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**Journal
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(Hansard)**

Tuesday 12 April 2005

Mardi 12 avril 2005

Speaker
Honourable Alvin Curling

Président
L'honorable Alvin Curling

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO

Tuesday 12 April 2005

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO

Mardi 12 avril 2005

*The House met at 1330.
Prayers.*

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

TERRY FOX

Mr. Garfield Dunlop (Simcoe North): I'd like to speak today on a true Canadian hero. Twenty-five years ago this morning, on April 12, 1980, Terry Fox began what was to become known as the Marathon of Hope.

Terry, who in 1977 had lost his leg as a result of bone cancer, wanted to run across Canada and raise money for cancer research and awareness. After a fairly quiet beginning in St. John's, Newfoundland, the Marathon of Hope quickly gained momentum, and Terry Fox became a household hero and star as he worked his way across our country over the next four and a half months.

I can recall talking to one OPP officer who had the honour of escorting Terry throughout Muskoka. He said to me that watching Terry run was one of the most emotional days of his life and one of the most proud in being a true Canadian.

Terry's run came to an end on September 1 of that year in Thunder Bay when they discovered that the cancer had returned to his body. He died the following June 28. He died a legend.

Since that day, the Terry Fox Foundation has raised \$360 million worldwide. The Terry Fox run, held in Canada during September, is now held in numerous countries around the world. In my riding, the Terry Fox run is held in many communities. Thousands of participants and volunteers make the Terry Fox run a fun and successful day, year after year.

Today, in St. John's, Newfoundland, the Terry Fox family will help unveil a 25-year memorial to Terry. We as Canadians owe a debt of gratitude to Terry Fox. His short life is symbolic of what is truly right and what is truly Canadian.

Mr. Peter Kormos (Niagara Centre): New Democrats are pleased to join others today in paying tribute to Terry Fox. It was 25 years ago today that that young Canadian dipped his artificial leg in the Atlantic Ocean to begin a journey that changed a nation. After being diagnosed with bone cancer and having his right leg amputated, Terry Fox wanted to make a difference in the world and help cure that dreadful disease. Young Mr. Fox said, "Somewhere the hurting must stop ... [I am] determined

to take myself to the limit for this cause." And he did. He began his Marathon of Hope and started an improbable dream.

He dreamed of collecting \$1 from every Canadian to raise money for cancer research. After taking his Marathon of Hope halfway across Canada, young Mr. Fox successfully raised more than \$24 million for cancer research, emerging as a true Canadian hero in the process.

Although cancer had ended his life in 1981, his legacy was just beginning. He became an inspiring example of indomitable courage, spirit and determination, and a symbol of extraordinary accomplishment and humanitarian excellence.

Twenty-five years later, cancer cases are on the rise at a rapid pace. One way or another, this disease touches all of us. While there's no cure yet, researchers have made advances to improve survival rates and quality of life for cancer patients. Like Terry, there is a long road ahead of us.

New Democrats pay tribute today to a true Canadian hero who continues to inspire us all. We should reflect upon the past and work toward the future. During Terry's fight he said, "Even if I don't finish, we need others to continue. It's got to keep going on without me." Twenty-five years later, we are continuing Terry Fox's work and making his dream become a reality.

ETOBICOKE-LAKESHORE
COMMUNITY COUNCIL

Ms. Laurel C. Broten (Etobicoke-Lakeshore): One week ago today, I had the pleasure of hosting a round-table meeting of more than 45 community leaders, members and constituents in my riding. The purpose was to discuss and provide feedback about the successes and needs of our community.

Community council served as a starting point to foster improved communication and interaction across our shared community. I appreciated the frank and open dialogue about local issues that affect youth, businesses, seniors and residents in Etobicoke-Lakeshore.

Our community council considered the unique strengths and challenges of all areas of the riding, from Lake Ontario to the Burnhamthorpe-Dundas area, and from Etobicoke Creek to the Humber River. We are fortunate to have a genuine sense of community in Etobicoke-Lakeshore, and also to have so many people devoted to furthering the vibrancy of all our neighbourhoods. At the same time, our community is aware of

the need for local infrastructure renewal, affordable housing, commercial revitalization, information sharing and increased green space.

I am committed to continuing to develop and to sustain the relationships formed at community council. From the floor of the Legislature, I want to thank everyone who took part in last week's meeting for their insight and willingness to work together for the benefit of our community. To ensure we keep the energy going, I would like to invite all the participants to our next meeting scheduled for May 17. I look forward to seeing them there.

LIBERAL CAMPAIGN PROMISES

Mr. Frank Klees (Oak Ridges): This past Sunday, a letter appeared in the Toronto Star written by Mr. Thomas Gibson of Richmond Hill. Mr. Gibson's words speak to the frustration and the betrayal felt by thousands of families across this province in this government.

I want to share Mr. Gibson's letter with my colleagues, and I ask particularly that the Premier and the Minister of Health listen to his words. He writes:

"My beloved wife of 52 years, who died in January at the age of 72, placed her hopes and trust in the hands of the Ontario Liberals who have hijacked this province on a field of broken promises. Suffering from bulbar ALS, my wife, in a wheelchair and incapable of speech, insisted on being taken to a polling station to cast her vote for Dalton McGuinty's Liberals in the firm belief they would deliver on their promises:

"We will invest in home care so Ontarians can receive better care at home.

"We will recruit and train more health care professionals so no one goes without the medical attention they need and deserve.

"We will provide treatment for autistic children beyond the age of six.' (Our grandson is severely autistic).

"Did he deliver on those promises? No. We had to struggle every inch of the way to get the little support that was available. My wife was bamboozled like so many other Ontarians who believed, even trusted the word of McGuinty. What an abuse of trust. I will remember this.

"Thomas H. Gibson, Richmond Hill."

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MILK VENDING MACHINES IN SCHOOLS

Mr. John Wilkinson (Perth–Middlesex): I rise today to recognize an important initiative that will benefit both the secondary school students and the dairy farmers in my riding of Perth–Middlesex. Last week, the Dairy Farmers of Ontario meeting in Milverton learned that Stratford would be the first community in southwestern Ontario to place milk vending machines in all of its high schools. Supported by Neilsen Dairy and the Dairy

Farmers of Ontario, St. Michael Catholic Secondary School was the first to embrace this project. As well, starting this September, both Northwestern and Central Secondary Schools in Stratford will implement this healthy initiative. This means that next fall, all high school students in Stratford will have healthier food choices available to them in their hallway vending machines.

This healthy lifestyle initiative is also good news for Perth county's dairy producers, many of whom sell their milk to Neilsen through the Dairy Farmers of Ontario and will now have access to another viable market: our schools.

Research shows that 94% of Canadians agree that the number of overweight and inactive children is a serious health issue in Canada today, and more than 60% of Canadians strongly agree that junk food should be banned from public schools.

Last fall, Minister Kennedy issued guidelines that ensure healthy choices in Ontario's elementary schools. Similarly, the schools in my riding are embracing this plan and introducing it at the secondary level. They should be commended. This is just one step to ensuring that our children can make healthy choices, but it's a big step.

HEALTH PREMIUMS

Mr. John R. Baird (Nepean–Carleton): I've said it before and it deserves to be said yet once again: The provincial Liberals have imposed an illegal tax on the people of the province of Ontario—\$2.4 billion in an illegal tax, nothing short of massive electoral fraud in this province.

What is this government doing with this \$2.4 billion? Well, in their own budget document tabled by this Minister of Finance, we learn that this money will go to pay for exercise videos. We know that this money, instead of going to our hospitals, is going toward sewer pipe projects. They promised this Parliament and the people of Ontario that it would go to health care. They bragged about how this new health tax will go toward increased immunization programs for children. Well, the truth is out. It was the federal government that paid for those immunization programs, not this new illegal tax that was brought about by massive electoral fraud.

I can tell you, John Tory is the leader who can find the money to replace this illegal tax to ensure that health care is provided for the people of the province of Ontario, to root out waste and inefficiency. I say to the Premier, we are the only party that is committed to removing your —

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Alvin Curling): Order. The member has a statement to make and I would like to hear it. I can't understand him. Before members even enter the Parliament area, you're shouting. I would like to hear the completion of the member's statement.

Mr. Baird: Thank you, Speaker—just a little bit of respect from the members opposite.

What he's not doing with the \$2.4 billion is that John Tory won't fire 757 nurses. He is committed to returning this illegal tax money back to the hard-working taxpayers of Ontario. John Tory is up to the hard work of finding waste and inefficiency in government—something that this Minister of Finance refuses to take up.

Hon. David Caplan (Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I seek unanimous consent that each party have up to five minutes to be able to pay tribute to Mr. Baird. I understand he will be leaving this Parliament in due course.

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

ALLEGED SEXUAL ABUSE OF MINORS

Mr. Jim Brownell (Stormont–Dundas–Charlottenburgh): As the esteemed member from Nepean–Carleton moves closer to fulfilling his aspirations on the federal stage, I was delighted yesterday to see him introduce a private member's bill urging the government to create a commission to examine provincial police activity during Project Truth investigations in my riding of Stormont–Dundas–Charlottenburgh. All of this is coming from a member who voted against Bill 48 in 2001, an act to create an inquiry into police investigation of sexual abuse against minors in the Cornwall area. It appears that the Ottawa press is more important than political conviction.

I will remind the member from Nepean–Carleton that this government is the first government to fully endorse a public inquiry into allegations of childhood sexual abuse in the Cornwall area. Premier McGuinty and Attorney General Bryant have had the conviction to follow through on this election promise, and the residents of Stormont–Dundas–Charlottenburgh are encouraged by this support.

The inquiry will happen, and the Attorney General remains fully committed to finding an appropriate commissioner and getting the terms of reference right. This process is important and it takes time, but the success of the inquiry is largely dependent on this.

I want to assure the residents of the Cornwall area that I have been and I continue to be a vocal advocate for this cause. This government also remains committed to this file, and we have demonstrated more fortitude than any of the opposing parties on this issue.

SAFE SCHOOLS

Ms. Judy Marsales (Hamilton West): I rise today to commend a very important initiative aimed at reducing youth violence and ensuring safer schools and communities.

Hamilton has been very fortunate in receiving money as part of a \$9-million provincial safe schools program announced in December. The public board is receiving \$204,000 to equip 51 of its schools, and the Catholic board is receiving \$116,000 to equip 29 schools. These

funds will be used to install cameras, monitors and possibly two-way intercoms and remote-controlled locks.

We are committed to the safety of our children in Ontario's public schools. The Liberal government wants to ensure that schools are safe and free of violence. This is the most basic principle in our schools today. When students feel they are safe and free from violence and harassment, they are in a position to learn and to succeed.

I'd like to thank the education minister, Minister Kennedy, and our member from Guelph–Wellington, Liz Sandals, who, under the safe schools action team, are addressing the physical and social safety in our schools in a meaningful way. Your level of support and leadership is invaluable.

The opposition has criticized our plans. Well, here is a plan in action. We are investing real dollars in our children's future. This type of funding allows them to learn in an environment free from violence, free from harassment and free from discrimination. It gives them the ability to succeed in a safe environment. That is what this party's all about: success for our students and opportunity for the future. Safer schools open the door to opportunity, and Hamilton West thanks you.

TERRY FOX

Mr. Bill Mauro (Thunder Bay–Atikokan): Today marks the 25th anniversary of an extraordinary event that touched all of our lives. Terry Fox dipped his limb in the Atlantic Ocean in Newfoundland on April 12, 1980, and started out, a lone young man struck by a disease that raises fear in the hearts of all of us: cancer. Instead of succumbing to fear, he decided to tackle his disease by raising funds for cancer research so that other people, in the years to come, would not face the ultimate prognosis that he faced.

Terry ran 42 kilometres per day, the equivalent of a marathon a day, for 143 consecutive days, totalling over 5,000 kilometres, until the Marathon of Hope ended just outside of Thunder Bay.

This may have been the single greatest athletic achievement ever. Still, we can only imagine the pain he must have been in as he took each step. But with each step, this amazing young man made us aware and made us believe that cancer can be beaten.

Each year, more than 200 cities in Ontario, including Thunder Bay and Atikokan, host a Terry Fox run. Locally, in Thunder Bay, the run is hosted by chairman Don Morrison, who has done a tremendous job of keeping to the true spirit of the run. To date, over \$360 million has been raised worldwide, started by the Marathon of Hope, for cancer research.

We in Thunder Bay have recognized Terry's incredible feat by erecting the Terry Fox Centre in Thunder Bay, where I invite all of you to come to see this magnificent monument. It was at the relocation of the monument five years ago in Thunder Bay that I had the privilege of meeting Terry's parents, the only people I have ever asked to have a picture taken with.

“Pain is temporary. It may last a minute, or an hour, or a day, or a year, but eventually it will subside and something else will take its place. If I quit, however, it lasts forever.” Those words were spoken by Lance Armstrong, the six-time Tour de France winner, in his book *It’s Not About the Bike*. Armstrong, of course, is a cancer survivor himself.

I can’t imagine any other words that would likely have more appropriately described the attitude and will of Terry Fox—an extraordinary life, an extraordinary young man and a true Canadian hero.

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ORAL QUESTIONS

HEALTH CARE

Mr. John Tory (Leader of the Opposition): My question is for the Premier. Last July 9, your health minister announced that he was creating regional health care authorities in Ontario, essentially 14 new layers of expensive bureaucracy. Tellingly, however, he has missed every single deadline since that time—deadlines he set for himself. What is the purpose of this bureaucracy, and can you tell us why your Ministry of Health can’t meet a single deadline?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs): We are dedicated to improving the quality of health care for all Ontarians. Unlike my friend opposite, we will not be taking \$2.4 billion out of the health care system. What we are working to do, of course, is put in place a system that delivers resources to the front lines. It turns out that when it comes to a regionally based model, ours is slightly different from that; we have a local health integration network model which we’re using. But it turns out that we are the only province in the country that has not acted in a deliberate way to provide resources down to the community level as much as possible. It’s taking longer, I must say to my friend, than I would have liked. But we want to make sure, in particular, that we have the best people in place so we can get the best job done once it’s fully lined up, and that has been a challenge.

Mr. Tory: Well, I guess that’s the point of the question: You may be the only province that hasn’t done it, and you still haven’t done it because you’re not able to meet a single deadline. The uncertainty caused by your local health integration networks and your poor implementation of this program to date is only the latest example of your mismanagement of the health care file. Commenting on your networks, well-known health policy expert Michael Rachlis said of your government in March, “They really don’t know what they are doing—they are making it up as they go along.” That, I would say, is one of the most charitable assessments I’ve heard.

Nine months after your government introduced this scheme, the people and the organizations that have to make these local health integration networks work—the

civil service, doctors, nurses, hospitals and others—haven’t been shown an actual plan. When are they going to see an actual, detailed plan from your government?

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: The reason we have to put so much effort into this is because no work was done in the past with respect to moving resources to the front lines, so we had to start from square one. I can tell you that these 14 local health integration networks will plan, coordinate, integrate and fund the delivery of health care services within their own specific geographical boundaries. We believe that this new approach is key to making the system patient-centred and responsive to local health care needs. In terms of the system we inherited, there was no coordination and no integration, and it was, broadly speaking, a patchwork quilt. So we’ve decided that it’s important to change that. That’s what we’re doing with the local health integration networks, and we’ve made tremendous progress. I’ll be delighted to speak to that in the additional supplementary.

Mr. Tory: The Brantford Expositor called these local health networks “an unfunny April Fool’s joke.” The *St. Thomas Times-Journal* said that there’s nothing in these LHINs that builds any public confidence. People in places like Orangeville in my riding are telling me that they’d rather see you spend their money on more nurses, not more bureaucrats. How do you respond to them?

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: What I can say to the good people at the newspaper and in the community is that we’re not taking \$2.4 billion out of the system—we made that investment—unlike the leader of the Conservative Party.

This is how complex the health system is: We’ve got 154 hospitals, 581 long-term-care homes, 42 community care access centres, 37 public health units, 55 community health centres, seven ministry regional offices, 350 mental health programs and five academic health science centres, all with different geographies, funding flows and overlapping accountabilities. My friend may argue that it doesn’t make sense for us to develop a regional approach to bringing care closer to patients, but that means he doesn’t understand where we’re going. I can tell you that at the end of the day, once this has been put in place, it will mean better care for more people closer to their homes. That’s what this is all about.

The Speaker (Hon. Alvin Curling): New question.

Mr. Tory: I can tell you that the only thing we’re committed to taking out is your illegal tax, and taking you out of office.

Interjections.

The Speaker: Order.

Mr. Tory: Premier, your promise of better health care for Ontarians is just another broken promise. Speaking about taking things out, last week your Minister of Health was musing about taking health services out of hospitals. He said your government would “extricate and consolidate services in our hospitals.” Premier, specifically what services will you be stripping and from which hospitals?

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: I don’t think the member had the benefit of the exchange that took place on that day,

but I can tell you—and I'll say again—that what we're looking at as part of our determination to make sure we're getting the best use of the limited health care dollars we have is to find ways where we might consolidate services.

We had a specific example. If there are cataract operations being performed in a number of downtown Toronto hospitals, we think it makes good sense to consolidate that service in one centre, where they can deliver that service in a very efficient way, a better coordinated way and in a way that speaks specifically to the disease or the manifestation that a patient is bringing to the centre. We just think that makes good sense.

I also said specifically that we are not going to do this in a way that is going to compromise access to care, especially in rural and remote communities and in northern Ontario. That is specifically what we said.

I know my friend would agree that we have a shared responsibility to make sure we are delivering our services in the most cost-effective way and in a way that not only does not compromise but enhances quality of care. That's what this is all about.

The Speaker: Supplementary.

Mr. John R. Baird (Nepean–Carleton): Premier, when you say you won't compromise care, the people of Ontario look at you and say that you're the guy who said he wouldn't raise their taxes.

Your plan for imposing these 14 new layers of health care bureaucracy is a unmitigated disaster. You've missed every deadline that you—

Interjections.

The Speaker: I call to order the Minister of Consumer and Business Services.

Hon. Jim Watson (Minister of Consumer and Business Services): Mr. Speaker—

The Speaker: When I say "come to order," I don't want someone to be talking back.

The member from Nepean–Carleton.

Mr. Baird: Premier, you've missed every deadline you've set for yourself and that your minister has set for your government. You seem to be either unwilling or incapable of answering even the most simple questions about what your Minister of Health meant when he confirmed that you would be stripping services from hospitals. Premier, tell us what services you will be cutting from hospitals under the guise of transformation.

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: It's with a certain sense of nostalgia that I get a question from a member who is shortly going out the door.

We will not be giving up on Ontario's health care system; I can tell you that right now. Others may give up on other causes, but we will not give up on Ontario's health care system.

We've said that we're looking for ways to deliver health care in a more cost-effective manner. If that means looking at ways we can consolidate different services in different centres, then of course we're going to do so. But to say it for the umpteenth time, we will not compromise quality of care, we will not compromise access to care

and we are especially mindful of those challenges that are to be found in rural and northern Ontario.

Mr. Baird: I have a copy of a letter that you sent to hospitals in Ontario before you were elected. You seem to be getting in trouble for a lot of letters you wrote before you went into the Premier's office. The letter says, "We are committed to providing hospitals with stable, multi-year funding, and we guarantee this commitment will come prior to the start of the fiscal year." We are more than two weeks into the fiscal year, and hospitals like Queensway Carleton Hospital and the Ottawa Hospital still have no idea what you have in mind for their fiscal crisis that you created.

Premier, will you stand in your place and tell us what fiscal resources you will make, and will you honour the commitment that you made to hospitals in Ontario when you were seeking the job in the corner office?

1400

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: I can tell you that hospitals in Ontario today have more certainty, more optimism and greater confidence in the future than they ever had under the previous Tory government, which made cut after cut, whether to hospital programs or to Ontario nurses.

I think it's important for the people of Ontario to know what it will mean to take \$2.4 billion out of our health care system. You only arrive at \$1 billion by way of reduction if you shut down 10 large hospitals. To arrive at a total of \$2.4 billion in cuts—and Mr. Tory is going to want to know about this—you've got to close 10 large hospitals; you have to fire 6,000 nurses; you have to shut down 49 MRIs; you have to cancel 5,000 hip replacements, 6,000 knee replacements, 5,000 cardiac surgeries, 3,000 cataract surgeries and 2,000 radiation treatments; 50,000 fewer children will receive vaccinations; and finally, you will have to shut down 20,000 long-term-care beds. Those are the consequences of taking \$2.4 billion out of our precious health care system.

HYDRO GENERATION

Mr. Howard Hampton (Kenora–Rainy River): For the Premier: Premier, tomorrow you are set to announce the winners of a competition to generate a good chunk of Ontario's future electricity supply. During the election you promised ordinary Ontario families, "Your hydro will remain in your hands." You also said, "We're going to have to build generation in the province of Ontario. Who? Ontario Power Generation, the way we did it for 50, 60 ... years."

Last month your energy minister spoke to the largest private electricity generating conference that I think Canada has ever seen, in Calgary—a lot of private power generators. Premier, can you tell us, was your energy minister's message to those private corporations the same message you gave to Ontario voters before and during the last election about the importance of public power?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Inter-governmental Affairs): The Minister of Energy.

