down their plant, normally there is a process that the Minister of Natural Resources is supposed to look at: “All right, what do I do with the wood?” Up to now, given the opportunity, the minister would basically look around to see if anybody else was interested in operating a sawmill or a paper mill, whatever it might be, in that community, before redirecting the wood anywhere else.

What has happened in this case is that the government in the name of Mr. Ramsay, the Minister of Natural Resources, has decided otherwise. He has said, “Listen, Tembec came knocking at the door, Domtar came knocking at the door. They said, ‘Mr. Minister, we would like to shut down our mills in the community of Opatatika. We’d like to shut down our mills in communities like Chapleau. We’d like to shut down our mill in the town of Kirkland Lake. By the way, when we shut those down, can you send the wood to our supermills in other communities like Hearst and Chapleau? Would you be able to do that for us, Minister?’” And the minister said, “Oh, not a problem. You can take all the wood and do what you want with it.”

It is patently wrong to do that. What I asked the minister earlier this week in the House was a very simple question: Will the minister reverse the decision that he made to acquiesce to the forestry companies that transfer of wood? We know that small communities like Opatatika and others are struggling to survive. A decision like this is going to devastate that community, losing the only employer they have. The minister instead got up and tried to play the blame game, saying, “Oh, you know, when the NDP was in power, you guys shut down a bunch of mills.” I’ll say what I said then: “What a bunch of hogwash.” I think I actually said the word “crap,” and I got away with it. But the point is we were the government. It was the NDP government—

Interjections.

Mr. Bisson: I did it twice now. Amazing.

It was the NDP government from 1990 to 1995—as sawmills and paper mills across northern Ontario were under tremendous stress from the economic recession that was going on and were, yes, talking about closing down and in some cases were closing down—that came to the table and found some very unique solutions. In towns like Kapuskasing, we saved and we restructured the old Kimberly-Clark mill and made it the new Tembec of today. They were able to do that by way of worker-ownership. In places like Hearst we did that. We did that twice in Sault Ste. Marie, once with a steel plant, Algoma Steel, and the other time we did it was with St. Marys Paper in Sault Ste. Marie. We did it with Abitibi in Thunder Bay; we did it in Atikokan and in many other communities. We did it in Sturgeon Falls, in the member’s own riding, and we said, “We don’t accept that

these places should shut down. We are going to come to the table and try to find unique ways to be able to save these particular plants.” In some cases it was worker-ownership, in other cases there were community investment funds and in others we did loan guarantees to those companies. The bottom line, what we said to those companies, was, “If you pull up stakes and you go, we’re taking back the wood, and we’re not going to allow you to redirect that wood somewhere else.”

So my question to the minister is simply this: Will you reverse your decision so that the community of Opatatika gets an opportunity to do what it must do, which is to see if they can keep the wood, if they’re able to come up with another owner or themselves—reconstitute themselves as a worker-ownership—in order to keep that mill going, so that the jobs in Opatatika can stay in that community rather than being shipped down the road to a supermill?

Hon. David Ramsay (Minister of Natural Resources): I’m pleased to be able to address directly the question the member puts before me tonight. First, I’d like to talk about the situation and how I feel about it, because it is truly unfortunate, what has happened in the town of Opatatika and the closing of this mill. It was a business decision made by Tembec, the forestry company. I’ve discussed the situation with the company, and I’ve met twice with the community leaders about the situation. I’m committed to working with them to find a workable solution for the town of Opatatika, in the form of a value-added facility, and I’ll talk about that more in a minute.

The situation is not unique to Opatatika or even to the province of Ontario. I understand that these small sawmills are facing very difficult times in a very competitive business environment. While these adjustments are difficult, it’s my firm hope that the remaining mills in these communities will become stronger competitors in the sawmill industry and will continue to contribute to the prosperity of northeastern Ontario.

The honourable member knows, or should know, the difficult situation the forest industry is facing right across this country. Our exports of forest products have been impacted by the high Canadian dollar, the softwood lumber duties and rising energy costs.

My government is concerned about the challenges facing the forestry industry. We are concerned about the job losses and the impact they are having on our northern communities. That is why we are actively working with the forest industry, municipalities, First Nations and labour and environmental groups to come up with a solution.

As the member knows, on November 24 of last year I announced the establishment of a Minister’s Council on Forest Sector Competitiveness, which will provide advice on creating a more secure future for the forest products industry, workers and northern communities. The council is examining the major challenges facing the forest industry in Ontario, including wood supply, increased power costs, the strong Canadian dollar, global compe-

tition, and the softwood lumber duties imposed by the United States. I look forward to receiving this report.

What I want to say specifically to my friend is that he fails to make the point, in talking about the Tembec and Domtar issues, that there are some bright spots in this consolidation. As he knows, the Kirkland Lake sawmill will close but will be replaced by a new value-added mill that will have 12 more jobs than the one it replaces. Domtar's Elk Lake planing mill will expand, and Tembec's Chapleau sawmill will expand production. We're also working with the First Nation there to look at establishing a cedar operation.

You keep going on about the directing of wood away from the community. As the member knows, there is absolutely nothing in the Crown Forest Sustainability Act that ties wood from a specific forest to a specific community. The honourable member knows that, or should know, because it was his government that wrote that particular act.

It was also his government, under the direction of Natural Resources Minister Bud Wildman, that approved the Spruce Falls mill in Kapuskasing in 1992. At that time, Spruce Falls was directed to continue providing conifer to Excel's predecessor mill. I am not redirecting this volume to another facility. The Gordon Cosens Forest sustainable forest licence identifies a commitment of conifer to Excel. This means that the sustainable forest licence holder, Spruce Falls, has to make the conifer available to Excel. But if Excel does not purchase the committed conifer, the SFL holder can harvest and utilize the volume however it sees fit, including selling it or sending it to another Tembec sawmill. That's what

they're doing. And they are free to do that. I have no decision to make.

If the Excel mill closes and the wood isn't used elsewhere, then more people will be out of work. Our bushworkers, feller-buncher operators, skidder operators, grader operators, loader operators, mechanics and truck drivers could be all out of a job.

So I invite the honourable member to work with me to try to find an investor for the Opatatika mill to expand it and make it into a value-added sector in northern Ontario. That would be better than accepting the status quo.

I'd say to the member that I'm prepared to continue to work with the community on this as we adjust. We're going to see more and more adjustments in the forest sector. There may be more consolidations away. I think we need to be working together to make sure that we secure a strong forest sector for northern Ontario, right across the north. We want to be able to encourage new investors to come in and start to invest in sustainable jobs in the north with some of the new value-added products, and at the same time allow the mills, where it's necessary, to consolidate so that they're competitive and so that we can have sustainable employment in our towns.

We've got to get out of this boom-and-bust cycle that we have up there, which has always been a detriment to the northern economy, and build a sustainable northern economy.

The Acting Speaker: There being no further matters to debate, I deem the motion to adjourn to be carried.

This House stands adjourned until 1:30 p.m. next Monday.

The House adjourned at 1800.

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