Hon. Dwight Duncan (Minister of Energy, Government House Leader): Let me begin by saying that this government's energy policy has put the energy sector back on a stable footing so that we can ensure adequate supply, reliable supply, at affordable prices. Our commitments prior to the election are what we're working toward now, and had everything to do with and continue to have to do with ensuring that the lights will stay on, ensuring that we can keep prices at a reasonable and responsible level to assure new generation.

We put out the call for proposals for the RFP. It's a substantial call for proposals. We will be announcing soon the successful proponents. We did the same thing with renewables last fall. We announced 395 new megawatts in renewables. We're satisfied that this helps us (a) to keep our commitments, (b) to close the coal plants and reduce pollution, which I know that member opposes, and (c) to ensure a reliable, adequate supply of power into the future.

Mr. Hampton: I guess that's why, on a mild day in April last week, the lights flickered out in Ontario.

The Premier didn't want to answer the question and I'm not surprised, because this is what the media says about the message that was delivered in Calgary, dateline Calgary, March 15, 2005: "Speaking to some of Canada's largest power generators, including TransCanada Corp., TransAlta Corp. and EPCOR," Ontario energy minister Dwight "Duncan said there was money to be made in Ontario." Duncan told the private electricity generating companies, "The risks ... will be worth the rewards."

Ontario hydro ratepayers have already seen you increase the hydro rate by 34% above what you promised in the election. How much more will hydro ratepayers in the province have to pay in order that the new private generating companies that you're so fond of have money to be made in Ontario?

Hon. Mr. Duncan: First of all, rates have not gone up over 34%. That's just nonsense.

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

Hon. Mr. Duncan: It's absolute fiction. Number two, prices went up 43% under that member. Number three, that member proposes to create more power by OPG. Do you remember what happened with Pickering A, unit 4? A billion dollars over budget. Is that the route we should go?

The Speaker (Hon. Alvin Curling): Could you direct your response to the Speaker.

Hon. Mr. Duncan: Mr. Speaker, I will remind the member opposite of what he says in his own book, *Public Power*. "There will be important roles for the private sector to play in the future of our electricity system, as there always have been." He goes on to say, on page 18, "I'm not ideologically opposed to private power any more than I'm opposed to private restaurants, clothing stores or car dealerships." Talk about a flip-flop artist of the first degree—

The Speaker: Thank you.

Interjections.

The Speaker: It's also against the rules to be shouting when the Speaker is standing up.

Mr. Gilles Bisson (Timmins–James Bay): Yes, you're right, Speaker. I apologize.

The Speaker: I think we were on the final supplementary.

Mr. Hampton: The question was about the message that the Premier delivered before the election. Before the election it was the Premier who said it will be public power. It was the Premier, one Dalton McGuinty, who said it will be generation by OPG. Now it is to be TransAlta, it is to be TransCanada, and we know what they will want. On whatever the price is, they'll want 20% more to take care of the profit line and the executive salary line.

My question to the Premier again is, after the election, whose side are you on? Are you on the side of those people who are already having a hard time paying their hydro bill or are you now suddenly on the side of TransAlta, of all the other private power producers who want the 20% profit on top of the hydro bill and, yes, the executive salaries and the executive perks as well? Whose side are you on, Premier?

Hon. Mr. Duncan: This Premier and this government are on the side of small consumers across Ontario, unlike that member. That member increased hydro prices 43%. That member and his government cancelled every conservation initiative. They cancelled negotiations over Conawapa.

There is no inconsistency between what the Premier said before the election and what we are doing now. We are bringing affordable, cleaner electricity to Ontario in order to ensure that we have a stable, reliable system going forward. Had that member and his government done even a fraction of what we're doing now, we wouldn't be in the mess we're in today. Our plan is working. Our plan involves private investment to bring on adequate generation. Our plan involves closing coal plants to clean up the air—something I know he opposes. We're not opposed to that; we're moving forward on it. We believe it's responsible, we believe it's the appropriate policy and it's paying dividends. We have already increased wind power in Canada by 85%.

HYDRO ONE

Mr. Howard Hampton (Kenora–Rainy River): All of those paper mill workers and pulp mill workers are going to feel really reassured after the Minister of Energy's statement.

Premier, I want to ask you about the latest episode of the habits of your high-flying head of Hydro One, Tom Parkinson. As you know, Mr. Parkinson gets a \$1.1-million-a-year salary. He will get a \$2-million golden parachute severance package. The hydro ratepayers of the province subsidize his mortgage to the tune of \$125,000, and, yes, he takes the hydro helicopter when he wants to visit his cottage.

You'd think he would be happy with all that, but apparently he is not; apparently he is outraged. In a memo to senior management, he blames "media lies" for the negative publicity he has received. Premier, do you agree with Mr. Parkinson? Is this all the media's fault? Or do you agree with ordinary Ontario hydro ratepayers who are already having a hard time paying for Mr. Parkinson's, shall we say, large executive perks?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Inter-governmental Affairs): The Minister of Energy.
1410

Hon. Dwight Duncan (Minister of Energy, Government House Leader): Hydro One's board of directors have an obligation to ensure the proper functioning of that organization. We have confidence in that board. It consists of members who were appointed by the previous government. It consists of former Premiers of Ontario. There are policies in place that that board will oversee. It is important that Hydro One function efficiently and effectively, not only to maintain, most importantly, our transmission infrastructure, but to ensure a fair return to the taxpayers of Ontario, who own that important asset. It is important that all of us work together to ensure stakeholder confidence in that organization and in our transmission system as we move forward.

Mr. Hampton: I think all those people who are having a hard time paying their hydro bill will be interested to know that it's keeping Hydro One in line that forces Mr. Parkinson to take the hydro helicopter to his cottage for the weekend. But he says he's misunderstood. He said he never took the Hydro One helicopter to his cottage; no, he only got a free ride to the Muskoka airport. He had to drive from the Muskoka airport to his cottage himself. I think the energy minister would know all about this. Apparently, he was riding along with Mr. Parkinson.

Premier, you are the sole shareholder of Hydro One. It's your job to protect the public interest. Can you tell me: How is the public interest being served by Mr. Parkinson taking the hydro helicopter to his cottage for the weekend?

Hon. Mr. Duncan: We believe that transparency and accountability are the best safeguards to public service, and that's why it was this government that made this information accessible to the public through freedom of information. We applied freedom of information to OPG and to Hydro One so that the ratepayers and taxpayers could see what goes on, so that the board of directors of those organizations, this government and any government of the day knows that whatever actions are taken or not taken by management, by the organizations themselves, there will be clear accountability and transparency.

That's something we're proud we did. That's something his government didn't do when they had the opportunity. None of this information would be public had we not applied freedom of information to this situation. We believe it's appropriate. We believe ratepayers can understand this. We believe the board will understand ratepayer reaction and act accordingly.

Mr. Hampton: I'm asking, how do you defend this to hydro ratepayers? In fact, it wasn't just once that Mr. Parkinson thought he had to use the hydro helicopter. On another occasion, he took the hydro helicopter from his cottage to Ottawa. He said, "I decided to use the chopper rather than spend five hours driving and four hours in airports just to give a speech." Poor Tom Parkinson. Traffic and commercial flights: what a problem.

The real problem here, Premier, is this. This is what you said before the election: "The real problem here is not these boards ... [or their] ability to ... create these compensation packages." That's your quote. "It has everything to do with [the Premier] and [his] standards, and [his] failure to stand up for" hydro "ratepayers." Well, Premier, it's your turn to stand up for the hydro ratepayers. Do you think Ontario hydro ratepayers should be paying for Mr. Parkinson to take the hydro helicopter to his cottage because he doesn't want to face the traffic?

Hon. Mr. Duncan: We believe that it's in the interest of ratepayers to have a board of directors that is accountable to the government to ensure that adequate policies and procedures are in place. It is incumbent that that board deal with the situation according to how they see fit. That board was appointed by the previous government. It was supported by this government. It has a number of people who are well known to this House, including the former NDP Premier of Ontario. It is incumbent on any government to ensure, unlike that government, that our hydro system remains competitive, that there's adequate, reliable and affordable electricity available to everyone and that the transmission system is run according to a standard that, by the way, is second to none in North America right now. Our government is committed to that. Our government has confidence in the board of directors and that they will do the appropriate things under all these circumstances.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Alvin Curling): Could I ask members to stop chatting across when we're having question period, or at any other time when another member is speaking? It's very disruptive, and I'm unable to hear either the answer or the question.

FISCAL AND ECONOMIC POLICY

Mr. Jim Flaherty (Whitby-Ajax): My question is for the Minister of Finance—

Interjection.

Mr. Flaherty: —which isn't you. It's over here. But thank you for your views.

My question is about taxing and spending and the—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Alvin Curling): Order. Just stop the clock for the member here.

The member for Whitby-Ajax.

Mr. Flaherty: Minister, you brought in the largest single tax increase in the history of the province of Ontario in the past year: more than \$4 billion. You've also increased spending at a rate that you don't even

know. When I asked you last week, you couldn't tell this place the percentage increase in program spending in the current fiscal year, which is shocking.

We know spending has gone up something like 6.9%, which is what your budget plan is. We know spending is probably something north of \$80 billion this fiscal year. I hope you have the accurate number. You've abandoned your fiscal plan of balancing the budget in the province of Ontario within your term. Your government is aimless; it's rudderless. You have ad hoc spending decisions; money over here, money over there that's not in the budget, that's not in the plan. Management Board isn't doing its job of controlling spending going forward.

The people need to know, though—they're entitled to know—how far off your financial plan is. The only way—

Interjections.

The Speaker: Order. The question has been asked.

Interjection.

The Speaker: Order. You had adequate time to ask the question. The question has been asked.

Minister of Finance.

Interjections.

The Speaker: One second. Let me get the House leader to be quiet a bit, and also the Attorney General, before you respond. Are you ready? Thank you.

Hon. Greg Sorbara (Minister of Finance): I didn't hear a question, but I think the comments from my friend from Whitby–Ajax deserve some response. The first thing to note is what we did, beginning the day on which we were sworn in, which was to start to bring fiscal discipline back to the province of Ontario. We inherited one heck of a mess. I made it clear in my first budget that we were not going to resolve all of the problems of that mess in one budget. What we also did was begin to make investments in health care, to begin to make important investments in education, to begin to make important investments in social services and to begin, for the first time in 11 years, to give those who are most vulnerable in Ontario a small increase in what we provide through Ontario Works.

We're very proud of the start we've made. I want to tell you we have just begun to get this province back on the road to good, strong financial health.

Mr. Flaherty: That is frightening, if you've just begun. With that level of spending and that level of tax increases, the people of Ontario will be in trepidation of what you will do when you bring in your budget.

You do have this safety valve that you put in your last budget, and that's the LCBO. That's the cash cow that you might make subject to a fire sale. You appointed a committee and you said in your terms of reference, Minister, that the panel is to provide its advice and recommendations in a written report to the Minister of Finance in spring 2005, on a date to be approved by the minister.

We know the budget is coming up. What is the date that you have approved for the release of the report by

the LCBO panel so that the people of Ontario will have that information before your budget?

Hon. Mr. Sorbara: My friend from Whitby–Ajax simply uses his questions to get his own private political philosophy on the table. We know he wants to sell the LCBO. We don't know what John Tory thinks about selling the LCBO, but certainly my friend from Whitby–Ajax has had no qualms about that. We know that's his philosophy. He wants government to get out of the business of public education. He wants government to get out of the business of distributing beverage alcohol. We don't yet know where John Tory stands on this, other than that he is going to fund private schools as well.

I will simply tell my friend that, shortly after the review panel for beverage alcohol reports to us, I will report to this House as to their findings.

1420

PUBLIC SAFETY

Ms. Marilyn Churley (Toronto–Danforth): I have a question for the Attorney General. The shocking decision to grant bail to a man charged with murdering his wife in broad daylight left women wondering if the justice system works for them. Now that we have the details about the decision, our concerns increase even more. It appears that men who are charged with murdering women can buy a “get out of jail” card. In the bail arrangement, Mr. Candir would have paid \$120,000 for an ex-RCMP officer to monitor him and \$200,000 for the electronic monitoring bracelet after his release.

Minister, how are you going to fix a system that allows men charged with killing their partners—and, may I add, witnessed—to get bail if they can afford to pay for it?

Hon. Michael Bryant (Attorney General, minister responsible for native affairs, minister responsible for democratic renewal): I thank the member for her question. I'm sure the member will understand, or I hope she will understand, that I'm not going to comment on this particular case that we are speaking of. As was said today by the dean at Queen's law school, Gary Trotter, it's not appropriate for us to be debating a position that an independent crown would be taking.

That said, I can assure the member and assure all members of that community that that individual is incarcerated.

Ms. Churley: Minister, you have been talking about Karla Homolka all morning, but I asked you a specific question. It's clear that there is a two-tier justice system here. If you have the money to buy yourself out of jail, you can get bought out of jail. If you don't, you stay in jail. In this case, it doesn't eliminate the fact, even if you are not going to speak to the case, that the decision was made to let a man accused of such a horrific crime out of jail on bail because he can afford to pay for it. Otherwise, he would not have gotten out. It has left the distinct impression that the justice system thinks it's acceptable that violence against women be treated as an out-of-pocket expense.

I'm asking you again, Minister: What are you going to do to ensure that such a situation does not happen again?

Hon. Mr. Bryant: This government, through the domestic violence protection plan, is undertaking not only a review of bail practices and the positions taken before the courts, how the courts respond and the way in which governments can make improvements, is not only addressing the same issue with respect to parole and probation, but is also looking at every way that we can to not only deal within the system to try and identify—for example, through ODARA—ways in which we can identify people who may be a risk to the community and use that evidence, use that test to determine the position that is taken before the courts, but we are making the investments that we have to through the victims' justice fund and through Minister Papatello's ministry to make improvements.

Let me be clear to the member. You are asking me about a particular case where the crown opposed bail. We opposed bail. We did not think this person should get bail. We made arguments that they should not get bail. A judge disagreed with us.

In the interim, the person is incarcerated. In the interim, the person is in fact not within the community. And I can assure the member that we will be taking the position before a bail review—

The Speaker (Hon. Alvin Curling): Thank you. Order. New question.

RENEWABLE FUELS

Mr. David Oraziotti (Sault Ste. Marie): My question is to the Minister of Natural Resources. Minister, our government is committed to phasing out coal-fired electric generating plants and developing cleaner sources of energy. Expanding wind and water power opportunities will contribute to a cleaner environment, cleaner air and healthier Ontarians. In a year and a half, our government, under Premier McGuinty, has unlocked the potential for 25 times more wind power than the past Conservative government and 390 times more wind power than delivered by the NDP.

For instance, the installation of approximately 60 wind turbines near Sault Ste. Marie on the North Shore of Lake Superior will produce 100 megawatts of clean, renewable energy. This project attests to our government's commitment to develop more renewable energy sources for Ontarians. Clearly, we're on the right track toward developing cleaner, greener energy sources.

To help us achieve our goal of eliminating coal-fired electric plants, I know the Minister of Energy and you have been working hard to promote wind and water development on crown land. Can you elaborate on what our government is doing to expand renewable energy projects in Ontario?

Hon. David Ramsay (Minister of Natural Resources): I apologize for the length of the question. I appreciate the member's interest in wind and water power. I know he's looking at a project that's just outside of Sault Ste. Marie.

As the member may know, the McGuinty government has made 18 sites available for water power development, and we're inviting a second round of applications for wind power on crown land.

Last November, the government called for expressions of interest to identify potential water power sites. Fifty-seven applications were received, of which 18 sites have now been approved for appropriate development. Soon the minister will be receiving detailed development proposals for those sites. I'm pleased to say that these water power sites alone have the potential to produce between 200 and 300 megawatts of clean hydroelectric power.

We're just beginning to unlock Ontario's enormous potential for clean and efficient electricity generation. Our government will continue to seek and encourage development of our capacity to generate this power.

Mr. Oraziotti: I understand that wind power is the fastest-growing energy supply sector in the world. In Germany, the second-largest industrial user of steel after the auto sector is the wind power sector. Examples of industrial outputs such as this are encouraging for the future of our province, where we could boast these types of statistics in the future.

I recall that not too long ago we announced a retail sales tax rebate for renewable energy systems, including wind and small hydroelectric projects. Can you tell me what else our government is doing to ensure that Ontario is on the leading edge of wind power development?

Hon. Mr. Ramsay: About a month ago, I announced a six-month window of opportunity, beginning April 1, for companies or individuals to submit proposals for wind power development on crown land. This follows closely on approvals given in January for 16 private companies to assess wind power potential on 21 crown sites. It's important to remember that each of the 21 approved sites must undergo an environmental screening before moving on to wind-power testing. Sites that successfully complete the wind-power testing phase then must undergo a full environmental assessment before a wind farm is established. Eventually, these wind turbines on both private and crown land could generate enough energy to help reduce our dependence on coal-fired electricity generating plants.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mr. John O'Toole (Durham): In the absence of the Minister of Health, I put my question on health to the Premier.

Lakeridge Health Corp. is scheduled to release its budget in Port Perry this Thursday. My constituents—in fact, all the people in Durham—are worried about the outcome of the next Lakeridge Health budget, because they are facing a multi-million-dollar deficit. Lakeridge has already announced 308 layoffs to balance its budget in the first step.

Health care funding in the GTA/905 is less than the provincial average. Every man, woman and child in Durham receives \$774 less than the average funding in the province of Ontario.

Premier, would you explain why you're putting at risk the ability of Lakeridge Health to deliver quality health care to the citizens of Durham?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs): I can tell you that we're very proud that in our first year we have invested an additional \$3 billion in health, and I believe that it's \$1.7 billion specific to Ontario hospitals. We've invested an additional \$13.6 million in Lakeridge this year, and we hope to be able to do more in the future.

I know that the member opposite will also understand that we have put together a process—we're working with all Ontario hospitals to help them find a way to balance their budget in a way that does not compromise the quality of care. More than half of Ontario hospitals have already found success in that regard, and we'll continue to work with Lakeridge and others throughout the province to make sure that we can get this right.

Mr. O'Toole: You should know that Lakeridge Health has already removed \$18 million in savings over the past two years. In fact, your platitudes do nothing to the work that has been done by Anne Wright and the volunteer board at Lakeridge Health—indeed, all hospitals in Ontario. You're asking to take blood from a stone. The board and staff in the community can't meet the fiscal challenges you've placed on Lakeridge and other hospitals in Ontario. Patients in Durham are asking for your support. Lakeridge Health is a multi-site facility, serving a rural community with four hospitals and 21 satellite facilities. What is your government doing to bring fairness and equity to funding, not just at Lakeridge, since they operate such a large rural site, but indeed for the province of Ontario, which you're putting at risk? Today you're telling us you're spending more; I can tell you that in fact we're getting less. What do you say to the people in Durham about the underfunding at Lakeridge and at hospitals in Ontario?

1430

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: First of all, to the people in Durham, and in particular to those who have committed themselves to the facility at Lakeridge, I want to offer my congratulations and support as they work on behalf of their hospital and the health and well-being of community members. But again I want to remind people that we've invested \$3 billion more in health care; \$1.7 billion more specifically to hospitals. I would ask the members of that community to contrast the approach we're bringing with that member's solemn commitment to take \$2.4 billion out of the health care system. Where would that leave that hospital? Where would it leave other health care services in that community?

Let me tell you, raising that money was not an easy step to take, but we felt it was an essential thing to do. We think it's right for us to increase the level of funding in our health care system. That's why we've done it, and we stand by that. I ask people in that community and in communities across the province to understand the difference: We're for investing more in health care and getting quality for the people of Ontario; they want to take money out of health care. That's the difference.

AUTISM TREATMENT

Ms. Shelley Martel (Nickel Belt): Premier, I was surprised to read today that you and the Minister of Children and Youth Services are refusing to acknowledge that your party made an election promise to parents to extend IBI treatment to autistic kids over the age of six. So to jog your memory, here is the e-mail sent by Nancy Morrison to the Ontario Liberal Party on September 8, 2003, entitled "Request for Platform Information Regarding Autism Funding." It says: "We want to make informed decisions on October 2 at the polls. Therefore, I am requesting each major political party in Ontario to provide your platform to bring more appropriate medically proven treatment for autistic children in Ontario. Please respond with your platform on our issues by September 12 ... so that the information provided by all parties can be forwarded to all our contacts in Ontario to help us in making informed decisions at the polls on October 2."

Premier, that sounds to me like a request for your platform on this issue. What do you think?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs): The Minister of Children and Youth Services.

Hon. Marie Bountrogianni (Minister of Children and Youth Services, Minister of Citizenship and Immigration): Today, there are more services available to children with autism than ever before in this province. We give them services from the moment they are diagnosed right through to the age of 18. We have increased the number of children under six who receive IBI by 25%. We have reduced the wait lists for assessment by 72%. We have added to an already very generous—the most generous across the country—special education program for these children with a new program. We've done a great deal for these children, and we plan to do a great deal more, as well as for all the children with special needs across the province. In the supplementary, I'm sure the Minister of Education would like to add his comments as well.

Ms. Martel: I have a specific request for information that was made by the parent of an autistic child and the specific response that came from the Premier. You see, on September 17, 2003, in the middle of the election, the Premier wrote to Ms. Morrison and said, "Thank you kindly for your e-mail requesting information on the Ontario Liberal Party's position on IBI treatment for autistic children. I appreciate the vital issues you raised and would be pleased to address them at this time..."

Further in the letter, "I also believe that the lack of government-funded IBI treatment for autistic children over six is unfair and discriminatory. The Ontario Liberals support extending autism treatment beyond the age of six." The letter is signed "Dalton McGuinty, Leader of the Ontario Liberal Party."

Premier, this was clearly an election promise made to families with autistic children. Why don't you stop trying to run and hide, and actually keep the election promise you made?

Hon. Gerard Kennedy (Minister of Education): We're hearing from the members opposite without any reference whatsoever to the well-being of the children involved. What we did in office was not jump up and down around what would be done but actually did something different. For the first time there's \$365 million more in special education, \$130 million being spent right now on children with autism, and it's being done in the best fashion possible.

We believe strongly that the 6,800—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Alvin Curling): Could I ask the member from Nickel Belt to come to order, please. Minister of Education?

Hon. Mr. Kennedy: The members of the party raising the question did nothing to try to bring in special education services that have been mandated since 1984. We have, in a short period of time, authorized the funds—

Interjections.

The Speaker: Order. The minister has about 10 seconds.

Hon. Mr. Kennedy: I wish I could say that the argument gets better with sheer repetition, but it doesn't, because compassion isn't built on that; it's built on consideration for what actually happens to students. In our schools, these students are getting better assistance than they ever have before. If that was your concern, it would be reflected in the way you put it forward. But we've seen here time and time again that that's not the concern. Grabbing a headline—

Interjection.

The Speaker: Order.

Could I ask the member from Nickel Belt to conduct herself in a better manner, especially when members are responding to your question. You have been rather aggravating in the way you respond whenever the minister is trying to respond.

FOOD SAFETY

Mr. John Milloy (Kitchener Centre): My question is for the Minister of Agriculture and Food. As the minister knows, food safety is a concern for all Ontarians, and it instills confidence in consumers when they know that what they are buying is safe.

Yesterday, the minister made an announcement that will further ensure that Ontario's food safety system is a world-class one. Could the minister inform this House what the creation of an office of the chief veterinarian of Ontario and the realignment of the Ministry of Agriculture and Food will mean for Ontario?

Hon. Steve Peters (Minister of Agriculture and Food): I thank the member for his question. I thank him as well because I think we need to recognize in this House that supporting agriculture and instilling confidence is both an urban and a rural issue, and I appreciate his interest in that.

The announcement yesterday is in direct response to Justice Haines's recommendations. Dr. Deb Stark will lead the animal health and food safety initiatives for the province. Dr. Stark will also work on assessing the need for a separate animal health act—something the agricultural community has been talking about for a long time—developing a strategy for biosecurity, and working co-operatively with our counterparts in the federal and provincial governments and other ministries. Most importantly, she's going to be there to help coordinate Ontario's role in response to any potential outbreak of animal disease.

We recognize the critical nature of this job. We've seen the devastation that can happen as a result of BSE and avian influenza. What this is going to do is allow us to better coordinate our scientific activities, education, inspection, compliance and enforcement to ensure that we do everything possible to bring forward a food safety strategy that is clear and unconvoluted.

Mr. Milloy: It's great to hear that our government is making the best use of its resources to ensure a safe and healthy Ontario.

As a supplementary, I want to ask the minister about the various announcements coming out of his ministry and the ongoing progress being made by our government as it works toward fulfilling the recommendations of Justice Haines's report on Ontario's meat regulation and inspection system. Can the minister tell us what he's currently working on that will further enhance our food safety system?

Hon. Mr. Peters: Contrary to some of the baffleleg that comes out of the mouths on the other side, we are very much conscious of and moving forward with a clear plan to support agriculture in this province. Part of that, as we move forward, was the report that was completed by Justice Haines.

We are making investments to support the deadstock industry. We're providing farmers and meat operators and further meat processors additional financial assistance to meet new standards and regulations. We're moving forward on a non-farm food safety strategy for Ontario that was developed in conjunction with the industry and the Ontario government. Most importantly, the strategy that we move forward aligns us with the federal government to ensure that there is program integration, coordination of administration, and infrastructure program evaluation. We also have developed a joint government-industry Ontario Traceability Task Force, developing a business model. We signed an MOU with the federal and provincial government to enhance public safety.

1440

TEACHER TESTING

Mr. Frank Klees (Oak Ridges): My question was to the Minister of Education, but I'll direct it to the Premier in the minister's absence. On April 4, I put a question to the Minister of Education relating to the fact that he

cancelled teacher testing, the qualifying test. Now there are 7,000 graduates who will be without a qualifying certificate. In fact, in my preamble, I quoted you, as the self-proclaimed education minister, as saying, "I agree that teachers should be tested. New teachers should be tested." And you said that teachers should be tested "at the beginning of their professional careers in order to be admitted to the profession."

Premier, you're aware that we have 7,000 graduates of education faculties today to whom your Minister of Education has now written to say there will not be a certificate for them. I want you, as the self-proclaimed education minister, to tell us whether you believe that that is a way to run the Ministry of Education.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs): I don't think there's any doubt about it: We're bringing a different approach to public education in the province of Ontario. For one thing, we happen to be committed to it. The member opposite would remove money from our public schools and put that money into private schools. We're bringing a different approach.

I can say, with respect to the testing, that it's turning out that the overwhelming majority of teachers were passing that test without any problem whatsoever. I think what this really speaks to is the respect we attach to the profession and to teachers themselves. Just one little example: So far, 16,000 teachers have volunteered for weekend training, without pay or training in the summer, in order to become lead teachers who are now specially skilled in literacy and numeracy for elementary students. The way you build a strong public education system in the province of Ontario is by speaking to what is best in our teachers. Sixteen thousand teachers volunteered, have special training and are now helping us get better achievement in literacy and numeracy.

Mr. Klees: Respect for teachers, Premier, would mean that you would look to ensure that graduating teachers will have their proper qualifying certificates.

Let me read to you what one of those graduates is saying. By the way, there are hundreds of these letters coming in now every day from the very people you say you respect. She writes:

"As a teacher candidate at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, I would like to express my dissatisfaction with the current initiative underway at the Ministry of Education....

"I am concerned that this has been done hastily and without any clear and logical plan for what the replacement evaluation may be...

"I feel that I have been done a great disservice as a new educator in Ontario."

I'm simply asking the Premier today to tell this House why he believes that new teachers graduating from faculties of education should be left without a qualifying entrance exam, should be left without a qualifying certificate and should be subjected to the kind of uncertainty to which they're being subjected as a result of this Ministry of Education not doing its job.

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: The member opposite is just plain wrong. In order for teachers to obtain employment in the province of Ontario, they've graduated and obtained a bachelor of education. They've had to meet standards and pass exams in their education faculties.

Again, I think what this really reflects is the difference in approach to the profession of teaching and to teachers themselves. You will recall that, in many ways, our schools, for eight and a half years under the Tories, were combat zones. We've worked hard to introduce peace and stability and higher student achievement into public education.

Again, I refer to the fact that we have managed so far to enlist 16,000 teachers to come and learn more on weekends and during the summer, to upgrade their skills and to take that special expertise back to the classroom. They are doing that as volunteers, without additional pay, and I think that speaks to the value of the approach that we are bringing to public education when we value the profession and when we value teachers.

SCHOOL CLOSURES

Mr. Rosario Marchese (Trinity-Spadina): The question is to the Premier. Premier, before the last election, your Minister of Education promised to save small and rural schools. Before the election, Mr. Kennedy said: "Schools are the hubs of northern communities, but the Harris-Eves government has failed to support them. We will protect northern schools."

The Fourway school north of Thunder Bay is scheduled to close in two months. Last week—and I've got a picture here that I can't show—parents held a protest to say that the future of their school is in your hands. They don't want to lose their community hub; they don't want their children on a bus for four hours every day on dangerous highways. All I'm asking you to do, Premier, is to stop the closure of this northern school. Will you do that?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs): The member will know that we have done a couple of things in this regard. First of all, we've found an additional \$31 million to support our Keeping Good Schools Open plan, which helps schools in remote communities. We know they have special funding challenges. With respect to the matter in Thunder Bay—and I've heard a great deal from my colleagues Mike Gravelle and Bill Mauro on this issue—we also have made a facilitator available to look at any school closure orders between December 2003 and February 2005 to make sure that the school closure is done in a way that does not compromise the interests of our students. I know that there is a great deal of interest in that community and what that board is doing, but we made additional funds available for the plan and we've put forward a good policy which really speaks to the best interests of students.

Mr. Marchese: As of today, no such review has been launched. This is what the board—Vice-Chairwoman

Beatrice Metzler—said in relation to this review: “We looked at all the guidelines and we are living within the spirit of the guidelines.”

We’ve got a problem here. That is why we are asking you to intervene. You told parents they would not lose their local school, but the board says you’ve raised no objections with them and have not provided any additional funding to keep the small school open. You promised new guidelines and the new funding and you have not delivered. Now these parents have been forced into the courts, and they are trying to get an injunction to save their school. Other parents, from Gorham and Ware and Fort William Collegiate, are joining them because your government is closing their schools as well. You have the power under the Education Act to stop this closure. Premier, will you save this school, or will you break your promise, like you did so many others?

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: Let me say that I know the people want to be reminded that under the NDP government, 155 public schools were closed. And I know the member opposite, my favourite thespian in the House, would not want to not have the public informed about that. But again, I can say that we have a new funding formula in place that speaks to the better interests of our students, contrary to the previous funding formula, which was really more of a bean-counting exercise. So we have made a facilitator available, someone who is prepared and go in and review the school closure proposal and make sure that it does not contravene our new approach.

As I said throughout the campaign and before the campaign, we’re not saying that no schools at any time will close ever again in the province of Ontario. What we have said is, we’ll change the funding formula so it speaks to the better interests of our students, as opposed to a dry, bean-counting formula.

MARIJUANA GROW OPERATIONS

Ms. Kathleen O. Wynne (Don Valley West): My question is for the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services. Minister, many Ontarians are glad to hear that this government is taking action against residential marijuana grow operations and the criminals who run these grow-ops. However, part of the bill would ensure that properties identified as grow-ops are inspected by building inspectors, and I want to be assured that we’re not inadvertently putting our building inspectors in harm’s way by having them do police work. There’s been much discussion and confusion surrounding Bill 128 and the ability of building inspectors to enter a suspected grow-op without a warrant. Can a building inspector enter a suspected grow-op house without a warrant, and under what circumstances?

Hon. Monte Kwinter (Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services): I thank the member from Don Valley West for her question. It’s an important question and I’m happy to clarify it.

Under the provisions of Bill 128, which is primarily about community safety, a building inspector may—as a

matter of fact, not only may, but shall—enter a building to inspect it, and this is without a warrant, provided he has been informed by the chief building inspector that the police have identified it as a grow-op. In other words, the building inspector doesn’t go in and decide whether it’s a grow-op; the police have already done that under a warrant. They have notified the chief building inspector that this is the case, and the building inspector can go in to make sure that the citizens of Ontario are protected, that they are not moving into a house that is unsafe because of the electricity, because of the mould, because of the chemicals. This is a very good provision in this act.

1450

PETITIONS

GASOLINE PRICES

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

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas gasoline prices have continued to increase at alarming rates in recent months; and

“Whereas the high and unstable gas prices across Ontario have caused confusion and unfair hardship to Ontario’s drivers while also impacting the Ontario economy in key sectors, such as tourism and transportation;

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

“That the Parliament of Ontario consider an immediate gas price freeze for a temporary period until world oil prices moderate; and

“That the provincial government petition the federal Liberal government to step up to the plate and lower gas prices by removing the GST on gasoline products and fix the federal Competition Act to ensure consumers are protected and that the market operates in a fair and transparent manner.”

As I am in full support of this, I affix my name.

REGIONAL CENTRES FOR THE DEVELOPMENTALLY DISABLED

Mr. Michael Prue (Beaches–East York): I have a petition that reads as follows:

“Whereas Dalton McGuinty and his Liberal government were elected based on their promise to rebuild public services in Ontario;

“Whereas the Minister of Community and Social Services has announced plans to close Huronia Regional Centre, home to people with developmental disabilities, many of whom have multiple diagnoses and severe problems that cannot be met in the community;

“Whereas closing Huronia Regional Centre will have a devastating impact on residents with developmental disabilities, their families, the developmental services sector and the economies of the local communities; and

"Whereas Ontario could use the professional staff and facilities of Huronia Regional Centre to extend specialized services, support and professional training to many more clients who live in the community, in partnership with families and community agencies;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to direct the government to keep Huronia Regional Centre, home to people with developmental disabilities, open, and to transform them into 'centres of excellence' to provide specialized services and support to Ontarians with developmental needs, no matter where they live."

I'm in agreement and would affix my signature thereto.

ANTI-SCALDING DEVICE

Mr. Jeff Leal (Peterborough): I have a petition today from residents in the riding of Peterborough. It says:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the Ontario government has made changes to the building code which requires a master thermal mixing valve (anti-scald device) to be installed upon replacement or installation of a water heater;

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

"That the installation of the thermal mixing valve (anti-scalding device) should be at the discretion of the property owner and not mandated by the Ontario building code."

I am in agreement with this and I will affix my signature to it.

SPORT PARACHUTING

Mr. Joseph N. Tascona (Barrie-Simcoe-Bradford): I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario that reads as follows:

"Whereas the lives of student and novice sport parachutists have been and continue to be lost to a systemic lack of regulation or accountability on the part of any currently governing bodies;

"Whereas inconsistent monitoring, a serious disregard for or inability to responsibly and competently police adherence to rules, regulations and manufacturer specifications on the part of the skydiving schools and the Canadian Sport Parachuting Association creates unnecessary risk to human life;

"Whereas evidence presented at the coroner's inquest of Gareth Rodgers suggests that the current regulatory body (CSPA) has no desire for accountability or means of enforcing rules and regulations in the sport of parachuting;

"Whereas a system of teaching standards and regulations to safeguard novice and student sport parachutists is grossly deficient;

"Whereas Joe Tascona, MPP Barrie-Simcoe-Bradford, has introduced a private member's bill, the Gareth Rodgers Act for Sport Parachuting, to regulate

sport parachuting activities for the safety of student and novice skydivers;

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

"(1) That the Dalton McGuinty Liberal government immediately pass and implement Joe Tascona's bill;

"(2) That the Dalton McGuinty Liberal government petition the federal Liberal government to act in a swift and responsible manner in order to ensure that the lives and safety of sport parachutists, especially student and novice jumpers, are protected by law and that the skydiving industry operates in a responsible, competent and transparent manner;

"(3) That the federal Liberal government consider immediate and responsible interim measures to suspend these activities until a viable solution to this matter may be attained;

"(4) That the federal Liberal government seriously consider the 12 sound recommendations submitted by the jury in the coroner's inquest of the skydiving fatality of Gareth Rodgers;

"(5) That the federal Liberal government make the industry both responsible and accountable for its actions and omissions, within strict standards of safety that must be governed by a competent body whose paramount mandate must be to maintain current equipment, thorough and competent record-keeping, and to ensure that manufacturer specifications are strictly adhered to and that appropriate safety standards are being observed at all times for student/novice skydivers and the equipment that they use."

I support the petition and sign it.

VOLUNTEER FIREFIGHTERS

Mr. Tim Hudak (Erie-Lincoln): I'm pleased to present my petition on behalf of double-hatter firefighters—another one. This one is actually rolling in from people in Niagara-on-the-Lake and St. Davids. It reads as follows:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas many volunteer fire departments in Ontario are strengthened by the service of double-hatter firefighters who work as professional, full-time firefighters and also serve as volunteer firefighters on their free time; and

"Whereas double-hatter firefighters are being forced to resign as volunteer firefighters or face losing their full-time jobs, which is weakening volunteer fire departments in Ontario;

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

"The Dalton McGuinty Liberals should support double-hatters and protect the right of firefighters to volunteer in their home communities on their own free time."

I support it with my signature.

REGIONAL CENTRES FOR THE
DEVELOPMENTALLY DISABLED

Mr. Frank Klees (Oak Ridges): You just got here.

Mr. Norman W. Sterling (Lanark–Carleton): Seniority does play a role.

This is a petition from 3,500 people who are concerned about the closing of the Rideau Regional Centre in Smiths Falls.

“Whereas Dalton McGuinty and his Liberal government were elected based on their promise to rebuild public services in Ontario;

“Whereas the Minister of Community and Social Services has announced plans to close the Rideau Regional Centre, home to people with developmental disabilities, many of whom have multiple diagnoses and severe problems that cannot be met in the community;

“Whereas closing the Rideau Regional Centre will have a devastating impact on residents ... their families, the developmental services sector and the economies of the local communities;

“Whereas Ontario could use the professional staff and facilities of the Rideau Regional Centre to extend specialized services, support and professional training to many more clients who live in the community, in partnership with families and community agencies;

“Therefore we, the” 3,500 Ontario residents “undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to direct the government to keep the Rideau Regional Centre open as a home for people with developmental disabilities and to maintain it as a ‘centre of excellence’ to provide specialized services and support to Ontarians” who are our most vulnerable citizens and provide for their needs, “no matter where they live.”

I’ve signed that.

1500

CONTROL OF SMOKING

Mr. Frank Klees (Oak Ridges): I have a petition here to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario that was submitted by the Richmond Hill Pro Bowl, located at 10593 Yonge Street in my riding, in Richmond Hill. It reads as follows:

“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 separate designated smoking rooms in hospitality establishments that regulate

and control employee and customer exposure to second-hand smoke.”

I’m pleased to affix my signature to this.

REGIONAL CENTRES FOR THE
DEVELOPMENTALLY DISABLED

Mr. Michael Prue (Beaches–East York): I have a petition similar to the last one I read, this time from the residents of Toronto and Mississauga. It reads as follows:

“Whereas Dalton McGuinty and his Liberal government were elected based on their promise to rebuild public services in Ontario;

“Whereas the Minister of Community and Social Services has announced plans to close Huronia Regional Centre, home to people with developmental disabilities, many of whom have multiple diagnoses and severe problems that cannot be met in the community;

“Whereas closing Huronia Regional Centre will have a devastating impact on residents with developmental disabilities, their families, the developmental services sector and the economies of the local communities; and

“Whereas Ontario could use the professional staff and facilities of Huronia Regional Centre to extend specialized services, support and professional training to many more clients who live in the community, in partnership with families and community agencies;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to direct the government to keep Huronia Regional Centre, home to people with developmental disabilities, open, and to transform them into ‘centres of excellence’ to provide specialized services and support to Ontarians with developmental needs, no matter where they live.”

I’m in agreement, and I affix my signature thereto.

ANAPHYLACTIC SHOCK

Mr. Bob Delaney (Mississauga West): I have a petition to the Ontario Legislative Assembly from a group of parents in Lisgar and Erin Mills, and it reads as follows:

“Whereas there are no established, Ontario-wide standards to deal with anaphylaxis in Ontario schools; and

“Whereas there is no specific comment regarding anaphylaxis in the Ontario Education Act; and

“Whereas anaphylaxis 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 Ontario schools, be it therefore resolved that,

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

“That the government of Ontario support the swift passage 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 support the petition, affix my signature and ask Stephaine to carry it for me.

REGIONAL CENTRES FOR THE DEVELOPMENTALLY DISABLED

Mr. Garfield Dunlop (Simcoe North): “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas Dalton McGuinty and his Liberal government were elected based on their promise to rebuild public services in Ontario;

“Whereas the Minister of Community and Social Services has announced plans to close Huronia Regional Centre, home to people with developmental disabilities, many of whom have multiple diagnoses and severe problems that cannot be met in the community;

“Whereas closing Huronia Regional Centre will have a devastating impact on residents with developmental disabilities, their families, the developmental services sector and the economies of the local communities; and

“Whereas Ontario could use the professional staff and facilities of Huronia Regional Centre to extend specialized services, support and professional training to many more clients who live in the community, in partnership with families and community agencies;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to direct the government to keep Huronia Regional Centre, home to people with developmental disabilities, open, and to transform them into ‘centres of excellence’ to provide specialized services and support to Ontarians with developmental needs, no matter where they live.”

I'm pleased to sign my name to that.

INSURANCE RATES

Ms. Shelley Martel (Nickel Belt): I have a petition that has been sent to me from Mr. Jean Roy of Alban, Ontario. It's been signed by dozens of people in Sudbury and Sudbury district east, and it says, essentially:

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“We have had enough of our insurance companies ripping us off and making senseless profit with our hard-earned money.”

I agree with the petitioners. I've affixed my signature to this.

REGIONAL CENTRES FOR THE DEVELOPMENTALLY DISABLED

Mr. Robert W. Runciman (Leeds–Grenville): I have a petition—I will abbreviate it so that members have an opportunity—from Rideau Regional Centre.

“Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to direct the government to keep the Rideau Regional Centre open as a home for people with developmental disabilities and to maintain it

as a ‘centre of excellence’ to provide specialized services and support to Ontarians with developmental needs, no matter where they live.”

I'm affixing my signature to this.

ONTARIO FARMERS

Mr. Toby Barrett (Haldimand–Norfolk–Brant): It's a farm petition:

“Whereas thousands of Ontario farmers have been forced to take their concerns directly to Queen's Park because of a lack of response from the Dalton McGuinty government to farm issues; and

“Whereas farming in Ontario is in crisis because of the impacts of BSE, unfair subsidies from other jurisdictions, rising costs for energy and a crushing regulatory burden on farmers; and

“Whereas current prices for farm products do not allow for sustainable agriculture in Canada, with a 10.7% decline in the number of Canadian farms reported between 1996 and 2001;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, ask the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to consult with Ontario's farmers to develop a long-term strategy to ensure the viability of agriculture in our province that protects our rural way of life, and to work in the short term to alleviate the farm income crisis and listen to the concerns of farmers about the greenbelt.”

I agree with the farmers, and I sign this petition.

REGIONAL CENTRES FOR THE DEVELOPMENTALLY DISABLED

Mr. Garfield Dunlop (Simcoe North): “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas Dalton McGuinty and his Liberal government were elected based on their promise to rebuild public services in Ontario;

“Whereas the Minister of Community and Social Services has announced plans to close Huronia Regional Centre, home to people with developmental disabilities, many of whom have multiple diagnoses and severe problems that cannot be met in the community;

“Whereas closing Huronia Regional Centre will have a devastating impact on residents with developmental disabilities, their families, the developmental services sector and the economies of the local communities; and

“Whereas Ontario could use the professional staff and facilities of Huronia Regional Centre to extend specialized services, support and professional training to many more clients who live in the community, in partnership with families and community agencies;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to direct the government to keep Huronia Regional Centre, home to people with developmental disabilities, open, and to transform them into ‘centres of excellence’ to provide specialized services and support to Ontarians with developmental needs, no matter where they live.”

I have signed that.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

FAMILY RESPONSIBILITY AND SUPPORT ARREARS ENFORCEMENT AMENDMENT ACT, 2005

LOI DE 2005 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR LES OBLIGATIONS FAMILIALES ET L'EXÉCUTION DES ARRIÉRÉS D'ALIMENTS

Resuming the debate adjourned on April 6, 2005, on the motion for second reading of Bill 155, An Act to amend the Family Responsibility and Support Arrears Enforcement Act, 1996 and to make consequential amendments to the Fish and Wildlife Conservation Act, 1997 / Projet de loi 155, Loi modifiant la Loi de 1996 sur les obligations familiales et l'exécution des arriérés d'aliments et apportant des modifications corrélatives à la Loi de 1997 sur la protection du poisson et de la faune.

The Speaker (Hon. Alvin Curling): It's time for questions and comments in regard to the member for Nickel Belt's statements.

Mr. Garfield Dunlop (Simcoe North): I only got to hear a little bit of the member's speech on the previous sessional day; I'll be speaking to this myself in a few minutes. It's a bill that I know we need to look at very, very carefully. I think it's really important to the members of this House and to the people in our constituency offices. I don't know if there's a constituency office in this province that doesn't have a lot of FRO calls. That's probably one of the top issues I've faced in my riding, along with birth certificates. I can tell you that this issue hits close to home because it affects a lot of young children and a lot of spouses of the people who are responsible under the FRO.

I just want to say that I look forward to the remaining time we're going to debate this. I will have an opportunity to speak to it somewhat myself and to give some comments from our caucus. But in the end I do think that we on this side of the House will be supporting this legislation. Anything we can do to make the Family Responsibility Office work more efficiently and serve the citizens of our province in a more effective manner is an area I think we have to closely work with.

I thank the member for Nickel Belt for her comments. I know she'll be taking a close look at the remainder of this debate as well, and I look forward to the remaining debate in the House today.

Mr. Dave Levac (Brant): In terms of this particular bill, Bill 155, we're talking about the Family Responsibility Office. When I was elected in 1999, I had a baptism by fire regarding the difficulties this particular portfolio brought to the members, not to mention what the people were going through. When I heard the stories of some of the tricks and some of the things that were being done to avoid payments to that group of people who so deservedly need those payments, it absolutely blew me away. I learned that we're talking about \$1.2

billion to \$1.4 billion and, depending on who you speak to, \$1.6 billion of uncollected support.

1510

If I'm not mistaken, the member works extremely hard from that point, as I remember, and I knew that she was concerned about that even before. I laud her for doing that, because this is a justice issue. It's a simple one. It's a justice issue. I believe that 230,000 children in the province at that time, and probably still the same or more, do not get that support. That speaks to a justice issue.

Is this the be-all and end-all bill that will solve that problem? I believe not. Is it those wonderful steps we all should be taking in this place to clean things up? It's a good step. It's a step that starts to point us toward the things that are signalling that we are not going to tolerate this. Did we hear from 1999 to now the various things that were being done? I would suggest that we need to move forward.

I understand and I'm very sympathetic that the clock is not working, Speaker, so I would like to sit down. I'd never take advantage of a situation like that.

Mr. Jerry J. Ouellette (Oshawa): As I made comments regarding this issue in the past regarding the FRO, if we're going to clean this up, we need to ensure it's done right. Some of the key areas, as I mentioned previously, that I hope will be further addressed—I see the PA is here—relate to the suspension. Is the suspension actually on the licence when you're dealing with the outdoor licensing or the outdoor card, or is it the tag, which is very key to a lot of people? Because party hunting is an element within the natural resources when you're hunting deer or any other species, whether you suspend the licence, which means the individual, or you suspend the tag, those individuals who party-hunt on that tag will also be under suspension and be penalized for the legislation that has come forward.

I hope that the PA or the minister, when they have the opportunity to address this issue, will be able to inform us on what's going to happen with that. I do appreciate the time to speak on this legislation.

Mr. Kuldip Kular (Bramalea-Gore-Malton-Springdale): It's my pleasure to participate in the debate on Bill 155, the family responsibility bill. Some of my constituents from the riding of Bramalea-Gore-Malton-Springdale have been coming to me, some of the mothers who are single mothers, and they are having a tough time to collect the family responsibility allowances from their spouses or previous husbands. As a family doctor, I feel very sympathetic toward these single mothers who cannot collect and they are having a tough time.

This bill, Bill 155, makes some efforts to be able to collect these allowances for those single mothers and for their children. This bill will make sure that the fathers who are not paying the family allowances to their spouses will have their licence suspended, whether it's a fishing licence or a driver's licence.

I commend the minister for bringing this bill. Definitely, it will help the single mothers collecting family allowances.

Ms. Shelley Martel (Nickel Belt): Let me thank all the members who participated in the responses. Let me just say a couple of things. I ended on the last day that I was speaking about this bill talking about my concerns about who will get this computer contract. It was why I raised a question to the Minister of Community and Social Services on December 15, 2004, because we had seen that Accenture had expressed an interest in being part of the request for proposals for this computer system. We watch with interest to see who the successful bidder is, but I certainly hope it isn't Accenture, because the experience that the previous government had with Andersen/Accenture was nothing short of a fiasco; it was a boondoggle. The problem with that computer system at ODSP, and OW today, is still not fixed, and Accenture is still on the government's payroll, so many years later. So I hope, when I see who the successful bidder is, it's not going to be Accenture, and I hope the government has some ways and means to get the contract under control in a way that a previous contract for a computer system was not.

Let me just say that I heard a number of government members say that some of the measures that were being introduced are going to help get money to women and children. I've looked at the measures; I looked at them carefully. I have to tell you that I don't think we're going to raise any money with the measures that they have put forward. Telling people that they are going to report payers to their professional associations doesn't mean that professional associations are going to do anything to get the money. They can't; there's no obligation in the legislation. Sending people to jail longer might work, except that the experience seems to be that no one has gone to jail in the first place, so it doesn't seem to be much of an enforcement tool. There was a reference to third party interests and making sure that people don't shield assets under third parties. That was part of the previous government's legislation in 1996 and that didn't work, so I don't think it's going to work now.

So I don't think the range of tools that are before us is going to make a lot of difference. Unless and until we have a new computer system and a case management system at the FRO, this office will not meet its legal obligations to women and children in this province, and that's a shame.

The Speaker: Further debate?

Mr. Bob Delaney (Mississauga West): Some of the very first constituents who came to see me, sometimes in tears, in the early days after the 2003 election spoke to me movingly about their frustrations in collecting child support from partners from whom they had separated or divorced. By and large, these constituents were single mothers who were the sole supporters of dependent children. Their stories were compelling. In many cases, these parents had obtained judgments entitling them to support from the other parent of their children.

After my election, I began to hear about the neglect within the Family Responsibility Office. I heard about my constituents who had to take an unpaid day off work

and get up at the crack of dawn to spend literally hours waiting in a telephone queue in order to speak with a human representative from the Family Responsibility Office.

There had been no substantive legislative amendments in the family responsibility and support area for eight years. It's not that the previous government had had no warning. The Ontario Ombudsman had warned of serious shortcomings in FRO; the privacy commissioner had warned the government about problems in FRO; the Provincial Auditor had written to say that changes were necessary in the Family Responsibility Office.

I heard in committee hearings that files were maintained on paper and stored in paper boxes. Little had been computerized. FRO local offices had been closed. The staff were not only seriously under-capacity, but dangerously overworked, not to mention overstressed and overcrowded at work—and, let me also add, underpaid. People would phone the FRO office and wait hours to speak to someone, only to find that the last person they spoke with was unavailable, and each person would need to start their entire case all over again with a new person, a new representative, each time. On top of this, after waiting hours just to speak with someone, the person would be put on hold yet again while the representative from FRO looked for their paper files in a box somewhere in the FRO office. Only then, after hours of endless, frustrating and needless wait, could anything productive begin.

That is the past, present and future of the Harris-Eves and now the Tory policy toward the lives of so many vulnerable men and women in Ontario. And the problems are not limited to single parents not receiving their payments from their former partners. Parents who had given up custody of their children and were trying to comply with support agreements or court orders were faithfully, and are faithfully, paying into FRO accounts and, in too many cases, FRO had simply not accounted for their payments properly. Their drivers' licences were still being suspended unjustly. Their wages were being garnished unfairly. The bad actors were getting away with it; the good-faith parties were being victimized themselves.

This is the Tory philosophy: Ignore it, neglect it, underfund it, mismanage it, maltreat it and hope the problem will go away. I say to anyone toying with support of the opposition party, look at what they did to see what they will do if they get close to power again.

1520

The Minister of Community and Social Services, the member from Windsor West, has a fresh approach. She toured Ontario extensively. She listened, and listened some more. She heard from the parents with custody of their children. She heard from the parents paying support faithfully. She heard from the beleaguered staff in the FRO, the people on the front lines who were trying, and are still trying, to match those who need support with those with an obligation to pay it. She heard from the overseers within our government and our justice system.

And she told everyone that results and hope were on the way. Well, Bill 155 continues the process of delivering those results and restoring that hope.

As someone with IT experience, it boggles my mind that sensitive information was stored in paper files under inadequate security. So the ministry has begun to design and implement a case management system. People will begin to deal with one representative, a worker who will be able to access information on-line rather than have to find it on paper. The minister will enforce court orders and track them, penalizing the violators rather than penalizing the faithful payers. The FRO offices will be able to enforce a lesser amount of support when the number of entitled children decreases, and FRO will be able to demand information from more sources, such as trade unions and professional associations. FRO will be able to demand this information in order to find people who have concealed resources or who violate court orders to support their dependent children.

This is clear and decisive action on a burning issue, in support of those who need it most. But John and the rest of the Tories will be missing in action on FRO, because those parents aren't interested in private schools, private health care, tax cuts for developers, horizon-to-horizon sprawl and choking traffic, while vital resources are taken from those who need them most and given to those who already have the most and want still more.

Speaker, I'll be sharing my time with the member for Etobicoke North, and I thank you very much for the opportunity to speak on this issue.

Mr. Shafiq Qaadri (Etobicoke North): First of all, I thank my colleague from Mississauga West for the leadoff.

It's our responsibility, obligation and duty to speak out in support of this particular bill, An Act to amend the Family Responsibility and Support Arrears Enforcement Act. There are three components with regard to this bill: enforcement, fairness and finding efficiencies. This government and the Minister of Community and Social Services, the Honourable Sandra Pupatello, with this legislation have shown a level of determination to bring justice to families and children in need.

As some of my colleagues in this Legislature have already pointed out, unfortunately this is a growing problem in Ontario. Something like 230,000 children fall under the jurisdiction of FRO. Just to give you an idea of some of the numbers involved, in 2003-04 more than \$600 million was actually recaptured from deadbeat parents regarding their FRO responsibilities. I'm pleased to report that, since the initiatives such as the credit bureau initiative, something like \$82 million more has been collected, but there's still a huge amount of money owed, and that is part of the initiative, the inspiration and the incentive for this particular bill.

The inaction of previous administrations actually speaks volumes to the concerns that government paid to the needs of families in Ontario. It was just not on the radar screen. When this government took office, there had been only the most cosmetic changes to the FRO.

This inaction had persisted over multiple warnings from the privacy commissioner, the Provincial Auditor and the Ontario Ombudsman. The silence on an issue of this significance has to date unfortunately been tolerated, yet all the while it is unconscionable. That is why I'm pleased to be part of a government that is taking real and meaningful action on this particular bill.

Enforcement, fairness, and efficiencies: Bill 155 has real teeth. It makes FRO into an organization that can aggressively pursue those who fail to make child or spousal support payments: 230,000 children involved, and I'm told more than \$1 billion still owed in arrears.

This bill doubles the maximum jail time, for example, for failing to comply with court orders, increasing it from 90 to 180 days. This tells non-payers that Ontario is serious, that Ontario is a province that will not shy away from seeing justice done on behalf of the families and children in need.

Fairness and efficiencies: The bill also allows FRO to report defaulting payers to professional licensing bodies and to suspend, as one example, hunting and sport fishing licenses. These are aggressive measures, and this government makes no pretence to the contrary. It's a serious subject and deserves serious measures. We cannot allow defaulting parents to continue to force their families into poverty, because it's at risk of forcing these families into institutionalized poverty.

Mr. John R. Baird (Nepean-Carleton): Where's your tuxedo?

Mr. Qaadri: In regard to the heckler, I would like to inform the MPP from Nepean-Carleton that I will be wearing my tuxedo next at his leadership bid for the federal Tory party.

This legislation specifically targets defaulting payers who deliberately and wilfully shirk their parental and familial responsibilities and support obligations. At the same time, Bill 155 is designed specifically to ensure fairness to all those who deal with the Family Responsibility Office. For instance, if a recipient refuses to respond to official inquiries about whether a child is still receiving or should be receiving support payments, the new legislation introduces measures that will allow the FRO to cease enforcement of the ongoing support.

This legislation introduces sorely needed amendments to the Family Responsibility and Support Arrears Enforcement Act. In a very real sense, it patches the holes in the legislation, faults that have crippled the FRO since the act was first proclaimed in 1997.

The Speaker: Questions and comments?

Mr. Joseph N. Tascona (Barrie-Simcoe-Bradford): I'm certainly pleased to stand up here and comment on the comments of the members from Mississauga and Etobicoke. Unfortunately, they don't want to go back in history in terms of getting the facts on how this situation arose. Actually, it was Ian Scott who took the measures with respect to reforming the family law process, where you went to court and got the order, and put in another system—which did not work, unfortunately. The intent was there, but the fact is that enforcement was the

problem. The bureaucracy that was put in place was put in place by the Liberal government under David Peterson, and for them to come in here today and start complaining about what other governments did is a bit rich. The leader of the third party was involved in those days, and I imagine he's going to talk about it in terms of the improvements they made to the office, to get more money. I know the measures that Charles Harnick put in place when he was the Attorney General with respect to enforcement. It's a very difficult issue, and people shouldn't be pointing fingers in terms of how to deal with it.

There are so many ways you can get around this in terms of if you're looking for another source to try to hide your money, and you won't be able to get at the source with respect to getting at that money. The driver's licence issue is certainly an important issue, but you can drive that vehicle if it's in someone else's name, if it's a business. You can get that car, and they can give you the gas card. So it's not that easy an issue. I think the members' intentions are good, with respect, but they were reading from notes and I don't think there was a lot of thought put into the process.

I didn't stand up and complain that it was against the standing orders because I have respect for debate, but the bottom line is that these members are basically just voicing the party line. They don't understand the history, they don't understand the problem, and the fact of the matter is that this isn't going to solve it. I don't know why they put it in with fish and wildlife. This is a joke.

Ms. Marilyn Churley (Toronto–Danforth): We know that in 2003, 37% of Ontario's low-income families with children were female lone-parent families, and the rate and duration of poverty among children in these families is disproportionately high. Also, if anybody looked, they would have seen that Campaign 2000's Report Card on Child Poverty in Ontario called for a major overhaul of the FRO in order to support these children. What we have before us today are some weak measures that, when you look at them and the kind of problems that exist and have always existed at the FRO, this is not going to fix the system. What I would call on the government to do today, after listening to some of the speeches about the changes they're making, is stop the clawback. That would go, perhaps to a large extent, much further than the measures that are being taken in this bill before us today. We all agree that the FRO needs a complete overhaul, but when you look at the measures that are before us today, they in themselves are not going to correct a lot of those problems, and we need to see a lot more.

1530

Let's look at all the things we need to do to stop child poverty in this province. The number one priority that the government adamantly promised to do before they won the election was to stop the clawback. That's a simple, clear promise. I wish we were standing here today acknowledging that the government kept a fundamental promise to some of the poorest, if not the poorest, children and their families in this province.

I will have an opportunity to speak more about the bill, and to put my thoughts on the record, a little later. But I say again to the government, keep your promise and stop the clawback of the federal child tax benefit.

Mr. Phil McNeely (Ottawa–Orléans): This legislation is about increased enforcement, improved fairness and enhanced efficiency. That's what is being done by the minister with this legislation.

I was at the public accounts committee, and the ADM is on record as saying that the present system costs us \$10 million a year in social assistance, because that's where mothers and children end up when the system doesn't work. If Visa ran this kind of system, where you don't do tracking of non-payments for seven or eight months, they'd be out of business in a few days.

This legislation is going in the right direction. What I like about it is that we're going to get into the 21st century with the computer system, the case management system, and that \$40 million will return to this province within three years, according to the ADM. But that's not the important part of it. The important part of this legislation is that we'll be protecting families and protecting children. That is extremely important.

It was interesting to note that the recommendation was made by the auditor way back in 1994. This could have been put in place in three years; it could have been in place in 1997. That means seven years at \$10 million a year. That's \$70 million that has been lost while we haven't been protecting our families.

I think it's very important that we move ahead with this. We are moving ahead with this, and the investments are being made. The FRO is going to be something that, for people who are expecting payments that are generated from court decisions, the payments will be there, the tracking will be done and the system will work. We'll get rid of the support, I think, by the former government for deadbeat parents. We're going to make sure that the families and children are protected.

Mr. Dunlop: I'm pleased to comment on the leadoff today by the two Liberal speakers.

I think we've made it very clear that we, on this side of the House, are trying to work with the government—to work with everyone—to try to improve the Family Responsibility Office. I think my colleague from Barrie–Simcoe–Bradford said it best: This is not an easy issue.

The members seemed to be a little cynical in their response, in that they felt that previous governments had not done enough. I think, as the member from Barrie–Simcoe–Bradford said, it's a difficult topic and governments should actually work together on this. To point the finger at someone else on previous actions is unacceptable because in this case we have the lives of children at stake.

On this side of the House and on behalf of our party, I know that we want to improve it. We want to make the system efficient; we want to make it effective. We want to make sure that people who are irresponsible to their children and to their families are not rewarded in any way but have to pay a penalty for that. We need to make

sure that as a society we try to rehabilitate people so that they are responsible to their families. We want to make sure that people pay their dues, but we also want to make sure that they're important members of their community and that they receive self-esteem and respect so that, down the road, they can contribute back and not be penalized by a system like FRO.

The Speaker: Would the member for Mississauga West like to wrap up?

Mr. Delaney: I acknowledge the comments from my colleagues in the House this afternoon. To the member for Barrie-Simcoe-Bradford, it is indeed truly rich to try and finger-point blame for a problem that persisted three years into the 21st century and to assign responsibility to a government from the 1980s.

To the member for Toronto-Danforth, the member does appeal to the government to look deeper and to try harder, and I truly do appreciate that. No single initiative will get resources from hand to mouth and address child poverty more than reform to the family responsibility act.

To the member for Ottawa-Orléans, he acknowledges that this is the time to look ahead, to look into the 21st century and to get on with the job. Ontarians agree and so does their government.

I say to the member for Simcoe North, who is a colleague I very much respect and whose hard work I acknowledge in this House, this is about former governments' track records and about ideas, not about individuals. I welcome his support for the bill, and certainly I hope that support persists through his caucus and that the bill is able to pass unanimously.

The Speaker: Further debate?

Mr. John O'Toole (Durham): It's my pleasure indeed to speak this afternoon on Bill 155, which is An Act to amend the Family Responsibility and Support Arrears Enforcement Act, 1996 and to make consequential amendments to the Fish and Wildlife Conservation Act, 1997.

Throughout the remarks this afternoon I will be using the acronym FRO, which means the Family Responsibility Office. Every member from every party here would be more than familiar with that term: Family Responsibility Office, FRO.

As my opening remarks, I want to compliment the staff in my constituency office at 75 King Street in Bowmanville. Fern Sargent is the person in my office who does a remarkable job in a customer-friendly manner of making the connection between persons involved in the resolution of support orders or custody and trying to make sure that the Family Responsibility Office case-workers have the needed information between the payer, the recipient, as well as we who are serving the public.

I took the opportunity to look up in Hansard the comments made by the minister, the Honourable Sandra Pupatello, when this bill was first introduced. She's not here this afternoon to hear these remarks, but I'm sure she will get a copy of Hansard, because we always appreciate it when ministers take the time to hear the input of the lowly opposition. Often, the suggestion is brought

forward. I want to leave the distinct impression that our critic made it very, very clear—the honourable Cam Jackson, once the minister in this area. I can read his remarks in response the day this bill was introduced in the Legislature, which was December 2, 2004.

Cam Jackson, the member for Burlington, said: "I'm pleased to respond on behalf of my caucus with respect to the Family Responsibility and Support Arrears Enforcement Amendment Act, which was tabled by the minister today. As one who has seen the evolution of support order and custody legislation in this province over the last 20 years," which indeed Cam Jackson has, "I'm mindful that in the late 1980s, when we saw the first legislation in our province, enforcement components were not supported by the then Attorney General of the day, Ian Scott. We have come, indeed, a long way over the course of the last 20 years, so that meaningful enforcement can occur when, as all members in this House will agree, it is extremely important that we support those families who rely on their support payments from a parent who is no longer living with them. For that reason our party will very definitely want to work with this legislation and offer some constructive comments as well as participate in committee in terms of making amendments to it.

"We do have some concerns, and I'm pleased to see the minister has taken a decidedly different tack, now that she is a minister" than when she was the critic on the other side of the House.

1540

All members would know that support orders by the courts are problematic for lots of reasons, and what they're saying in this bill purports to be strengthening. The only thing, on reading this rather important bill—but a technical bill, too, I might say—is that, as I see it, it's strengthening in what it says here. I'm reading from page 1 of the bill itself, the explanatory notes:

"The substantive changes chiefly fall into three categories: strengthening the enforcement tools available to the director of the Family Responsibility Office, improving the methods used for locating default payors and streamlining enforcement procedures."

It goes on to explain in the bill itself, "Some examples of the changes that are intended to strengthen enforcement tools"—and I will read these, because it's important to see how small a step this really is, although it's on the record that our party, under John Tory's leadership, will be supporting this bill. The first thing it says is:

"A power to obtain the suspension of defaulting payors' hunting and fishing licences under the Fish and Wildlife Conservation Act, 1997, similar to the existing power to obtain the suspension of the defaulting payors' driver's licences ..."

I might note for the members who are new here—and most of the current government members are new—that we, along with other governments, tried to strengthen the enforcement tools. One of them was the suspension of a driver's licence. There's a whole debate—Mr. Speaker, you would be aware, having sat here for a long time, not

as Speaker but as a member, both in opposition and in government at one time, and of course you were a minister. Some would say you should still be a minister.

The point I'm trying to make here is that we hear from persons like, for instance, a truck driver, who is the payer. The payer may indeed be a truck driver. If their driver's licence is suspended, no one gets any of the court-ordered arrears. The problem then is, the hole just gets deeper for the payer, because the arrears accumulate. That is not inappropriate, but what is inappropriate is that there may be a time and there may not be a time where this kind of enforcement tool would be effective. I'm wondering whether or not suspending someone's fishing licence under the Fish and Wildlife Conservation Act, 1997, would be of any consequence.

There's another section in here about increasing the incarceration period. It's the same argument. What they're doing there is just adding more days. We had initiated the driver's licence suspension, under director's orders, under our minister. We had also increased the incarceration period. They are now changing it from 90 days to 180 days, as outlined in section 24 of the bill, section 41 of the act. There's the same thing: Now that someone is incarcerated, they are no longer able to earn an income. Who suffers? The child. This is just the tip of the iceberg of how complex the enforcement mechanism is.

In a free society—I'll mention this as well—there are interjurisdictional issues. If a person chooses to move, enforcement becomes even more complicated. We did change the interjurisdictional. In fact, when we were government, we initiated the interjurisdictional coordination agreement with other provinces and indeed the United States.

I go on here with other examples of strengthening the enforcement:

"3. Obtaining information from third parties who are financially connected to payors is made easier."

"4. Information about default may be disclosed to entities such as professional organizations or licensing authorities." That could be a professional organization, as in a lawyer, an engineer, somebody who is regulated as a profession.

It goes on to say in the legislation—and this is just to show both the members here, who are reading from prescribed notes by the minister, as well as those viewing today—in the same section of the bill, the explanatory notes:

"Some examples of the changes that are intended to streamline enforcement procedures:

"7. The director is given the discretion to cease enforcement of support when the support obligation may have ended and the recipient does not respond to inquiries, and to enforce a lesser amount when some but not all of the dependants under an order cease to be entitled to support." In other words, when a child's birthday exceeds the entitlement date. There again, that just shows how detailed this becomes.

Number 8 in this section is:

"Income sources may make payments to the director by electronic transfer, and payments may be delivered to the recipient by direct deposit." Those orders or procedures were, I believe, to some extent in place already.

"The technical changes are intended to clarify the intended meaning of provisions and to update terminology."

So in many cases there are some administrative aspects to the bill as well. But there are other parts here that I think are worth mentioning. I will bring—without revealing any names, of course—some specific concerns of my constituency staff, Fern, into play here.

"Section 28 of the act provides for a 'suspension order' which suspends a support deduction order, allowing the payor to make payments directly to the director rather than having them deducted from the payor's income at the source." This could be for a person who is a contract employee, a person who has changed employer, or indeed is self-employed. "The suspension order does not suspend the support order itself, but the name has caused confusion. Accordingly, the act is amended to use the expression 'alternative payment order' instead."

In number 11 under the explanatory notes here, "One of the enforcement methods provided by the act is the suspension of the default payor's driver's licence, on notice to the payor," which I think is good. "One of the ways the payor can prevent the suspension is by obtaining an 'order to refrain.'" That would be the payor, as I said earlier in my example, potentially needing to drive as a salesperson or a truck driver.

I think I've covered some of the points. The other one is the issue of the interjurisdictional. I want to mention this because it was our government that brought forward the interjurisdictional support orders to simplify and streamline the collection system, making it easier for children to get the money they are entitled to, regardless of where the parent lives. Between 1997 and 2002, I believe we made significant improvements. In fact, there were 16,000 driver's licence suspensions, which led to the recovery of over \$190 million in outstanding court-ordered payments.

I don't think you'll find anyone here who wouldn't do whatever is deemed to be reasonable. That's a term that would have to be described, to make sure that the payer pays. Sometimes it's like getting blood from a stone—if a person is unemployed, for instance. They have no money. Through the divorce and separation procedures in the courts, they often—I'm getting off the specifics, but more on the problems and the mechanics of the FRO process. If someone loses their employment, they've got to go to court to have the court order revised. To go to court, quite often there are papers that need to be filed, as well as legal representation. The person may not qualify for legal representation. They may be in debt already, as many are. The payers themselves are in debt because of the difficulties during separation and divorce and custody battles, which are ongoing lifetime issues.

I'm dealing with Minister Bountrogianni on a specific case, a divorce, and I'm trying to deal with her amicably

to solve that problem, but in many cases there are what I would call personal issues between the two parents. This makes it even more difficult, not just for the support orders themselves, but often—and I don't mean to cast aspersions here on any side of the equation—the children find themselves in the middle, being used as leverage, one parent against another. Whether it's a visitation entitlement or a custody issue or monies that have been given for birthdays that are not included, all these minutiae surround these difficult family issues.

I would like to be on the record as doing anything to strengthen, first, the family unit as a viable societal unit, but secondly, to find more appropriate ways and means of mediating or arbitrating disputes, as opposed to the court system under the family law. That is, to me, the problem, because when I get into it in even more detail—all members, I'm sure, regardless of their political persuasion, recognize at the end of the day that it is the children who fall victim to the situation of two adults disagreeing on fundamentally everything: who has what and who gives what.

1550

We reviewed some cases in our office in the riding of Durham. These are just general observations; these are not criticisms of the justice system or anything else. The first point that we concluded was that judges are writing orders that support payers cannot fulfill from their weekly salaries. In some cases, the ongoing support cannot be met from the 50% garnishee of wages.

Imagine the implications for either one of the parents, deemed to have to pay 50% of their income, who have to then pay off legal bills and a lot of other commitments and still appear with some dignity with the children, if they do have visitation entitlements. Therefore, the arrears are accumulating each month, because the payer cannot meet the original support order. Again, to have the support order changed, they've got to go back to court.

There's got to be disclosure from both parties. One spouse may not have fully disclosed income, and therefore the support orders, in many cases, are based on income records that are old. For instance, a person working at General Motors or Ontario Hydro the year they were assessed by the courts may have found themselves, as they are this year, in a year of layoffs. There have been three and four weeks of layoffs announced at many of the automotive plants. The payers, who are skilled tradespersons, may have employment records during a boom year that have them making \$100,000. Now they may be living on employment insurance, and these court orders, which would be attributed to the original court decision based on \$100,000 income, are of no consequence. They can't meet them, so they get deeper in the hole. The frustration and depression that sets in, not only with their spouse—their other partner—but also with the children, who may be getting negative vibrations from one or other of the partners, makes the resolution of going forward much more difficult.

Another point is that caseworkers at the FRO, the Family Responsibility Office, need more resources and

tools to assist payers and recipients with their need to get cases resolved faster. Rather than going through the courts under every circumstance, having an affidavit—a testimonial statement from a third party on either part to improve the outcomes for both parties and the children—might be a way of streamlining enforcement procedures to meet their objectives.

This is number three. Warrants for committal need to be processed faster to serve default payers more quickly. There is a backlog, according to my office, in preparing the necessary legal documents to deal with these warrants for committal.

Another issue: We found that there should be a higher priority given to locating default payers. These are people who move out of the jurisdiction or who have just gone underground. In many cases, they're personally bankrupt, and it's like getting blood from a stone. Yet this incessant beating on the individual is a penalty to the children. So it would be more expeditious if the Family Responsibility Office could move to resolve these issues initially; it's going to save down the line. I support the new resource, Internet tracking, to find any deadbeat parent.

Number five, which we as a group found in our office: Recipients claim that the FRO does not go far enough in trying to locate default payers. We suggest investigation teams with the ability to get more information about sources, as is outlined in section 24 of the bill, section 41 of the act, to make it easier to obtain information from third-party payers who are financially connected to payers: an employer, accountant or someone of that sort. I support technical tools given to the director to streamline enforcement procedures. The initiative to locate default payers would benefit many of my constituents.

Once a person is being hounded, there has to be a better method of identifying—I think there's a role for the federal government, under the Income Tax Act, to connect the dots here to make sure that, on filing, they could adjust. If an employee's income had been substantially reduced because of employment circumstances—they got depressed; they missed a lot of time from work. It's a complicated, convoluted issue. There needs to be a certain amount of compassion and sympathy on both parts.

Just retracing the last three or four weeks, we got an average of about 15 calls per day. When I say 15 calls, that doesn't mean, "Hello. Have a nice day. Goodbye." These are complex, interpersonal issues and, again, I commend Fern in my office for working patiently with both parties to make sure that single parents in charge of children are receiving as much as possible and that the FRO knows the details.

My suggestion would be to look to the courts to streamline much of the decisions, to have a more expeditious way of resolving income matters for both partners in the relationship and, at the end of the day, to set up a fund so that any surplus amounts at some point accrue to the child and their future. When you think of normal parent circumstances, the parents would be saving some money toward their future education and training.

There's a lot that needs to be done, some of which is in this bill—a very small step going forward on collection enforcement—but I believe all parties need to support it and the government itself needs to ensure that compassion and realism have a place in the enforcement process. I can only tell you that in our riding it is the number one priority. I can say that often I have great sympathy for the payers, who I believe are being manipulated, substantially in some cases, under the custody orders. As such, at the end of the day, the fairness needs to rest with the interests of the children being first and foremost, regardless of the policy and ideology behind it. Thank you for the opportunity to speak.

The Speaker: Questions and comments?

Mr. Howard Hampton (Kenora–Rainy River): I listened carefully to the member for Durham's comments and I actually want to pose a couple of questions to the member for Durham. He, like myself, has been a member of this Legislature for the last nine years and he will remember when the first Attorney General under the Conservative government, Charles Harnick, introduced amendments to this program. In fact, one of the amendments he made was to change the name to the Family Responsibility Office. It used to be called the family support plan. What I recall is that when Mr. Harnick, who was then the Attorney General, introduced amendments to the plan, many of the amendments he introduced were the same amendments that are being introduced here today by the now McGuinty government. In fact, I read some of the statements made by the now Minister of Community and Social Services, and her remarks read remarkably like the remarks made by Mr. Harnick when he released similar amendments.

What I noticed is this—and I guess I want to ask the member for Durham this question. When Mr. Harnick introduced amendments very similar to the amendments introduced now, he said that this was really going to fix the problem, to result in the collection of more money, and there would be fewer children and families going without money and fewer deadbeat dads and the whole thing. I see the same Minister of Community and Social Services making the same comments today. I want to ask the member for Durham: Doesn't it strike you as unusual that we're seeing many of the same amendments that were brought here in 1996, yet the problem grows more serious?

Mr. Wayne Arthurs (Pickering–Ajax–Uxbridge): I'm pleased to join in this debate just for a couple of minutes or so, following on the comments by the member for Durham. I suspect that around this House we all share a common goal with this type of legislative change, and that is to protect the victims. For the most part, as it relates to the Family Responsibility Office, the victims are the children. They're not the only victims in these situations, but they're the principal victims. This will be the first substantive change in the legislation in some eight years, and to the extent that amendments to this legislation will make it ultimately better for children, it should be endorsed by this House and should ultimately be passed.

1600

If we can look at enforcement tools that might be available to us and, in doing that, encourage those who have payments to make to do that, then it's the right thing to do. Extending licence suspensions such that one can't get hunting and fishing licences is an appropriate tack to take. Those are privileges of citizens in good standing; they're not rights for someone who has a situation where they're in arrears in respect to their responsibilities to children and family members. If increasing incarceration from 90 to up to 120 days as a result of court orders and court actions drives home to more of those who would not make their payments the severity of the situation and supports children in families without both parents available, then that's also an appropriate thing to do.

There are multiple aspects to any individual piece of legislation, but keep in mind that our objective here is to ensure that victims are the ones we keep an eye on in changing enforcing elements—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Thank you. Further questions and comments?

Mr. Tascona: I'm certainly pleased to comment on the comments by the member from Durham. As I said earlier of this initial exercise in bringing the bureaucracy into family responsibility, I think the intentions were correct. I think the method that Ian Scott was looking at was a basis where a person has a job—is an employee—and you go after that individual. But it didn't work, because the fact of the matter was that it was a very simplistic model and didn't have enforcement mechanisms to go beyond the job and the income that was earned there. The changes that were made by our government expanded on the enforcement mechanisms because you had to, to deal with different ways to make sure a person didn't leave a job to avoid their responsibilities.

There are issues, looking at section 35 of this bill, in terms of notice dealing with losing your licence. Obviously, if you lose your licence, it could affect your livelihood, and if you haven't got a livelihood to go to, you're not going to be able to make your support payments. I think the government should look a little bit closer at the process that's been put in place for section 35, because it can be problematic in terms of trying to deal with the situation to ensure, number one, that the payments are made, but also that the individual doesn't lose that job. The mechanisms can become problematic, especially if the spouse leaves the jurisdiction they were living in and you're dealing with one court system versus a court system from another area.

It still doesn't fundamentally address the problems that everybody who is an MPP who has been dealing with this knows about: the self-employed individuals who find another pool of money to have their livelihood protected but who don't pay their support obligations. This bill does nothing to deal with the existing problem.

The Acting Speaker: We have time for one last question or comment.

Ms. Churley: I will be speaking to this bill in the next go-round, and I will have more to say then. So everybody out there can tune in, following up on your request—

Mr. Tascona: When?

Ms. Churley: In just a couple of minutes.

Mr. O'Toole: Turn on your VCR.

Ms. Churley: That's right.

Several of my colleagues have spoken to this bill already, and I will be reiterating our concerns about the bill. Of course we support it. Anything that moves it forward is a good thing. But we will be pointing out, and I will be pointing out again in more detail, the problems with the bill.

I understand that the government is aware that the office is not doing the job it should be doing. We're dealing with poor children and, in many cases, with single-parent families led by the mother who can't get by without this money. And when it falls into arrears, it causes terrible ripples throughout the entire family, from not having enough food to feed the children to not being able to buy them school supplies to sometimes not paying rent and losing mortgages. We hear these kinds of stories in our offices.

When we turn these numbers into real people, as we see when they come into our offices and we see first-hand the kind of devastation that these payments being in arrears causes to families, we really want to get to the bottom of the problem.

This bill is not doing it. We saw as much from the previous government when it made some attempts very similar to this to increase enforcement measures, but not at the same time dealing with the computer system and making sure there were enough resources in the office. It's the same thing now with this bill, so we're not really going to see that much of a difference if this bill is passed.

The Acting Speaker: The member for Durham has two minutes to reply.

Mr. O'Toole: I'm very impressed that the leader of the NDP responded and, in fact, left a question, and also the members from Pickering–Ajax–Uxbridge, Barrie–Simcoe–Bradford and Toronto–Danforth, who will indeed be speaking next. She is known to be quite an advocate in this area, and I'm anxiously awaiting her remarks to see how she could add something positive to this bill.

The leader of the NDP gave some service to the work of Charles Harnick when he was Attorney General, and said in substance that the amendments we see today are basically the same as were introduced in 1996. In fact, one of the members in the House, the member for Ottawa Centre, said that the notes that the minister used in her opening comments were written by the same bureaucrats. I understand the meaningful intent of that was that the elected members quite often—if it's a court issue, we hear continually from the Attorney General that the elected member has no role in any of these quasi-judicial issues; the members themselves have no role.

The role we have here is, in the legislative sense, to meaningfully debate the bill and bring forward substantive amendments or recommendations in the debate. What's missing, of course, is that the government has to

be listening. And if I'm looking at the comments made even today by the leader of the NDP, as well as the member from Barrie–Simcoe–Bradford, who is a practising lawyer—not in this area; I think he's in labour law, actually. He does, I believe, continue to practise and is known to be a fair-minded person. But what we're looking for here is a government that's not just prepared to say certain things before an election or even during the debate of legislation. In my view, to actually listen and be prepared to substantively mend, based on good policy, makes good politics.

The Acting Speaker: Further debate?

Ms. Churley: Yes, indeed, it is my opportunity now to add my comments and thoughts to the bill before us today. I was, just out of interest, reading through comments made. In particular, I was interested in the comments made by my colleagues Peter Kormos from Niagara and Shelley Martel from Nickel Belt because, Mr. Speaker, you will recall—I think you were here sitting on the government side of the House then, back in 1996. I was quite amused to read Mr. Kormos's comments saying, if I could quote him here, "Shelley Martel broke into that office in 1996. I saw the videotape. And she's lucky she never went to jail, I'll tell you that."

As you will recall, not all the members who are in the House now were here then, but I was. Having served in the NDP government as the minister before that and then ended up sitting over here—we've both experienced that now—I remember it very well, and I'm going to tell it like it was. It was both Mr. Kormos and Ms. Martel who broke into that office. The reason they did it—and these kinds of steps are not taken lightly—was because of tips that were provided to one or both of them, perhaps by people who worked there and were afraid to blow the whistle publicly or whatever. But they were given information that really there was no FRO office any more, because what had happened—and you'll recall this, Mr. Speaker. The problem at the time was the elimination by the Harris government, your government of the day, of the nine regional offices. The idea was to create one big mega-office, kind of like the idea of creating one big megacity, but that's another story for another day. In my view, that is a disaster too and I'd like to undo that. But we'll debate this idea of creating a mega-office without really thinking it through at another time.

1610

We found out, when we watched the videotape—I remember it well; it was quite shocking. They had clearly more or less broken into that office. There was a security guard there. Then they watched the videotape, and they came back and called a press conference and showed the videotape to the media and to the public, and it truly was shocking. Do you remember it? Were you here then?

Mr. Dunlop: No.

Ms. Churley: So none of this is your fault.

The shock of it: Let's again turn these numbers that we're talking about into people—mostly moms and their kids. Although there are a few men who depend on child support, it's mostly women and their kids. Turn them into

real people and then imagine what we saw on this videotape, what Peter Kormos and Shelley Martel had seen, and that was box after box in the hallways with files spilling out all over the floor. I actually, after all these years, still have that image in my head because it was just so shocking. This was after months and months, when we were getting more and more calls in our offices and we knew something was afoot. What we saw was that some of these boxes were bursting and files were falling out on to the floor. Clearly, the office was not functioning, and this had been going on for months.

Let's be fair here. Mike Harris and the Conservatives ran on cutting red tape and generally cutting government spending, and they followed through on that. We realized that unless we blew the whistle on this, nothing would change. So the whistle was blown, and the government made some attempts then to try to fix it.

It has been mentioned by my colleagues—and my leader, Howard Hampton, mentioned it earlier as well—that then-Attorney General Charles Harnick came forward with some measures not unlike the measures that we have before us in this bill. It was about more enforcement. The promises that were made to people, particularly to those people in arrears, were pretty grandiose at the time, as are these promises now.

I know that my colleague Ms. Martel, who has spent a number of years as our critic in this area and who knows the issue very well and knows where the pitfalls lie, is making it very clear that of course we're going to support the bill. Any movement forward is a good thing. But from her knowledge and experience, she is telling us all to be careful of what we promise here with this bill. She's telling the government—we are telling the government—that it's very similar to what the Tories did before and it didn't work, and it is wrong to set up expectations that this bill is going to fix the problems that it purports to, because it's not going to. You can't fix these problems without the proper resources.

I know that Ms. Martel said it, and I'll say it: Talk about *déjà vu* all over again. There's a lot of *déjà vu*, as you know, Speaker, in this place in all kinds of bills over the years, over the months, over the days. Sitting in the chair, you hear a lot of *déjà vu* over and over again. But this is a very painful *déjà vu* to be caught up in, because, again, we're talking about children who desperately need the family support money that they're not getting.

May I say, and I think it has been pointed out here, that the majority of people—mostly men, but there are some women who are in the position of paying child support—do pay and they pay up on time and are very responsible toward their children. We know that. Then there are those we refer to as deadbeat parents who don't pay. They are the problem. We don't have a system in place yet, and this bill is not going to make the changes we need to make sure that those who are irresponsible and who are not paying their arrears pay them.

One of the things we keep hearing over and over again is that we need a brand new computer system to deal better with the case management—and we don't see that

today—and that we need to have more experienced full-time case managers, people in the office to deal correctly, swiftly and knowledgeably with those who are in arrears. What happens—and we see this in our offices, and it really is heartbreaking. We deal with the people who work there, God bless, and they're conscientious and they do the best they can with a computer system that isn't working properly and can't do the job it's supposed to. There are way too many cases for them to be able to keep up with, and no consistency in the cases they follow. They do the best they can. It's incredible stress and pressure on them.

The reality is that we have people come into our offices, women who come in or call us and say, "I haven't received any payment in six months. I've sent in, I've called in, I've written in my ex-spouse's address, the phone number where he works," blah, blah, "and I'm still not getting my money." Or conversely, occasionally we get a man coming into our office with proof that he has paid. He's not in arrears, but something's gone wrong. It's piling up and piling up and, after months, he's being confronted with this huge bill for \$5,000, \$10,000 or whatever it is and can't get a response back to clear it up, and then the threats start.

We hear from people, mostly women, where sometimes their ex-spouse, the father of their children, is so in arrears for months and months and for thousands and thousands of dollars that when the FRO finally does catch up with them, if they do, it's impossible for them to pay in many situations because it has built up because the resources weren't there to be able to deal with the problem right away. If you notice that somebody is in arrears for a month or for the first couple of months and they're not too far gone, you get on that right away. You threaten that person right away with the loss of a driver's licence or whatever other enforcement measures you have, but you get on it right away before those arrears are built up to the point where they feel they have no choice but to try to run and hide. The more they owe, the more they don't pick up that phone when they're called, the more they don't answer that letter, the more they run away from their responsibilities. So it's absolutely critical.

This would be true in any circumstance where you're trying to recover money that's owed. The more it builds up—it's not only the person not getting it on the other end, but the person who's supposed to be paying. It's less likely that they're going to pay it. Yes, you're increasing jail time in this bill, but if that person has gotten to the point where they are six months in arrears and by the time they're caught up, their licence is removed, they can't drive that truck any more or whatever, they no longer have an income and they're thrown in jail. It doesn't really solve the problem.

That's not to say that there shouldn't be punishment for those people who are quite clearly and deliberately running away from their responsibilities. I have absolutely no sympathy, as I expect none of us do, for any parent in this province who runs away, and indeed doesn't go out of their way to follow through on their

responsibility to make sure that their child has the kind of income so they can live a reasonable life—enough food to eat and a roof over their heads etc. I have no patience whatsoever for those kinds of people who deliberately run away from it.

So what we have here is a bill that does more on enforcement, but doesn't do the basic things that New Democrats have been recommending. We of course understand that the government may not necessarily listen to or respond to the recommendations the opposition makes, although from time to time they do. I'm proud to say that I was very pleased when Mr. Sorbara publicly credited me for practically bullying him, pushing him into finally following through on the promise on the film credit that he had been renegeing on in questions in this House. It just goes to show that occasionally the opposition, when we know it's the right thing and we keep pushing and prodding, along with other stakeholders, can and does sometimes make a difference. It shows that this place sometimes can work, that the opposition, along with the government, can actually get things done.

Interjection.

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Ms. Churley: Oh yes, I'm patting—how often do you guys pat any opposition on the back? Not very often. In fact, quite frequently I see them get up over there and take credit for what we do over here or have done in the past. So I think that's OK.

Coming back to the bill at hand, I just want to read to you some of the things the Ombudsman said in January 2005. As you know, Clare Lewis, who has recently retired—but I'm sure he's not really retired; he's out there working magic in some other area now—repeatedly raised the FRO as a problem in his reports. Here is an excerpt from 2003, and he made a special point of raising it upon his retirement in January 2005, because it's one of his big concerns where he's just not seeing improvement. Here's what he said:

“The Family Responsibility Office in Ontario is often not adequately addressing children's needs in divorced and separated families in Ontario....

“As long as this problem continues to exist, women and children are suffering because they are not able to get the financial support they need to live. In Ontario, many children are affected by this problem. This is unacceptable. My office has made some strides but there is still a lot to be done to improve child support payments in Ontario. The sad fact is that until the FRO has more resources, it will not be able to meet adequately the needs of the very parents and children it was intended to serve. However, the current government and the responsible minister, Ms Papatello, have taken several encouraging steps which give me reason to believe that serious concern and attention are being given to address FRO deficiencies.”

Of course, I assume that he was referring to the bill that's before us today, that there was some encouragement and some hope that things would get a little better.

As I pointed out, the NDP caucus is disappointed because we, too, were expecting more, based upon the recommendations from the Ombudsman and from others that what is needed is not necessarily more enforcement tools, which won't work that well anyway unless you have the resources there to enforce them. We're not seeing those very recommendations that would make the difference.

I want to read to you a quote from Keith Leslie from CP:

“‘A good many spouses and children are not receiving money they need, and they are vulnerable,’ Lewis said as he released his annual report.

“‘I have great concerns about the impact on single parents with children who often float into poverty.’...

“‘There's been a failure to enforce and a failure to stop enforcement.’

“Lewis blames most of the problems at the FRO on the fact the agency still doesn't have a computer system able to support the payment program and case management, a problem he said the government promised to fix as far back as 2001.

“‘Well, that's then and this is now and it hasn't yet occurred,’ said Lewis.

“‘There's human error and there's also technological inadequacy.’”

It's very clear from these reports from the Ombudsman and from others that what is needed is an increase in resources and a new computer system. We have been told that there could be a new computer system, promised by the spring of 2006. Now, we've heard lot of promises over the last several years about new computer systems. I just find it astounding and appalling when we know absolutely, without a doubt, that the majority of the problems there are not fixable without the new computer system.

Until it is implemented and until staffing levels are raised, it is really unlikely that many changes made by this enabling legislation before us today will actually come into effect. The FRO is still understaffed and under-resourced and clearly struggling under the weight of the existing model, under which, among other things, there is no dedicated caseworker to monitor individual support orders. I believe that that, in itself, is a major problem. We've seen it in other areas as well, but with this one, it's so fundamentally critical that there be a case management, where one person is following a set number of cases and has a handle on who the people are—who's regular and who she or he can depend on and can put aside and not worry about too much—and a knowledge of all these individual cases.

The government, I noted—I believe my leader asked a question about this the other day. To our shock, we found out that the government has refused to rule out Accenture. Remember that, Mr. Baird: Accenture?

Mr. Baird: Good people.

Ms. Churley: They were the providers of the Tories' flawed social assistance computer system. Mr. Baird says they were good people. Well, remember what happened? Remember what happened with Accenture under that

regime? I know that the Premier's former chief of staff, Phil—

Mr. John Milloy (Kitchener Centre): Dewan.

Ms. Churley: Phil Dewan is now a lobbyist for Accenture. It just goes to show once again—I remember when the Liberals were sitting on this side of the House. We could dig out quotes of how vehemently, and at times viciously, they went after the previous government about this. Remember that? You remember this kind of thing?

Today some of the members from the Liberals were yelling out about the “sleaze” of some of our questions, and “below the belt” and “nasty.” I yelled back and I said, “You guys wrote the book on this stuff.” If this were you sitting over here now and you found out that this—I'm talking to you specifically now—

Mr. Levac: I talk sleazy?

Ms. Churley: No, no, no. Some of your members were accusing New Democrats today in terms of our—

Interjection.

Ms. Churley: You should. But I'm saying, there is something about this that just smells; it doesn't look good. What we want to see is the government get that new computer system in place right now, and we want to make sure that whichever firm wins the bid on this is going to be reputable and do a good job and doesn't rip off the taxpayers in the process.

Understand that there are many other issues that I now have no time to get into, such as liability issues regarding the posting of deadbeat parents. I personally think that's a good idea. I think anybody who has sympathy for the parents who are not getting the money they should be getting would support this, but there is always a chance of mistaken postings, and that could be really critical, if somebody's name gets put up and they're actually not in arrears. Who is going to deal with that should that happen?

Increasing jail time: I talked a little bit about it in terms of some of the problems with that in terms of actually getting the money into the pockets of the parents and the children who need it.

At the end of the day, we'll support this bill, but it's really not going to do that much to improve the conditions that the government says they're hoping the bill will improve.

The Acting Speaker: Questions and comments?

Mrs. Carol Mitchell (Huron-Bruce): It's certainly my pleasure to rise to support Bill 155. Unlike the previous government, we have listened and we are committed to taking aggressive action to get families the support that they need and deserve. This legislation will increase enforcement, improve fairness and enhance efficiency.

I would like to go over some of the facts, the numbers, so that the people of Ontario have a better understanding of what the FRO caseload includes.

There are 185,574 active cases at the Family Responsibility Office. There has been a 45% increase in caseload since 1994. The arrears at Family Responsibility are \$1.29 billion. That is the total historical amount of sup-

port payments that are in arrears and that are owing to the families in Ontario who desperately need help; \$201.3 million is the total amount owed to taxpayers for social assistance that is paid to the families and children when parents do not make their support payments. This is a necessary stopgap to ensure that these families have the food, clothing and shelter that they require, but this is the amount, as well, that is owed to taxpayers to make sure that our taxpayers receive the maximum benefit from all their tax dollars. I put these numbers to the people of Ontario to give a better understanding when we talk about family responsibilities and the importance of the changes represented in this legislation.

1630

Mr. Baird: I want to congratulate my colleague from Toronto-Danforth for her fine remarks on what is an important bill. All of us as MPPs deal with family responsibility issues every day; at least our hard-working staff do. I know the member for Toronto-Danforth's constituency office does a lot of work in this regard, and she knows that mine does as well.

I guess we're putting a lot of hope in this bill. I hope the bill can do everything the government says it will. I had conversation the other day with member for London North Centre, who reminded me that the bill does a few things I didn't think it did. She thinks it does, and God bless. I hope it works out, and I hope it can do that, because we should do more. One of things that is also important is to be realistic and not leave a false impression that the government can solve every problem in this regard. Far too many of these payers will flush the money down the toilet before they send it in; they'll declare bankruptcy, quit jobs, go on social assistance, as reprehensible as it is to admit that. It's hard to come up with a statute, regulation, policy or practice to deal with that. They're not going to pay. If someone is unemployed and on welfare, they're not going to pay back a heck of a lot. Obviously, that's unfortunate.

The inability to successfully enforce a court order in Ontario should be a huge concern to all of us. The significant administrative dealings with the courts where the judgments are not clear or they vary—if we could even get some consistency on that. I hope the parliamentary assistant and the minister will challenge the judiciary to come up with a clear and effective process that is easy to communicate, because that is in order. I know the member for Toronto-Danforth would agree with that comment as well.

Mr. Milloy: I want to congratulate my colleague from Toronto-Danforth for her presentation. Although I didn't agree with all of her analysis, I do agree with her about how important this bill is. I think every member in the House could go on at great length about the problems that have been brought to their constituency office staff by people who are dealing with the FRO. Many of us would talk about the nightmares people have gone through, especially women who are looking for support from deadbeat dads, but also the flip side—and I think we have to be fair—people who are paying support and

have found themselves locked into a situation of bureaucracy and unanswered questions and a system where they found it very difficult to manoeuvre.

I welcome this bill, which I understand is the first substantive amendment to the FRO act in eight years, and I think we, as a government, should be proud that we're putting it forward. The simple fact is that this whole issue of the FRO, which is so crucial, was neglected by the previous government. We saw reports coming forward from the Ontario Ombudsman, the privacy commissioner and the Provincial Auditor, all saying that the problems with FRO—the backlogs, the increasing bureaucracy and the inability to manoeuvre through the system—had been neglected, and yet we saw no action. Here we have a bill put forward by this government that is going to do three key things: increase enforcement by extending the maximum jail term for failure to comply with court orders, improve fairness by allowing FRO to enforce a lesser amount of support when the number of children entitled to support decreases, and enhance efficiency by expanding the number of organizations from which the FRO can demand information to include trade unions and other professional organizations.

This bill goes a long way in addressing some of the concerns that have been raised over the past few years, and I think it's high time that we dealt with this.

Mr. Dunlop: I'm pleased to make a few comments on the member for Toronto–Danforth's speech as well, and on some of the other questions and comments that have been made around it. I think it's important to note that we have some statistics on file here now that are on record as saying that previous governments apparently have done nothing in this area. Now we'll have some numbers on file; we'll have some data in Hansard, as the member from Huron–Bruce just mentioned, about the total dollars etc. We'll keep a close eye on that over the next three years. In 2007, we'll make sure that those numbers are down substantially, and we'll see the success of this particular piece of legislation at that point.

That's what we're counting on happening, but that likely won't happen. As I've said, my constituency staff have been dealing with this for years prior to the Mike Harris and Ernie Eves governments, and nothing has really been improved upon in this area. As a number of members have mentioned here today, this is very delicate area and it's a very delicate subject. Each government tries to bring forth amendments and tries to make improvements to the system. Perhaps doubling the jail fines or taking away their hunting licence is the answer; we'll give it a try. But I'm not encouraged by what will likely be the results two years from now. That would be nice if it did happen, if we could actually see a substantial saving and people would be responsible and pay their debts to their families. That would be good for all the citizens of Ontario, particularly those families. I'm a little leery that it probably won't happen.

Anyhow, the numbers are in Hansard here today, and we'll look carefully at those over the next couple of years.

The Acting Speaker: The member for Toronto–Danforth has two minutes to reply.

Ms. Churley: I want to thank the members for Huron–Bruce, Nepean–Carleton, Kitchener Centre and Simcoe North for their comments. I particularly want to thank the member for Nepean–Carleton for congratulating my staff for the work that they do.

Mr. Baird: Good people.

Ms. Churley: They are good people. It's Manna Wong, Louise Morin and Christine Kemp in my constituency office and Jasmyn Singh in my office here, who are incredibly hard workers. Without them—I'm sure we all feel the same—we couldn't do our jobs, because they are the ones who deal far more than I do on a daily basis with the people we're talking about here today. I want to thank them too, as do many of my constituents for whom they work diligently and hard to try to help.

This is an ongoing concern in my constituency office. As we all know, these cases continue to be there day after day. I know that my staff have their contacts in the office, as all our staff do, and they would be the first ones to say that the staff working in the FRO are, on the whole, conscientious, hard workers and are really frustrated and stressed because there aren't enough of them to keep up, which brings me back to the central core of the New Democrats' criticism of this bill.

Of course we're supporting it. We see trying to beef up the enforcement as a good thing. But again, I want to say to the minister, who is here, and the other members in the Liberal Party: Do not make any more promises that you can't keep. I think you would agree with that, because this bill is not going to be able to do what you say you want it to do without more staff and the computer system. That has been made very clear—

Hon. Sandra Pupatello (Minister of Community and Social Services, minister responsible for women's issues): You know we ordered the computer system.

Ms. Churley: Yeah, but we don't have it yet, so you're making these—

Interjection.

Ms. Churley: There goes the minister. You know, Sandra Pupatello—

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

Mr. Dunlop: I'm pleased to take part in the debate this afternoon. It's day three, the second reading of Bill 155, An Act to amend the Family Responsibility and Support Arrears Enforcement Act.

A couple of the other members have mentioned the importance of the FRO and what a huge issue it can be in the constituency offices. In central Ontario, we have our problems as well. I can tell you that in my office in Orillia—Marilyn Rolland and Mary Silk—this becomes an issue they have to deal with on a regular basis. It's probably the most important issue we're faced with year to year in the constituency offices. In my Midland office, Joan Lawrence and Marjorie Roach work on these issues as well. I can tell you that in some cases there has been the problem of miscommunication at the FRO office, but

in a lot of cases our office has been able to get the contacts at the Family Responsibility Office, and we have had fairly good success rates dealing with that office.

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I want to talk a little bit about the Family Responsibility Office and the types of issues that people face. In a lot of cases, couples get married and have families—naturally, you would expect that everything would turn out well and problems wouldn't exist, but I want to give the general public and the people at home some examples of some of the problems that we've faced in the Family Responsibilities Office.

Not too long after I was elected in 1999—I guess it was the year after—just prior to Christmas, I had a young lady come to my office. She had two small children with her. She was very clean-cut, but she was very stressed out. I'm not going to mention any names, of course, but the problem she had was that somehow, by way of her boyfriend or husband, they had lost the apartment. The spouse had given up on the apartment—had signed off or not paid the bills—and moved out when she was away over a weekend. What had happened was that she came back and there was no place for her to go. She came to my office. That's one of the most difficult times I'd ever had. It was just prior to Christmas, and there was just no place for her to be. Her family were all in other parts of the country, and she had no place to be for Christmas-time.

Anyhow, thank God for the Salvation Army, and I hope every member in this House would respect the work of the Salvation Army. The Salvation Army came to her rescue and helped her out. After a few days, we were able to get her some assistance. Everything worked out OK in the end, but it was a case where the spouse had actually dropped her and the two little ones for a girlfriend. They were out having a good time, and the young mom, with her two small children, was left on her own.

It's hard to believe people do that. I'm fortunate; I've been able to have a family, and we haven't had those sorts of problems, but I can tell you that that was one of the most frustrating periods that I've found as an MPP: dealing with those kinds of issues. They continue to come up even to this day—not examples quite as bad as that, but I can think of a gentleman who came to our office not too long ago. In a lot of cases, it's the men too. This gentleman had obviously made some terrible judgments over the previous two decades and hadn't seen four of his children in something like 15 years. He owed a ton of money through the Family Responsibility Office and couldn't even get in touch with the people. He wanted to rebuild his life. He wanted to get back on track. I'd hope that would still be possible, even for someone who was in a desperate situation.

I just wanted people in the House and at home to know that our constituency staff, who have to deal with these kinds of issues, face people who, in a lot of cases, I would think, are close to being suicidal. I know that in this one particular case, with the gentleman who hadn't seen his children in 15 years and who owed a lot of

money to the FRO, I spent two hours talking to him. I'm no psychologist or anything else—I'm not trained in any way whatsoever in that area—but in some cases people, both male and female in these cases, need somebody to talk to. In this last case with the gentleman, we thought perhaps we had made some movement in a very positive and forward direction to help him out. We got him on the right track, got him talking to some JPs over certain issues, and we're hoping we can work with it.

Former minister John Baird mentioned, a few minutes ago, some of the very desperate cases. Some people would give up their jobs so they wouldn't have to pay their family responsibility. However, I hope that's not the norm. I hope that most people, in the end, feel somewhat responsible and would like to see their children raised with respect and dignity and with the proper financial assistance they need. But that isn't always the case, and as a result, of course, the government has to make moves in this manner.

I think we've made it fairly clear that our caucus will support this legislation. We know it's probably not perfect. I'm not 100% sure that we'll see the results pay off in a couple of years' time. It would be nice if that would happen and we would see people pay their bills and be responsible to their loved ones, but that's not always the case.

It's my understanding that there are three main purposes for the legislation. First of all, it's to strengthen the enforcement tools available to the director of the Family Responsibility Office. It's also to improve the methods used for locating defaulting payers—in this case, most of the time it's the male spouse—and to streamline enforcement procedures.

The background on this is that the Family Responsibility Office has long been the subject of criticism from opposition members. I don't think it matters what government is in power; you will find that the opposition members come forward with these kinds of concerns. It has also been under criticism from the Provincial Auditor and, of course, from the clients. I think the biggest problem we hear from the clients is the phone system. What I hear more than anything from my constituency staff is that the clients come in and claim they get put on hold or they don't get the proper response.

The Provincial Auditor has completed three audits of the program in recent years. It's my understanding that it happened in 1999, 2001 and 2003. Of course, our party was in power in those times, and naturally we'll take the responsibility if there's a problem. That's our job, the same as, if there's an auditor's report in 2004, the new government, the Liberals, will take the criticism for that.

Many of the criticisms revolve around the rate of success in collection proceedings, faulty computer systems—we've heard over and over about that today—and customer service in general. That's the issue I'm hearing, the fact that people get put on hold or they don't get on the telephone lines. That has been the number one criticism I've heard from both male and female spouses who phone that office, requiring assistance.

The FRO was also the subject of over 1,400 complaints to the Ontario Ombudsman during the 2003-04 year. Of course, our Conservative government was in power for half of the 2003-04 year.

The government promised during the election campaign, "We will crack down on deadbeat parents and make them pay up." That's one statement.

"Withholding family support payments is a serious crime. It makes the lives of single parents even tougher and it hurts our kids. We will not watch children suffer while deadbeat parents shirk their responsibilities.

"We will use innovative new techniques such as Internet tracking to find deadbeats and recover the money that they owe." That will be an interesting area to see explained, the Internet tracking of deadbeats. It will be interesting if some of the members would bring that forward in their comments.

"We will pursue aggressive enforcement measures such as suspending drivers' licences for anyone missing two or more support payments." That comes under the Liberal platform document, *Growing Strong Communities*, page 28.

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This suspension of licences can be a real problem too. For someone to miss two or three payments—if you had a very difficult time, you could miss a year's payments or seven months'. A person could be in a difficult period of their life, and two or three payments could lose them their driver's licence so they couldn't even get to work; now, that would be a problem. I'd be really concerned about that statement in the Liberal platform document, and I think that's an area where I would hope that the people making the final decisions would take some flexibility or leniency, because we'd want to make sure that we weren't putting a person on to the unemployment lines because they didn't have a driver's license to get to work. For example, say it was a truck driver who had a serious problem with a breakdown in his equipment and he needed to pay for a new engine in his truck, and he somehow missed a couple of payments to pay for the truck engine so he could work with the trucking industry. To not have a driver's licence, to lose that completely, you could be out of work, and if it was seasonal work, you could have no income for months ahead. These kinds of things can have a dramatic effect on the payor as well.

In this bill, "The substantive changes chiefly fall into three categories: strengthening the enforcement tools available to the director of the Family Responsibility Office, improving the methods used for locating defaulting payors, and streamlining enforcement procedures.

"Some examples of the changes that are intended to strengthen enforcement tools"—and I've got a few of them here that I'd like to read into the record:

"A power to obtain the suspension of defaulting payors' hunting and fishing licences under the Fish and Wildlife Conservation Act, 1997, similar to the existing power to obtain the suspension of defaulting payors' driver's licences, is added to the act. (Section 22 of bill, part V.1 of act)." Now, that's an interesting part of the

legislation. It's certainly not going to gain a lot of friends in the Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters, although I would hope that those particular groups—hunting and fishing organizations or hunting and angling organizations—would encourage anybody in their membership to try to be responsible members of the organization and keep up with their FRO payments. But that's not always the case, so there will be quite a few comments on that one, although I guess a person could do without their fishing licence as opposed to their driver's licence.

The second example would be: "Maximum periods of imprisonment are increased from 90 to 180 days. (Section 24 of Bill, section 41 of Act)." This is an area where I think we should be somewhat careful as well. When you talk to the folks in Monte Kwinter's ministry, the Ministry of Community Safety and Correctional Services, and they can tell you about the issues facing the correctional system. You would hope that the whole intent of the correctional system would be to rehabilitate and educate, as opposed to being a facility to warehouse someone for 90 days or 120 days. So if in fact someone was being sent to jail for not paying, whether it be a 90-day or a 120-day time frame, I would hope that person would come out of jail somewhat rehabilitated and educated on this problem. That may or may not be the case.

But I did notice that Minister Chambers is in the House today, and she made a nice announcement last week on some of the apprenticeship funding. I want to thank her for that because some of the money in the apprenticeship funding—and I'm not sure if you're 100% aware of this—went to some of the correctional facilities. The facility I have in my riding, which I've taken a lot of heat on since it was introduced in 2001, is the Central North Correctional Centre, and it's a privately run organization. But they've been doing some really good work in the community and in the rehabilitation area. They got some money toward the apprenticeship work, and I'm ecstatic over that because they've been doing a great job with Georgian College and with Simcoe County District School Board in working with inmates and trying to rehabilitate and educate. There's nothing better than that. If persons are in a facility, instead of their running around in an orange suit all day, you'd rather have them learning something. If there's a possibility of their getting some pre-apprenticeship work, I am positive that that is the way we've got to do it. They have been trying to work with Habitat for Humanity.

It was interesting: The other night I was at the Penetanguishene Rotary gala ball that was based on an African safari theme. Folks at the Central North Correctional Centre, the inmates, had built the props and built a lot of the scenery. It was at the Brooklea Golf and Country Club. The walls were decorated with the works from the folks at the Central North Correctional Centre. I was really pleased to see that because it went a long way and made the community fairly happy with that.

That would be an area where, if someone is paying the debt to society and going to jail, I hope that there would

be a priority put on those folks to be educated as to why they should work with their loved ones and make sure they're properly paid.

I don't have a lot more time, and I wanted to close by making a couple of other points here. There is a lot to this bill, but in the end the intent of the bill is to strengthen the government's ability to collect the money so that people can pay what they owe to society. That's what this is all about. As someone who has raised children, I can't imagine someone not wanting to pay their responsibility to society. But that's not always the case, as we said, and a number of members have brought out some of the statistics on how many folks across our province don't take a responsible role.

Hopefully, in the future we can work on building a strong economy, putting people to work, making sure they have better and better lifestyles—as the government would say, building stronger communities. If they can grow those strong communities and make sure we don't have the kinds of issues that we're faced with in Canada today, I hope that would be the route we would go in improving the quality of life for all Ontario citizens so that we would have fewer and fewer cases and less need for the Family Responsibility Office.

I don't know how long this debate is going on today. I understand that the government is probably not putting up any more speakers, so this may come to an end fairly quickly here. That's my understanding. I was talking and I got a wave from the chief government whip, and it looked like he wasn't putting any more speakers up. This may be one of the last comments today on this particular piece of legislation. I thought there would be more people wanting to speak to it. I understand that Cam Jackson had wanted to do his leadoff, but he was tied up in committee, so I'm not sure if he'll still be able to do that if this legislation comes to an end today. Is that your understanding, Mr. Speaker? Can I get a ruling on that?

The Acting Speaker: If the member for Burlington were in the House and wanted to speak and there was an opportunity for him to speak in rotation, I would certainly wish to recognize him. But if he is not here—

Ms. Churley: You can't say that somebody is not here, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: I didn't say he was or was not here; I said if, he was not here.

Mr. Dunlop: My understanding was that he was in committee and that he would be given the opportunity—he had his leadoff speech deferred and he's been in committee each day the bill has come up. That's been the problem, and I'm trying to get a clarification on that. I know I'm not supposed to ask for clarification while I'm delivering my speech, but that's possibly the case now.

I thank you for this opportunity and look forward to whatever further debate takes place on the bill. As I said, our party will be supporting this legislation.

The Acting Speaker: Questions and comments?

Ms. Churley: I can assure you that the New Democrats are putting up more speakers. I believe that my

leader, Howard Hampton, is on his way back from a meeting to speak here.

I don't know if you're in trouble or not, but you're not allowed to get up and mention that certain members aren't in the House, are you? Is he? He will be in to speak to this bill in a few minutes, I understand.

1700

I thought the speech given by the member for Simcoe North was very thoughtful. It was a good analysis of what's in and what isn't in the bill and reiterated some of the things that have already been said and that I'm sure the minister has heard before.

I believe this is my last kick at the can on this particular bill—not overall, I can assure you; there will be many more kicks at the can in many other areas. What the government is going to find out very quickly is that telling people this bill is going to fix the problem and is going to mean that the money is going to be in their pockets or in their hands as a result of this bill is not going to work. It's only fair to be realistic with people because the reality, as some of my colleagues have mentioned before, is that without the computer system now—we need that computer system to be able to do the things this bill purports to do. If you don't have a proper computer system, if you want to take away that fishing licence, that driver's licence, garnish wages, the federal government, all of the enforcement mechanisms that are being put into this bill—we've seen this movie before. That's what we're trying to say here: We've seen it before. Let's learn from the mistakes of the past and put the right resources into the office to make sure that indeed these enforcement tools can actually work.

Thank you for this opportunity.

Ms. Deborah Matthews (London North Centre): It's good to be hearing the supportive comments coming from all sides of the House.

Mr. Baird: It's because you're so great.

Ms. Matthews: Thank you.

This is a place where sometimes emotions run high and conflicts are the order of the day, but with this piece of legislation, we all know that we need to make meaningful changes to the way the Family Responsibility Office is run. We know that kids across the province are counting on us to do a better job to make sure that they get what they need from their parents. All of us, in our constituency offices, are more familiar with this issue than we perhaps are with other issues, because the people in our offices spend a lot of time working out problems associated with the Family Responsibility Office. So it's just wonderful to be here and to hear the constructive criticism and the supportive remarks.

I want to take this opportunity to say how proud I am of the Minister of Community and Social Services, Sandra Pupatello. She inherited such a mess on this file. It was an issue that was raised by the Ombudsman, the Provincial Auditor and the privacy commissioner. It was a real problem and, frankly, a shameful state of affairs. She has tackled this issue with the tenacity and determination she is famous for. I think it's important we recog-

nize that the minister has taken on this project. This is part of the solution, it is not the whole solution, but we are making real progress in making sure kids get the money they need.

Mr. Ouellette: I very much appreciate the opportunity to speak again. The PA is here. I know we've had some dialogue during this debate on certain issues, and I hope that when she gets an opportunity to speak again, she can continue. The member from Simcoe North spoke very eloquently on this very issue.

The voluntary arrears payment schedules: How is that going to play in? Are the arrears going to be noted? Those court order agreements: How are they going to be notified? During the arrears process, how is that going to fall in place? Particularly coming from Oshawa, we have a number of concerns related to, for example, short-notice layoffs. What happens in a particular case where, for example, General Motors has recently announced a two-week layoff? How is that going to impact, or how are they going to be able to accommodate, with potential changes in this legislation, to take that into consideration? We have a changing society and things are happening. We've had a number of weeks, and all of a sudden 50% of your pay during that month has been reduced. How can you make your contribution? Your contribution is based on the amount of pay you make. What happens in cases like that as it relates to overtime for extended periods? Quite frankly, there are a number of weeks that General Motors, in this particular case, are going to have laid off, which will change the bottom line or income that those individuals have. Those individuals then have to go back to court to change their amounts that come in.

Those are some of the key points that I was hoping to bring up.

The other one is the noncompliance orders. What is the legislation, or are we going to be able to find a method to assist those individuals who want to see their kids, who are in compliance with the payments, but when they go to pick up their kids, there's no compliance there? Those individuals are left out in the cold. Whether there's posturing between the spouses in what takes place there, we need to make sure that the kids aren't the ones being punished in this particular case.

The Acting Speaker: We have time for one last question or comment.

Mr. Baird: I want to congratulate the member on his excellent remarks. As the member for Toronto–Danforth said, the member for Simcoe North was well prepared for his speech. He talked about the folks who work in his constituency office, and I'd have to say the same about mine. Cara Salci, my constituency assistant who deals with these files, works very hard. It can be a challenge, because there are some very difficult social issues affecting families that make this issue a tremendously emotional one.

I share the member's view. I am more hopeful than confident about the success of this legislation or the government's belief that it can achieve success. I hope it

does. I would prefer, though, that the government be a tad more realistic in terms of the expectations of this bill. It's not just waving a magic wand and all the problems will disappear.

We in the official opposition will be here to be accountable, to ensure that this bill does everything the minister and the parliamentary assistant say it will accomplish: that we can and we should and we must do more to ensure that single parents and their children get the support they deserve. They should be getting it from the person who can pay. Far too often, it falls to the state or it falls to a level of poverty that's unacceptable in the province of Ontario.

I want to commend the member for Simcoe North on his speech. I look forward to additional debate on what is a very important issue.

The Acting Speaker: The member for Simcoe North has two minutes to respond.

Mr. Dunlop: I'd like to thank the members from Toronto–Danforth, London North Centre, Oshawa and Nepean–Carleton for their comments on Bill 155 and on my comments.

I think we've made it fairly clear in this House this afternoon, and it has been brought up by a number of the speakers both in the Qs and As and in the speeches, that our constituency staff are people who have to deal with the Family Responsibility Office as much as anybody would. A number of us here have mentioned our staff in our constituency offices and the valuable work they do. As I said earlier in my comments, it's all about just listening, in a lot of cases, and then finding the appropriate channels to take to try to resolve the problem that the person calling would have.

As I said earlier, since 1999, when I was elected here, the FRO has probably been the top issue we face on a month-to-month basis. There's always the story of the day or certain issues over a short period of time, but certainly the FRO remains a high priority.

Anything we can do, whether it's doubling the fines or taking away licences—I think in a lot of cases we have to try those. But as I said, in some of the cases, let's have some flexibility in how the driver's licence is removed, or the hunting or fishing licence or whatever it may be. The jail time, of course, is a huge issue. Boy, you'd hate to put somebody in jail and have them lose a job forever and be unable to pay and so put their family in an even more difficult position down the road, particularly if they've missed just two or three payments.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I appreciate this opportunity and I thank you once again.

1710

The Acting Speaker: Further debate? The member for Kenora–Rainy River.

Applause.

Mr. Hampton: I'm pleased to participate in this debate. I'm especially thankful for the reception on the part of my soon-to-depart colleague Mr. Baird, who I understand wants to be the federal candidate in Ottawa West–Nepean. I wish him well in his endeavours.

I'm pleased to participate in this debate, although, to borrow a phrase from Yogi Berra, this feels like déjà vu all over again. The déjà vu all over again that I'm speaking about is the amendments that were introduced by the first Attorney General for the Harris Conservative government, Charles Harnick. I actually remember the speech he gave. The speech he gave is very similar to the speech given by the current Minister of Community and Social Services, so I want to deal with that aspect of this.

I want to say at the outset, though, that New Democrats intend to support this bill. It's not that we think this bill is going to be the magic wand, that it's going to remake the universe in terms of the operation of the Family Responsibility Office, but we recognize there's a serious problem and we are prepared to support some amendments. I want to talk about some of these amendments that are being promoted here. I also want to talk about what is not being done or what doesn't appear to be happening.

I think I can quote the Minister of Community and Social Services. The McGuinty government would have you believe that the amendments presented here are the be-all and end-all, that they are really going to make a difference at the Family Responsibility Office, that all of those children who are currently not receiving support payments are somehow now going to receive support payments as a result of the amendments that are being proposed here, that this is going to radically change the landscape, that this is going to be the next thing to a magic wand when it comes to improving the operations of the Family Responsibility Office.

I just want to say to people at home who may be watching this debate, those who may have a particular interest in this legislation, that I've heard this before. I heard this from the former Attorney General, the first Attorney General of the Harris Conservative government, Charles Harnick. I remember when he came into this Legislature—his bill was Bill 82—and said things like, "The new enforcement measures in Bill 82 are among the toughest and most stringent of any jurisdiction in North America." That's a quote. "They close the loopholes that in the past have let defaulting parents avoid meeting their support obligations. These new measures make it clear that defaulting on support payments is no longer acceptable in Ontario and that it will not be tolerated. We are introducing 10 tough tools."

Well, I reviewed Hansard and some of the comments of the MPPs of the McGuinty government, and they're talking about the same tough new tools.

Mr. Baird: I think they stole Charles Harnick's speech.

Mr. Hampton: Well, I wonder if the same bureaucrat wrote the speech for the current Minister of Community and Social Services and the McGuinty government MPPs, because the resemblance between the speeches by McGuinty government MPPs now and the speech given by Charles Harnick when he was Attorney General is remarkable. Then you actually look at the proposals, and there's an even more remarkable resemblance. In fact, I

would say, looking at what Mr. Harnick proposed and what the McGuinty government now proposes, they differ only in hyperbole. In terms of the character, the general direction of the reforms, they're the same. It's just that the McGuinty government has managed to get more hyperbole into their reforms.

I want people to have some examples. When Mr. Harnick introduced his amendments, one of them was drivers' licence suspension; one of them was reporting of defaulting parents to the credit bureau; one of them was third-party enforcement, which meant where you have shared bank accounts, for example, where the support payer now has a shared bank account with perhaps a new partner, how you get at some of that money; obtaining financial statements and making orders against persons who help support payers avoid enforcement by sheltering their assets. All those things appeared in Bill 82.

Then, if we look at what is being proposed here in the McGuinty government bill, it's very similar, if not identical. It says, to make it easier for the Family Responsibility Office to obtain a financial statement from a third party that is financially linked to a default payer; increase the FRO's powers to demand personal information about payers in order to locate them; report defaulting payers to professional licensing bodies. These are virtually the same kinds of amendments introduced by Mr. Harnick when he was Attorney General and when he was responsible for the Family Responsibility Office.

Mr. Harnick at the time wanted people to believe that his amendments were going to be the magic wand, that they were going to do the trick, that they were really going to make the Family Responsibility Office function better on behalf of child support recipients, spousal support recipients etc. Now we have the McGuinty government saying the same thing.

Since 1996, and now, fortunately we've had the opportunity to hear from some third-party critics about what actually is happening at the Family Responsibility Office. I would not claim credit for all of these comments. In fact, one of the third-party critics was the auditor in the public accounts committee. Another was the Ombudsman. I want to refer to what some of these third parties have said.

Let me just refer to the auditor's report from 2003. Here's what the Provincial Auditor says:

"As was the case at the time of our last audit, in 1999, we concluded that the Family Responsibility Office did not have satisfactory systems and procedures in place for initiating contact and taking appropriate and timely enforcement action where payers were in arrears on their family support obligations. In fact, it is our view that, unless the office takes aggressive enforcement action, supported by effective case management and significantly improved information technology and communications systems, it is in grave danger of failing to meet its mandated responsibilities. We found that the office's services were impaired, and we had the following concerns:

"Unlike most other provinces, which use a process of individual case management, Ontario does not assign

each case to an individual caseworker. Therefore, no one individual has responsibility for or is held accountable for the administration of most cases. In addition, although we were advised that in practice the office has assigned cases with outstanding arrears greater than \$50,000 to caseworkers since 2001, approximately 1,500 such cases, with arrears totalling \$126.7 million, were not assigned at the time of our audit in November 2002 and were therefore not actively monitored or enforced.

“Since 1994, the number of caseworkers has declined”—I think the auditor was being polite here; he could have said, “has been cut”—“by 20%, whereas the number of cases has increased from 126,000 to 180,600.” That’s a 43% increase in cases and a 20% cut in caseworkers. It goes on: “As a result, the average number of cases per caseworker has steadily increased. For example, the number of cases with outstanding work items assigned to senior caseworkers now ranges from 600 to more than 1,300, averaging 890 per caseworker.” No wonder it’s falling apart. Then there is some comparison to other jurisdictions where the cases assigned per caseworker are much lower.

1720

I just want to take what the auditor said here. What the auditor is essentially saying is that you can pass legislation that sounds tough—and the McGuinty government can go out and spin it as being very tough; we know you’re very good at spin—but unless you get a new computer system that works, and unless you have adequate staffing, your result is going to be the same as the result under Charles Harnick: You’re going to have more cases and not enough caseworkers, and you’re not going to have a system that is capable of handling the problem.

I just want to say to people who may be watching out there or people who have a particular interest in this that my fear, as I said, is that this is déjà vu all over again. There’s lots of spin, but the real ingredients—a computer and information technology system and a communications system that really work—have to be put in place. I don’t see that yet. And more staffing has to be put in place. I don’t see it yet.

I just want to say a few words about staffing. My fear is that what we’re going to see under the McGuinty government—and we might see this announcement come fairly soon—is less staffing; we’re going to see not more staff out there doing this vital job but, potentially, fewer staff. I’ll just say to folks that the system won’t work if that’s the case.

I’m reminded of what happened under Ronald Reagan, because it was such a classic example. Ronald Reagan passed some very tough-sounding environmental legislation in the United States during his presidency. But then he proceeded to lay off most of the people who were doing the casework and the enforcement of that environmental legislation. As a result, the moral overtones were all very high-sounding but no enforcement was happening. As a result, environmental performance in that country fell off disturbingly. I just say that here you can have all the high-sounding legislation you want, but

if the staffing isn’t increased and given the systems and the training to do the job properly, then I don’t think the public is going to see anything that is very effective.

The next point I want to make is that an information system, a computer system, is needed. One of the issues is that we’ve asked the government to rule out Andersen Consulting, otherwise known as Accenture, from being permitted to bid on this contract. Let me tell you why. Again, the Provincial Auditor has referred to what happens when you allow Andersen Consulting or Accenture to put in place a computer system for you. In fact, the Provincial Auditor has referred to this in four separate reports, where he details the degree to which the system put in place by Andersen Consulting/Accenture doesn’t work, costs far more money than it was advertised as costing and results in the folks who work for Andersen Consulting/Accenture being paid far, far more money than civil servants would have been paid if they had been in charge of the system.

The conclusion of the Provincial Auditor is that the Ministry of Community and Social Services was taken advantage of—indeed, the taxpayers of Ontario were taken advantage of—by Andersen Consulting, otherwise known as Accenture. You see, what happened is, after Andersen Consulting got caught shortchanging the taxpayers in a number of jurisdictions, after it got caught charging more and delivering less time and time again, they changed their name to Accenture. They developed a bad odour as Andersen Consulting, so they changed their name to Accenture hoping no one would recognize them.

Andersen Consulting has left behind a remarkable record, and I just want to refer to that record. Andersen Consulting has been the subject of investigations or commentary by public sector auditors in Florida for a bad deal, in Ohio for a bad deal, in New York for a bad deal, in New Brunswick for a bad deal, in Texas, Nebraska and Virginia for bad deals, and in Ontario.

You would think the McGuinty government would look at that and say, “We don’t want a repetition of this. We don’t want to see the same bad reputation, bad results, high cost in this situation again. We cannot risk a computer information technology system in the Family Responsibility Office that doesn’t deliver for those people who deserve to receive their support payments. Children and families who are living in poverty deserve a computer information technology system that works. Therefore, we’re going to rule out Accenture, because they have failed to deliver in so many other jurisdictions.” But is the McGuinty government going to do that? No, they’re not. In fact, Andersen Consulting, otherwise now known as Accenture, is being welcomed to participate.

I wonder why that could be. Well, what we’ve learned is this: Dalton McGuinty’s former political chief of staff, one Phil Dewan, is acting as the paid lobbyist for Accenture, formerly known as Andersen Consulting. So our fear is that the financial interests of Andersen Consulting—Accenture—their ability to find high-priced insider lobbyists closely connected to the McGuinty

government, will win out over the interests of people who need to receive their child and spousal support payments. That's our fear.

I just want to reiterate that, at the end of the day, I don't think the amendments that have been promoted by the McGuinty government are going to be the magic that the McGuinty government wants to pretend they are. These amendments are very similar—almost identical—to the amendments that were introduced nine years ago by Charles Harnick, who was then responsible, as a Conservative cabinet minister, for the Family Responsibility Office. They were not very effective in producing the magic wand effect then, and I don't think they're going to produce the magic wand effect now.

The real issues at the Family Responsibility Office, issues which are not addressed by this bill and which we don't think are going to be addressed anywhere else by this government, are that you need a good computer system, you need a good information technology system, you need a good communication system, so that files can be traced, so that you can have a very active, quick response in these files, so you can keep track of all the information and you can be up to date on the information. The second thing that is needed is that you need more staff, better trained staff, more experienced staff and staff with the appropriate systems so they can do the work. So far, we don't see any evidence that those two things are really going to happen. Our fear is that we're going to see another repeat, another fiasco, of Andersen Consulting/Accenture, with a computer system that will cost a lot of money and deliver not very much, and we're not going to see the staffing improvements. We'd urge the government to act on those two issues. They are the really important—

The Acting Speaker: Thank you very much. Questions and comments?

1730

Mr. McNeely: My first experience with public accounts in the Legislature was when this particular report came back from the auditor. The 1,300 cases per case manager is certainly a load in itself. Of course, the computer programming was done in the early 1980s, and I believe 1994, when the third party was in place, was the first time they said, "You have to get a better case management system, a better computer system." Of course, it wasn't done. I believe the member for Nepean—Carleton was there for a year and a half or so as the minister, and again the auditor said, "You have to get a better case management system; you have to get a better computer system."

We're arguing about computer systems, but you can put them in place very quickly, and there's no point going back on bad deals that we got from IT people. The solutions are there; it's just a matter of getting them done. But I don't think there was any real desire on the part of the governments in those years to catch the deadbeat parents. It was better to trace them after the seven or eight months they hadn't been paying and it was too late; they'd changed jobs and often they'd gone to another province or to the States.

I think this minister is on the right track. I haven't heard those complaints about the FRO office since this government took over. The first three or four months were difficult, but people have been getting through on the phones. Mothers were taking off a whole day in Orléans to try to get through on the phone during the months preceding the last election. So it's good to see this minister is taking the right steps and is getting the process in place. We'll have a new case management system and new computers, and that is going to make a lot of difference to the mothers and children who depend on these payments.

Mr. Tascona: I'm certainly pleased to join in the debate. I listened to the member just now from Ottawa Centre saying that the previous government had little desire to deal with the issue. What nonsense. Quite frankly, this has been a difficult issue that, in my view, was caused initially by the failed model put in place by Ian Scott, who was the Liberal government Attorney General back in 1988. He put up a model that basically went after people who were employed and he went after their income, which is a very simple model. The problem is that you have to go after the source of the income.

The problem we've got here, which has not been addressed by the Liberal government currently, is that when you get a court order, the implementation of that court order is the key issue in terms of making sure you get those funds. That's something they're not looking at in terms of speeding up the implementation of the court order. When Charles Harnick was the Attorney General, we put in place a number of measures to get increased enforcement, and those measures are intact. There's nothing new that's being added with respect to this bill in terms of further methods of enforcement.

Everybody out there knows that the issue for a self-employed person is where that money is being earned and being able to get at it, because the money may be in the hands of another party and may not be directly paid from the contractor; that contractor may be paying another person, as opposed to the individual who does the work, the individual who owes the money. This bill doesn't deal with that.

The simplistic model that was put in place by the Liberals has been improved on by the provincial government—we dealt with the enforcement orders. That's the issue: the implementation of the court order. The implementation is something that's not being addressed by this bill, and I guess that's the Leader of the Opposition's problem.

Ms. Churley: I guess that wasn't quite my last kick at the can when I spoke before. I'm happy to respond to my leader Howard Hampton's comments. I was listening to him talk about the fact that he fears there may be fewer staff at the FRO. It occurred to me then that we haven't mentioned recently anything about the "mod squad." Remember? There was a story by Ian Urquhart in the Toronto Star a while ago featuring the minister, in this case, along with a few other prominent Liberal cabinet ministers: the "mod squad," a powerful little committee

put together to find ways to cut government spending. It reminded me, when Mr. Hampton mentioned that the concern is that there might be fewer staff, that indeed that is one of the jobs the minister has, and we should bear that in mind.

If I were a mother out there who was dependent on income from a former spouse who was not paying what he owed and was in arrears, and I were listening to this debate today, I would be really concerned. You have a Conservative stand up and say, "Well, the problem is that Ian Scott did it all wrong," and then somebody else did it all wrong and somebody else did it all wrong. We're saying here today that you still don't have it right. You're still not doing what needs to be done. That's what the leader of the New Democratic Party was trying to point out.

We know what needs to be done. There's a formula for what needs to be done after what happened in the previous government and what's happening now, and that is bringing in more enforcement tools without the resources to enforce the enforcement tools. What's wrong with this picture? We know what we have to do, and it's not getting done. For the person out there who's relying on this legislation to solve the problem, it just ain't going to happen.

The Acting Speaker: We have time for one last question or comment.

Mr. Pat Hoy (Chatham–Kent Essex): I'm pleased to rise and make a few brief comments about the subject at hand today. I do recall that when the previous government centralized the Family Responsibility Office, we had immediate chaos. The chaos was immediate. Staff in my offices, both here in Toronto and in the riding, were on the phone for an hour at a time waiting for assistance. So our minister, Minister Papatello, has taken chaos and tried to correct the wrongs that occurred in the Family Responsibility Office. To date she has done a marvellous job, and I commend her for that.

After the centralization of this office, neither the recipients, the payers or the employees were happy with what was happening. No one was satisfied with the delivery of service. Employers were frustrated, payers were frustrated and recipients, many of whom were children, were waiting for those valued dollars. From the previous government, we have a computer system that can't adapt. It's pitiful, in actual fact.

In this bill, it's regrettable, we need to have enforcement opportunities. We need enforcement on our highways. Most people drive and obey the laws, but there are those who will break laws, so we need enforcement. Many of the persons who owe spousal payments make them, but others defy the rules and regulations. So we're increasing the maximum jail term for failure to comply. We will ensure early release provisions under certain sections of the act. We're going to make it easier for the FRO to obtain a financial statement from a third party that is financially linked to the default payer.

There are many more points under this bill that will make a better system for those who need the dollars the most.

The Acting Speaker: Member for Kenora–Rainy River, you have two minutes to reply.

Mr. Hampton: I want to thank those members who have offered their views and opinions in response to my comments. But let me tell you, I was disappointed that I didn't hear from the Minister of Community and Social Services, who was here, because it would have been an excellent opportunity for the Minister of Community and Social Services to stand in her place and say without any hesitation that the fiasco known as Andersen Consulting, who installed an information technology/computer system at the Ministry of Community and Social Services, one that doesn't work and that cost the taxpayers of Ontario far more money than they should have paid for it—I wanted to hear her say that they will not be invited to do the same thing now with the Family Responsibility Office. But alas, the Minister of Community and Social Services, while she had lots to say while I was speaking, didn't take advantage of the two minutes to say to the people of Ontario, and to all those people who are not receiving their support payments now, that, burned once, the government of Ontario will not invite Andersen Consulting/Accenture to do a repetition of their dismal effort. She wouldn't say that.

1740

I also thought, since she had so much to say while I was speaking, that she would have stood and said to the people of Ontario, and to all those spousal support recipients and child support recipients who aren't receiving their support, that she was prepared to guarantee that there will be more staff at the Family Responsibility Office, that they will have the technology, the training and the systems they need to do the job. Alas, she didn't do that either.

So I just repeat my fears: I think this is wonderful legislation, but I don't think it's going to solve the problems at the Family Responsibility Office.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you very much for your contribution.

Further debate? The member for Nepean–Carleton.

Applause.

Mr. Baird: Thank you to my good friend the chief government whip.

I'm pleased to see the Leader of the Opposition here today. The Leader of the Opposition regularly attends the debates in this place and actively participates. I don't remember ever seeing—other than his immediate predecessor, who is of course also here—other Leaders of the Opposition come and listen to the debate and hear the concerns of working families.

I want to say at the outset about this bill that on election night those many years ago, that long time ago since we went to the polls here provincially—how long ago was it? Many years ago. I said, on becoming an opposition member, that I hoped I would not oppose the government for the sake of opposing them; that if they did something I agreed with or could support, I would support them. I would like to support much of what is in this bill. I don't think it is the be-all and end-all, as the

government has suggested, but I think some measures go in the right direction.

I would like to indicate that I would be supporting the bill. I have done that on a number of issues. The Minister of Natural Resources is nodding. I'm not one of the more partisan members of this place. I supported the government's culture heritage bill. The Attorney General brought a bill forward that I supported. I supported a bill that Minister Watson, the member for Ottawa West—Nepean, brought forward last week.

Hon. David Ramsay (Minister of Natural Resources): Is this your departure speech?

Mr. Baird: I say to the Minister of Natural Resources, I'm not going anywhere.

The Minister of Natural Resources is here. I wonder why we're not debating wildlife rehabilitation in Ontario, and the efforts to stifle the volunteers who want to bring in wildlife rehabilitation in the province. A lot of constituents of mine are very concerned about wildlife rehabilitation, and I should put that on the record with the minister. I did an interview with CBC in Thunder Bay about that, and about their rabies program, where the cost-benefit analysis is absolutely extraordinary. It's like using a nuclear bomb to kill an ant, I say to the Minister of Natural Resources.

Anyway, I'm going to get back to this bill. The leader of the third party was talking about Accenture consulting. I like the leader of the third party and generally respect him. I don't know why the leader of the third party doesn't go outside and say those things. If he is so confident they are all true—what is that?

Interjection.

Mr. Baird: One of the members opposite is saying that the leader of the third party would be chicken to go out and say that outside. If he is so confident that the evidence is so overwhelming, I'd like him to get a copy of Hansard and read his speech today outside. There he is. There is my friend the leader of the third party. I'd like him to read that outside. I don't suspect he will. But I want to put on the record that the information technology and the processes that were part of Andersen Consulting/Accenture are in place. Every day in the province of Ontario, the system works. People get their welfare cheques every month in this province. The system, the processes, the design, have saved taxpayers literally hundreds of millions of dollars in Ontario. Accenture brought some expertise that simply was not present. Yes, more money was spent than anticipated, but not on the initial contract. Andersen/Accenture did exactly what they said they would do for the dollar amounts. We made a number of changes as legislation changed—a new Ontario Works act and a new ODSP act—which required things above and beyond the call within that initiative. So I think the leader of the third party besmirches the good name of a lot of hard-working Ontario taxpayers who did some good work with respect to that system.

This bill is obviously designed to help improve the lives of single parents and their children, and that's a

noble goal. I want to put on the record that the FRO staff do a phenomenal job. These public servants work awfully hard and do a difficult task.

We have two or three significant challenges. The enforceability, or unenforceability, of a court order in the province of Ontario should cause us all great concern. We also need to streamline the clarity of these judicial orders. I've had one-on-one conversations on this issue with the parliamentary assistant, the member for London North Centre. We've got to be able to have clear court orders, and the baloney that is said that you can't work with the judiciary on that, or pass legislation detailing with and dictating how these orders should be done—there should be clarity; there should be form. It should be done—

Hon. Dwight Duncan (Minister of Energy, Government House Leader): Criminal Code stuff.

Mr. Baird: The member opposite is right: Criminal Code things are very important. And the government we have in Ottawa isn't addressing issues with respect to the Criminal Code. They're too busy doling out money to their advertising friends in Quebec, to Groupaction, Jean Brault and all their little friends—Jean Chrétien's brother getting \$4,000.

Anyway, I want to get back to this speech. Yes, you bet your boots they need a new computer system. If there are any folks from the FRO watching, let me tell you, I would certainly concur. I have visited the Family Responsibility Office, as I hope some other members have. I have taken the opportunity to talk to the staff there, and you bet your boots they need a new computer system. I look forward to this minister's solving all the problems, because I know my friend Sandra Papatello will solve all these problems by the time the Ontario voters go to the polls. There won't be any arrears, and she'll have cleaned up the whole mess of this file. I hope she does.

Improving the lives of single parents and their children is important. Most of these single parents—not all, but most—are women who are disproportionately low-income and need this support. Many of them are on social assistance, and that support is assigned to the government, which could go to other needed programs or tax cuts that are in place.

A lot of young families particularly are reeling from this government, because they said they would withdraw the national child benefit supplement clawback. They said they would scrap that and allow parents in Ontario to keep it. They haven't done it. Really, by their actions they're basically applauding the actions of the previous government.

I had some other stuff I wanted to present. Welfare rates in Ontario: The sad reality is that with inflation, people on social assistance got more money from Baird than they get today from Papatello, even with the minuscule 3% raise. When I was minister back in 1999, people had higher take-home pay if they were on social assistance than they do today under Dalton McGuinty's government. I know that causes a great deal of concern to these members, but it's a fact, not just in 1999, but in

2000 and in 2001. So the measly loonie they allow them to keep from the national child benefit doesn't discount the hundreds of millions of dollars they claw back. The minister and the Premier sat in here the other day talking about what they do with that money. When I gave that answer, he sure as heck didn't like it. I want to put those comments on the table.

This is an important first step. The parliamentary assistant, who I know is ably carrying this bill in this place, nods her head because—she is right—she is ably carrying this bill. I hope the minister will take these issues and run with it. Get a new computer system—which is, I'm the first to concede, long overdue—to help the FRO staff do their job, to support Ontario's public service in doing their job.

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I don't like the comments in some parts of this debate where people have besmirched the public service who have been implementing this legislation, because they don't have the tools that they need. They've got some new tools in this legislation. In time, they will get a better process in terms of a computer system.

I think it is important to note that even the former Provincial Auditor, Erik Peters, did note, and certainly the Ombudsman, Clare Lewis, noted as well that the staff there do a very good job under the circumstances. Whether it is in the way our judicial system works and the court orders or whether it's with the computer system or whether it is the legal powers that they have, they do a darned good job. I certainly saw that when I went and met with them. Because I cared so much about this issue, I even went out and met with the front-line workers and listened to their suggestions, advice and counsel, in the usual hallmark of the Harris government's consultation, which I was pleased to participate in.

The Acting Speaker: Questions and comments? The member for Toronto—Danforth.

Ms. Churley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm having another kick at the can. This really is my last one.

It's my pleasure to respond to the member from Nepean, who I understand will be leaving us at some time in the future.

Mr. Baird: I don't know what you're talking about.

Ms. Churley: He doesn't know what I'm talking about here.

Hon. Mr. Ramsay: He's in denial.

Ms. Churley: He is in denial now that it's out there. But he is one of the people in this place where—

Mr. Baird: Those rumours.

Interjection.

Ms. Churley: You are saying it was in the paper and it's a rumour?

He knows full well the flaws in this bill, because he's been there. He knows better than most of us what needs to be done over in the FRO, and this ain't it. I think it's important and prudent of this government to listen to what the member for Nepean has to say, because certainly when he was in government and his government

brought in some new enforcement measures, things got worse instead of better.

This government is actually doing a very similar thing, bringing in more enforcement without—I just looked down and realized I've got the wrong notes in front of me, Mr. Speaker. I've got the marijuana, the grow-op, notes in front of me, which we're not talking about today. But what he has to say is very important, because they went through an experiment in that government of cutting back, reducing the number of staff, and look what happened. Here we have a situation where there aren't enough staff, there aren't enough resources, and we need a new sophisticated computer system in order to make sure that those who are in arrears pay those arrears. It's abundantly clear from all of the experience we've had now that putting in new and more enforcement without the resources will mean that nothing much will change.

So again I say to the government that it's important to be very straight and very clear with the people of Ontario about what this bill before us today can do and what it will not do.

Mr. Lou Rinaldi (Northumberland): I rise in this House to make some comments from my friend from Nepean about Bill 155.

As you know, Mr. Speaker, this is my first term representing the people of Northumberland, and I can tell you that in the time I spend in my constit. offices—I have two of them—I see the length of time that my staff spends dealing with FRO issues. And the odd time, I must admit, I take an interest in one or two of them, because virtually they are at their wits' end.

I guess we need to appreciate the steps our minister is taking to try to sort through the maze that was created. Will it be perfect? Will it solve all the problems? I think this is a beginning to get there. But we need to recognize that within days of this government being sworn in, and recognizing the difficulties we had with that particular function, the minister took quick action, and I think it's very positive action.

As I mentioned, I do take a personal interest. My staff virtually throw their hands up in the air because of the intricacies and the work to resolve these. And at the end, it's kids that suffer. We try so hard, whether with better education or better health care, yet the simple things where we need those commitments from parents who have left their family—I think this is a super step, and we will get it right.

The Acting Speaker: Questions and comments?

Mr. O'Toole: I'm pleased to respond to the member from Nepean—Carleton, who has always got a view on the issues that affect his riding. I'm sure as we go forward he will have even more views and other articles as well.

The previous speaker, the member from Toronto—Danforth, has a long experience in this file. I was always intrigued to listen to the NDP, because when they were in opposition some time ago and we were government, they had a chance—and I'm going to read this directly. This is Peter Kormos's comments on the introduction of this bill,

quoted from Hansard: “In fact, it has been just about eight years and a month or so plus since my colleague Shelley Martel, the member from Nickel Belt, conducted her early morning raid, her break and enter into the Family Responsibility Office to demonstrate the laxness of security. She came back, after that break and enter, with videotape demonstrating an office that was in complete chaos....” I think it’s kind of supercritical, in fact, that this is a member of his own caucus saying that she took the liberty to view for herself and videotape the information and chaos. It would seem, being supportive of OPSEU, etc., that they wouldn’t be so critical of the actual micro-level functioning of the office, as they described it in the remarks by Mr. Kormos.

This bill itself, I think, has pretty broad support, although it doesn’t move us very much further down the road of ensuring that children, at the end of the day, receive the money they are entitled to as a result of a court order. I know our government was widely criticized for introducing a lot more of the enforcement tools that we see in this bill. In fact, the leader of the NDP said

today that the same bureaucrat wrote the same speech for Ms. Pupatello, the current minister, as was written for our minister of the day. So there is a long way to go, but each of us should keep in mind that every inch that we can move forward on this, while protecting the payer, is looking after the welfare of the children in this system.

The Acting Speaker: I want to recognize the presence in the chamber of a former member of this assembly, Mr. Bob Huget, former MPP for Sarnia.

We have time for one last question and comment.

Seeing none, I will turn to the member for Nepean–Carleton. You have two minutes to reply.

Mr. Baird: I want to thank all of the folks for their good comments and wise counsel. I also want to thank the Minister of Natural Resources for paying heed to my comments about the need for more wildlife rehabilitation in the province of Ontario.

The Acting Speaker: It being 6 o’clock, this House stands adjourned until later on this evening at 6:45.

The House adjourned at 1757.

Evening meeting reported in volume B.

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